

**Watering Down the Whisky: Alcohol, Abstinence and Temperance
in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1820-1860**

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Abstract

Organised temperance as a response to the commonplace drinking habits, prevalent drunkenness and damaging consequences for the individual and society, emerged in the Highlands and Islands from the 1830s. Alcohol was associated with many aspects of highland social and working lives from celebratory and funereal occasions to its ritualised use in business transactions and working practices and those of illegal activities of illicit distilling and smuggling. During the period from 1830-1860 highland societies advocated temperance principles of moderation and subsequently total abstinence. Local societies were part of a national temperance movement and a broader mid-Victorian middle class crusade of social reform. This dissertation examines the influence of temperance in altering public attitudes towards alcohol and its significance of its role in highland society.

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Special Notes

This study will examine the role of the denominations of the Protestant churches only as they ministered to the majority of highland parishioners, although recognition of temperance initiatives in the Catholic and Episcopal Churches is duly acknowledged. Also, the highland geographical diversity of rural pockets of scattered communities co-existing with the growth of small and medium towns such as Inverness, Wick, Thurso, Stornoway and Lerwick, demands a more in depth analysis than the limitations of this dissertation will allow. This examination of the temperance movement will focus mainly on areas where temperance societies were most evident in the northern and eastern parts of the Highlands and Islands although reference, where apposite, will include other areas.

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Introduction

A culture of alcohol usage, particularly ‘ardent spirits’, illicit distilling, smuggling and drunkenness as a feature of life in the Highlands and Islands, has been well documented by contemporary commentators during the nineteenth century. Challenging and changing these practices became the focus of a temperance movement in the north of Scotland from the 1830s. The formation of temperance societies throughout the area was an indigenous initiative, a response to local concerns regarding illegal activities, alcohol related popular customs and above all drunkenness. However, by adopting similar objectives, it was also part of a broader national and international movement and, simultaneously, sought to publicise, educate, influence and garner support in order to tackle the prevalence of drink in society.

The consequences of a culture of drinking on the individual, the family, the community and society was an ongoing concern during the period under review, 1820 to 1860. This study will explore contemporary highland attitudes to alcohol and the economic, social and cultural pressures that underpinned its usage. It will also examine the place of temperance within a wider context of social reform, religion and legislation. Another area of consideration will be its participation in and contribution to a changing moral climate which embraced Victorian values of respectability, self-help and self-improvement. Education was a prominent feature of the social reforming campaign and temperance objectives were based on this means of instilling these values, with children as

a particular focus. Annemarie McAllister's studies of the Band of Hope movement and the intensive use of visual and musical aids to reinforce a moral and Christian message for children is of relevance to this temperance analysis which examines the defining and fundamental principle in temperance ideology.

A chronological approach discloses the contemporary religious, moral and cultural setting of drink and its usage, the geographical spread of temperance and a change of direction from one of the moderate use of alcohol to the adoption of the principle of total abstinence. The pioneering temperance reformer John Dunlop's attack on the ritualised use of alcohol, particularly 'ardent spirits', resonated with highland religious and social reformers concerned about the moral and spiritual consequences of alcohol abuses. The advocacy of 'moral suasion' and its execution by a voluntary choice of moderation, education and 'positive association' was to be superseded by the principle of total abstinence. An awareness of opposition to temperance in the Highlands is a pertinent consideration and one that was articulated from various standpoints.

From the late 1830s to 1860 a range of religious, social and economic developments prompted changes in attitudes to drink in social and working lives and a wider support for temperance. The reluctance of a suspicious and possessive Church of Scotland to support the cause at the early stage of temperance dissolved as it recognised the movement as a means of spreading a spiritual and moral message of salvation. The supervision of morals also

became increasingly associated with ideas of social reform directed at the working class, notably differentiated between 'rough' and 'respectable'. The prevalence of drunkenness was perceived as related to issues of poverty, crime and immorality among the urban lowest order.

An examination of increased support from potentially influential members of the community, from professional, civic, judicial and elite quarters is an important consideration in order to determine whether this was due to a changing moral code or wider exigencies that necessitated this development. Other points will disclose a greater awareness of temperance activity which was publicised more extensively by greater newspaper coverage and reformers' own efforts of spreading the message.

A significant development was the more direct involvement of women and the initial animosity they received. This progressive move, while indicating the value of female influence in converting women and altering the early gendered bias within the temperance movement, highlighted the role of women in society. Margaret Barrow and Megan Smitley have independently examined women's agency in public campaigns and based their research on women's suffrage and temperance.¹

¹ M. K. Smitley, 'Women's Mission': The Temperance and Women's Suffrage Movements in Scotland, c. 1870-1914', (PhD. Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2002), M. Smitley, 'Inebriates', 'Heathens', Templars and Suffragists: Scotland and Imperial Feminism c. 1870-1914', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 11 No. 3, (2002), M. Barrow, 'Temperate Feminists: The British Women's Temperance Association', 1870-1914, (PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 1999).

Irene Maver's study of the nature and influence of associational culture on civil society demonstrated the positive impact of the connections established between Scottish temperance organisations with their counterparts elsewhere in Britain.² This aspect was reflected in the association and participation of Highland temperance societies in regional and national temperance organisations and in the continuous interaction and co-operation which was provided locally and by developed networks.

The historiography of temperance has produced a variety of interpretations and conclusions relating to the underlying motivations of the temperance movement and provide a broad base from which to explore the topic. Brian Harrison's monograph, first published in 1971 and reprinted in 1994, provided the first comprehensive and ground breaking analysis of drink, temperance and related economic, political, ideological and social issues in Victorian England.³ Harrison's work inspired subsequent academic research which has examined temperance in the light of various nineteenth century developments and pressures. Industrialisation, urbanisation, poverty, licensing legislation, philanthropy, working class political movements, class and gender, education, religion and leisure have been subject to various analyses.⁴ It also

² I. Maver, 'The Temperance Movement and the Urban Associational Ideal, 1820s-1840s', in G. Morton, B. de Vries and R. J. Morris (eds.) *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth Century Europe*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 159-174.

³ B. H. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-72*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1971). Reprinted (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994).

⁴ C. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), O. Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland: Social Welfare and the Voluntary Principle*, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980), W. W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland, 1800-Present*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), R. M. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *The*

engendered subsequent research which widened the geographical dimension of the subject regarding Scottish, Welsh and Irish drinking cultures and temperance.⁵

Scottish temperance historiography has been comprehensive in content but generally geographically limited to urban and Lowland settings. A more recent study, however, published in 2011 by Aaron Hoffman whose research of the temperance movement in Aberdeen further expanded the geographical spread, although again located in an urban environment.⁶ Norma Logan/Denny's studies have approached issues of temperance chronologically and thematically in relation to class, class collaboration and aspiration, ideological differences, evangelical-based reform, working class sponsored organisations, and the relationship between the Churches, temperance and the people in a later publication.⁷

Historical Journal, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1983), pp. 95-118, D. Paton, 'Drink and the Temperance Movement in Nineteenth Century Scotland' (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1977), T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950*, (London: Fontana Press, 1986), E. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁵ The *Bibliography of British and Irish History* lists academic publications on the alcohol issue and temperance during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries pertaining to various locations in Britain (and one in Canada), published to the Internet at:

http://cpps.brepolis.net.eor.uhi.ac.uk/bbih/search.cfm?action=search_simple_result&startrow=1&search_order=year_desc&add_to_search_history=1&log_simplesearch=1&access=restricted&access=public&full_text_boolean=and&full_text=&author_name_boolean=and&author_name=&title_boolean=and&title=&allindexterms_boolean=and&allindexterms=Temperance&period_boolean=and&period_from=YYYY&period_to=YYYY&period_close_matches=0
accessed 10.10.16

⁶ A. Hoffman, *The Temperance Movement in Aberdeen, Scotland, 1830-1845: 'Distilled Death and Liquid Damnation'*, (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

⁷ N. D. Logan, 'Drink and Society: Scotland 1870-1914', unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow (1983); N. D. Denny, 'Temperance and the Scottish Churches, 1870-1914', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. XXIII Part 2, (1988).

A lack of research into the history of temperance in the Highlands and Islands has prompted this dissertation and aims to provide a contribution to the social history of the region during the nineteenth century. This study is based on an examination of contemporary source material such as parliamentary papers, newspapers, temperance literature of tracts and published pamphlets and temperance records and publications. These sources have provided a wealth of information, opinion and attitudes which have informed the thesis presented in this dissertation. This study will examine the prevailing cultural, political, social influences that impacted on contemporary attitudes, popular customs and rituals surrounding the usage of alcohol, particularly whisky. It will determine that the highland temperance movement was a significant agent of change in the early to mid-nineteenth century, by example and by its wide-ranging endeavours to impart a moral and Christian message.

Chapter one examines the highland culture of alcohol with its illicit activities of distilling and smuggling and the ritualised place of drink in the social and working life of highland inhabitants. It will trace the origins of the temperance movement in the 1830s as voluntary agents of reform in the campaign against 'ardent spirits' and the mixed response it received.

Chapter two discusses the role of the dissenting, conformist and seceding sections of the Church of Scotland during the next phase of total abstinence. It will illustrate that temperance was representative of mid-Victorian evangelical social reform and of contemporary middle class and

aspiring working class values of respectability, thrift, self-improvement and responsibility.

Chapter three explores the range of strategies and methods used by highland temperance societies to spread the message, maintain and enlarge its membership and provide alternative leisure opportunities to replace the role of the public house as a popular socialising amenity. Education was a fundamental temperance principle and an essential means of moral instruction and self-improvement and was particularly aimed at children.

Chapter One: A Culture of Drink and the Early Temperance Movement in the Highlands and Islands, 1800-1840

‘The principal reforming power lies in introducing a universal change of opinion among the inhabitants of this country, and in their becoming satisfied that ardent spirits are unfit for daily use’.⁸

In 1831, during a lecture prior to the formation of the first temperance society in Inverness, a minister, Rev. Andrew Kennedy, condemned the widespread use of ‘ardent spirits’ which he asserted was ‘an indispensable usage of social life’.⁹ Rev. Kennedy’s indictment of the extensive alcohol abuse and its ‘disastrous results’ on individuals and communities was a message that was being delivered in temperance halls and meeting rooms throughout Scotland since 1829. The origins of the discourse to tackle a nationwide propensity to drink and drunkenness lay with the pioneering temperance advocate, John Dunlop, dubbed ‘the Father of Temperance Societies in Great Britain’, for his influence and endeavours in initiating and progressing the temperance cause.¹⁰ Dunlop’s ant-spirits campaign challenged the habitual usage of alcohol governed by the ‘rules and regulations as to times and occasions of drinking’ among all classes who, he asserted were ‘captive to the

⁸ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Report from the Select Committee Inquiry into Drunkenness with Minutes of Evidence, Evidence of John Dunlop, 5 August 1834, p. 395

⁹ *The Inverness Courier*, 31 August 1831, p. 4, col. 1.

¹⁰ S Couling, *History of the Temperance Movement in Great Britain and Ireland from the Earliest to the Present Time with Biographical Notices of Departed Temperance Worthies*, (London, 1862), p.35.

ordinary ensnarement of ardent spirits'.¹¹ Early highland temperance reformers also viewed alcohol abuses in similar terms and were viewed as symptomatic of a deterioration of moral and Christian values in society.

In order to evaluate the emergence and development of the temperance movement in the Highlands and Islands during the 1830s and 1840s, it is important to consider the culture of drink, alcohol abuse and associated activities of smuggling and illicit distilling which prevailed before attitudes and habits were challenged and altered by economic, political and social pressures. For those visitors who travelled around Scotland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries documenting their observations and experiences, the highland fondness for whisky was particularly worthy of comment. On a visit to Morvern, in 1791, Nathaniel Phillips observed that, 'Every morning the first thing done, is drinking a dram of Whiskey – women, as well as the men'.¹² While a travel guide of the Highlands and Islands, written by George and Peter Anderson warned potential visitors about the lack of facilities and low standard of accommodation in inns, it praised the quality and quantity of the food and drink, 'with whisky, etc, always in abundance'.¹³ John McCulloch's accounts of his visits to the Highlands and Islands between 1811 and 1821 explained a probable source of this plentiful supply. In a series of letters published between

¹¹ J. Dunlop, *The Philosophy of National Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usage in Great Britain and Ireland; containing the Characteristic, and exclusively National, Convivial Laws of British Society; with the Peculiar Compulsory and Festal Customs of Ninety Eight Trades and Occupations in the Three Kingdoms; Comprehending about Three Hundred Different Drinking Usages*, (London, 1839), p. 3-4.

¹² N. Phillips, *Scottish Journey July–September 1791*, quoted in M. Rackwitz, *Travels to Terra Incognita: The Scottish Highlands and Hebrides in early modern travellers' accounts, c. 1600-1800*, (Munster, 1870) p. 480.

¹³ Quoted in D. Cooper, *Road to the Isles: Travellers in the Hebrides, 1770-1914*, (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 63.

1819 and 1824, amid extensive descriptions of the landscape and its geological properties and his observations of the daily life of its inhabitants, the activities of illicit distilling and smuggling were graphically and enthusiastically described.¹⁴

In 1820, illicit distillation had become so prevalent in Scotland that more than half the spirits consumed by the population were supplied by illicit traders.¹⁵ Its continuance was due in no short measure to the complicity of landlords who and magistrates who also benefited from the practice. After the appearance of an alleged smuggler before a court in Nairn circa 1810, ‘Two of the Justices on the bench privately admitted that they regularly sold their barley to the smuggler and were in the custom of giving him orders for illicit spirits’.¹⁶ T. M. Devine’s analysis of this trade, however, while demonstrating the entrepreneurial aptitude of highlanders as a contradiction of ‘the Victorian racial stereotype of an apathetic Celtic population’, contended that it was often driven by economic necessity and personal consumption therefore was limited.¹⁷ T

This argument was supported by Alan Dean’s 1995 study of alcohol in the Hebrides where whisky was a commodity to be used for rent or in other

¹⁴ J. McCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, Containing Descriptions of Their Scenery and Antiquities, with an Account of the Political History...: Present*, Vol. 4, (London, 1824), pp.367-9).

¹⁵ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue for years 1856-1869*, Vol 1, (1870).

¹⁶ G. Bain, *History of Nairnshire*, (Nairn, 1893), p. 594.

¹⁷ T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters’ War: The social transformation of the Scottish Highlands*, (Manchester, 1994), pp. 119-133.

transactions.¹⁸ Small scale home distilling that supplied the family and local inhabitants was not deemed harmful to the parishioners of a Lewis minister who averred,

Formerly, when each tenant was allowed to convert the produce of his little lot into usquebaugh ... it was solely to pay his rent, - illicit distillation had not the same deteriorating effect here on the morals of the people as on the mainland. It is pleasing to add, that there are few instances of inebriety to be met with, out of the town of Stornoway.¹⁹

Although this flourishing highland 'peasant enterprise' was fiscally detrimental by depriving legitimate distillers of profits and the government of revenue, it was also regarded as both a moral and an anti-social issue requiring firm government action. The Commissioners' Report, prior to the 1823 Excise Act, stated that, due to a 'fatal prevalence of illicit distillation, their [highlanders] moral condition is rapidly approaching to the lawless and disorganized state existing in parts of Ireland'.²⁰ Condemnation was accorded to the large scale producers whose market extended out-with the neighbourhood with many a public house or dram shop in towns and cities, north and south, supplied with illicit spirits.²¹ The enforcement of stricter penalties and intensive activity by excise officers after a series of legislation from the 1820s prompted

¹⁸ A. Dean, 'Alcohol in Hebridean Culture: 16th-20th century', *Addiction*, 90, (1995), pp.281-2.

¹⁹ *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (hereafter NSAS), 1834-1845, Vol. 14, p. 130.

²⁰ UK Parliamentary Papers, Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland etc; Distillers, 30 May 1823, pp. 3-4. *The Aberdeen Journal*, 2 July 1832, p. 139.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 129.

a slow decline of this longstanding highland trade, although as late as 1888 it was reported that ‘the nefarious practice’ was still ‘pretty rife’ on the western coast of Ross-shire.²²

Whether in rural and urban areas, popular customs involving the over consumption of alcohol had habitually touched many areas of highland social and working lives and all classes. Hospitality among the highland elite has been well documented for the inclusion of copious quantities of alcohol and consequently drunkenness. The Rev John Wilson, writing about the drinking habits of the upper class in a pre-temperance era, narrated,

intemperate drinking is understood to have been practised, even among the most polished classes, with such horrific defiance of all moral obligation and all social decency, that a guest would be thought discourteous or perhaps insulting to his entertainer, who did not drink until he became insensible, and had to be carried away like a mass of carrion.²³

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, it was noted that these habits were diminishing. Henry Cockburn on a visit in 1847 to Kilravock Castle near Croy, Nairnshire, noted a reduction in the amount of wine being served at dinner and was reminded of a previous era when a specially appointed servant, with the self-appointed description of ‘the lad that louses the craavats’, had the job of preventing comatose, ‘drunken guests from choking’.²⁴ The Rev Clark of Durinish noted a changing climate of manners among the upper class towards

²² *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 24 March 1888, p. 6, col. 7.

²³ Rev J. M. Wilson, (ed.), *Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland; ; or Dictionary of Scottish Topography, Compiled from the Most Recent Authorities and Forming a Complete Body of Scottish Geography, Physical, Statistical and Historical*, Vol. II, Gordon-Zetland, (Edinburgh, c.1854), Vol. II, (1868), p. 129.

²⁴ *Journal of Henry Cockburn: being a continuation of the Memorials of his Time*, 1851-54, Vol. II, pp. 66-7

refinement instead of ‘the boisterous conviviality’ of previous years.²⁵ This account would suggest that drunkenness had become an offensive habit and standards of conduct among gentlemen were changing.

Among sections of the upper middle and middle class, social drinking was conducted often within the private clubs and societies which emerged from the mid-eighteenth century and where ceremonies, rituals and fines inevitably involved alcohol. An insight into the social drinking habits of the urban middle class in Inverness can be gleaned from a propaganda pamphlet by a reformed drinker, Kennedy McNab, published in 1868.²⁶ This address ‘dedicated to the working classes’, although a blatant and strongly worded diatribe against intemperance, was also an indictment of the conduct and drinking habits of middle class club members and their invited visitors within the private rooms of public houses. His verbose and gossipy narrative, while describing his personal drunken activity as a ‘long, dark, black record of the past’, revealed his opinion of the underlying purpose of club society, mainly in Inverness.²⁷ Instead of acting as venues of conviviality and sociability, he denigrated them as drinking dens frequented by a clientele who indulged in ‘revolting, disgusting and blasphemous language’.²⁸ The underlying message in his pamphlet, however, was to direct his intended readership, principally, the young working class towards temperance, education and self-improvement and away from

²⁵ *NAS Parish of Duirinish*, Vol. XIV, pp. 358-360.

²⁶ K. McNab, *Stray Thoughts on Temperance and Drinking, and Random Recollections of Drinking: dedicated to the Working Classes of Inverness*, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, (1868).

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 21-3.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 22.

indulging in drinking and the alcoholic practices which pervaded the work environment.

As a part of the working and commercial life of many trades and industry, alcohol featured in commercial transactions, sometimes in lieu of payment, and in traditional work-related customs such as marking the end of an apprenticeship or the fulfilment of contracted orders by workers.²⁹ Hugh Miller described the reward of a drink that workmen received on the completion of different stages of construction works, from a ‘founding pint’, when the foundations of a building were laid, at the different stages of construction and at its completion.³⁰ His comment that for labouring workers and artisans, ‘usquebaugh’, was ‘simply happiness doled out by the glass, and sold by the gill’, suggested that drink was a well anticipated and welcome release from the hardships of life.³¹

Another prime example of habitual alcohol usage was in the fishing industry where whisky was a commodity to be used as payment and in business transactions and was also part of fishermen’s and fish workers’ routine. John Dunlop’s account of the ‘regulations of drinking’ in the herring trade, conducted round the coasts of Scotland, was a comprehensive description of the place of whisky at every stage of the business: from the ritual of doling out whisky to

²⁹ King, *Sober and Free*, pp. 5-6.

³⁰ H. Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters: or, the Story of my Education*, (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1869), p.518.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 518.

the outgoing fishermen and rewarding their profitable return with their catch, to providing the female fish gutters 'three glasses of whisky a-day', in the commercial transactions for salt and the hiring of vessels and in the bargaining between fish seller and buyer.³² There were indications of a decline in the drinking habits of the fishermen by the 1840s. A report of the 1848 fishing season at Wick stated that although the whisky bill was 'one of the heaviest items of expenditure... some crews take none'.³³ Despite the indulgence by other fishers, the season was 'characterised by sobriety and peace' with few instances of drunkenness reported in the port. The 'Orkney and Zetland hired men' were singled out for their sobriety – 'we have not seen one of them intoxicated during the eight weeks they sojourned here'.³⁴ This phenomenon suggests the influence of temperance societies which were in existence on many of the islands from the early 1830s.

In common with the rest of Scotland, social occasions, fairs and market days and the marking of the different life stages of births, weddings and deaths involved the flow of alcohol and a fondness of Highlanders for whisky was deemed responsible for the prevalence of drunken behaviour. The 'rioting and intemperance which encroached on the quiet of Sunday' after public fairs induced the local magistrates at Inverness to alter the timing to mid-week.³⁵ Highland weddings were occasions for celebration that involved alcohol, sometimes in abundance. A report in *The Inverness Courier* in 1820 announced

³² J. Dunlop, *Artificial and Compulsory Usage*, pp. 18-19.

³³ John O' Groat Journal, 15 September 1848, p. 2, col. 4.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ NSA, Vol. XIV, pp. 34-35.

that the alcohol served at a wedding at Glen of Urquhart consisted of: ‘200 Scottish pints or 100 English gallons of whisky; 15 Scots or 60 English gallons of homebrewed ale...the mountain dew circulated with a twelve horse power of rapidity’.³⁶

The expectations of mourners of the provision of food, drink and dancing following a burial was also an integral feature of early nineteenth century funereal customs. While the moderate use of alcohol was acceptable on such occasions, some ministers not being averse to a dram or two, intoxication was subject to censure, being perceived as a deterioration of moral and Christian values. The Glenelg kirk session in 1832 recorded the condemnation, by the officiating minister, of the ‘improper and indecent conduct’ of ‘quarrelling and fighting’ by drunken mourners at the local funeral of the wife of a weaver.³⁷ Public condemnation was also being expressed verbally and punitively in courtrooms when Lord Mackenzie denounced the frequency of ‘brutal drunkenness and outrage’ at local funerals while presiding over a case of assault in North Morar and sentencing the miscreants to three months imprisonment.³⁸

Changing the public attitude towards drink and drinking habits when alcohol was readily obtainable in public houses and dram shops was a difficult

³⁶ Quoted in M. Bennett, *Scottish Customs: From the Cradle to the Grave*, (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 151-2

³⁷ Quoted in L. Abrams, ‘The Taming of Highland Masculinity: Inter-personal Violence and Shifting Codes of Manhood, c.1760–1840’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. XCII No. 233, (2013), p. 112.

³⁸ *The Inverness Courier*, 29 April 1829, p.2, col. 4.

challenge. These outlets, although licensed, operated under relaxed opening hours, were accessible to all ages, and subject to lax regulation and supervision. The main points of the earlier legislation were concerned with the renewal of annual licences, recordkeeping, imposing penalties for any infringements such as failure to renew, and endorsing the licensee ‘as a person of good fame, sober life and conversation, and fit to be intrusted with the keeping of a common inn, alehouse or victualling houses’.³⁹ These measures were of limited effect in tackling prevalent issues of drunkenness, crime and public disorder.

Drunkenness was perceived as ‘prevalent among the working classes’ and the regularity of public disturbances, violence and crime as a result of drinking was of growing concern to the citizens and authorities of highland towns.⁴⁰ In Inverness, the ‘midnight riots’ from Saturday into Sunday morning was a frequent issue although similar offences were reported also on mid-week nights.⁴¹ The public house was a significant part of working class culture as a meeting place and place of conviviality and in which to socialise at the end of the working week. It was also viewed as having a corrupting influence upon public morals for their association with drunkenness and disorderly behaviour.⁴² In the *New Statistical Account* a common criticism was ‘the pernicious influence’ of public houses, inns and alehouses with the Wick minister, Rev.

³⁹ U K Parliamentary Papers, (hereafter UKPP), (1828), Bill to regulate Granting of Certificates by Justices of the Peace and Magistrates authorizing Persons to keep Inns, Alehouses and Victualling-Houses in Scotland for Sale by Retail of Excisable Liquors.

⁴⁰ *The Inverness Courier*, 3 February 1825, p. 3, col. 2.

⁴¹ *The Inverness Courier*, 28 June 1821, p. 3, col. 2.

⁴² Poor Law Inquiry, Appendix II, Part Two, containing Minutes of Evidence taken in the Synods of Ross, Argyll, Shetland, Orkney, Sutherland and Caithness, Glenelg, Moray, Aberdeen, (1844), pp. 21, 57.

Charles Thomson, vehemently condemning ‘the appalling number’ of public houses which he equated to ‘seminaries of Satan and Belial’.⁴³ Little appeared to change when outrage at the 140 outlets in Caithness, approximately twenty years later, was expressed in a letter to the local paper by a writer, signed ‘*Pro Bono Publico*’ whose sentiments and turn of phrase was suspiciously akin to the Rev. Thomson’s.⁴⁴

Re-educating the ingrained habits of the nation through Dunlop’s argument of ‘moral suasion’ was the message that spread geographically, reaching the Highlands and Islands to an initially small but committed number of committed temperance reformers. The influence of the independent churches was evident at the formation of the first temperance society in Inverness in the Secession chapel in 1831. Encouraged by the example of the minister, the Rev. Scott, and the Rev. Kennedy of the Independent Church, forty members of the congregation enrolled after a lecture by a visiting pro-temperance clergyman, Rev. Kennedy from Keith.⁴⁵ Within a year, the Inverness Temperance society had increased its numbers, having a reported 300 members.⁴⁶ An almost simultaneous response occurred in neighbouring and distant highland areas with the formation of societies in Nairn, five in the Shetland Isles, and eight in North Argyll towns and islands.⁴⁷ By the end of the decade, local newspapers were regularly reporting temperance meetings and social gathering in Dornoch, Golspie, Tain, the Orkneys, Shetland and Stornoway. This wave of initiatives

⁴³ *NSAS*, Vol. XV p. 176.

⁴⁴ *John O’ Groat Journal*,

⁴⁵ *The Temperance Society Record*, Vol. II, No. XIX, Dec.1831, pp. 280-81.

⁴⁶ *The Inverness Courier*, 9 May 1832, p. 3, col. 1.

⁴⁷ *The Temperance Society Record*, Vol. III, No. XX, Jan-Dec 1832, p. 23.

owed much to the missionary work undertaken by temperance agents who had previously lectured at these locations, but the receptiveness of a temperance message was also an indication of a change in attitudes that was infiltrating communities.

During this early stage there was a lukewarm response and some antipathy to the idea of temperance and the necessity of a temperance movement in the Highlands and Islands. The Rev. James Kennedy, secretary of the Inverness society, reported on a generally hostile reception to the introduction of temperance in the area.⁴⁸ It was suggested by one newspaper correspondent that lectures by visiting temperance advocates were an unnecessary exercise in a region of ‘thinly peopled districts of the country’, arguing that it was the industrialised and more populated southern towns and cities which benefited from temperance work.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, another correspondent suggested that Inverness and other northerly towns were free from the ‘ ’ which beset urban areas further south.⁵⁰ Alcohol taken in moderation was still viewed by society as acceptable and even appropriate when used medicinally. A letter to the editor of the *Inverness Courier* from a G S Mackenzie refuted the need for teetotalism and based his views on religious texts to illustrate and endorse his viewpoint.⁵¹ Passages from the Bible were commonly cited by advocates who supported the moderate use of alcoholic beverages such as wine and beer,

⁴⁸ *The Temperance Society Record*, Vol. II, No. XIX, December 1831, p. 281

⁴⁹ *The Inverness Courier*, 24 August 1831, p. 3 col. 3.

⁵⁰ *The Inverness Courier*, 30 July 1834, p. 3, col. 5.

⁵¹ *The Inverness Courier*, 20 May 1840, p. 3 col. 3-4.

although this religious source was used by the opposite contenders in the debate to bolster their position.

Personal attacks were also a feature of the disapproval expressed within the Church and even from temperance members. Those abstinent ministers of the seceding churches who preached what they practised, were subject to adverse reactions to their principles. In an article submitted to a temperance publication Rev. John Whyte of Moyness recounted his detractors' views that he was, 'out of my senses, by others as an extreme enthusiastic, and as only worthy of scorn and contempt'.⁵² A correspondent to *The Inverness Courier* in 1840, was critical of a fellow temperance advocate as he questioned how Sir Francis McKenzie, a well-known temperance supporter, squared his conscience as a seller of wine while he 'strongly reprobates their use'.⁵³

In the Highlands and Islands, by the mid nineteenth century, although not universally endorsed, temperance ideas were taking hold in a broad spectrum of local initiatives which were supported by individuals from diverse backgrounds. The perceived lack of headway necessitated a more intensive and committed approach and teetotalism became the founding principle of many existing and new societies from the 1840s.⁵⁴ The following chapter will

⁵² Quoted in P. T. Winskill, *The Temperance Societies and its Workers: A Record of Social, Moral, Religious and Political Progress*, (London: Blackie & Son, 1892), p. 246.

⁵³ *The Inverness Courier*, 22 April 1840, p. 3, col. 1.

⁵⁴ *The Register and Abstinence's Almanack*, (1851) listed nine highland societies: Ballachulish, Dornoch, Golspie, Inverness, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Oban, Tain and Wick. Thurso, Stornoway and Nairn, although not registered with The Scottish Temperance League, had established temperance societies.

examine the shift in temperance principles to total abstinence in a burgeoning climate of social and religious evangelical purpose.

Chapter 2: Temperance and Total Abstinence: Religion, Respectability and Responsibility

‘WE AGREE TO USE NO INTOXICATING LIQUORS, AS A BEVERAGE, OR LUXURY; NOR PROVIDE THEM AS ARTICLES OF ENTERTAINMENT OR FOR PERSONS IN OUR EMPLOYMENT BUT IN ALL SUITABLE WAYS, TO ABANDON AND DISCOURAGEMENT THEIR USE’.⁵⁵

Various contributions to the *New Statistical Account of Scotland, 1834-45*, reported on the generally ‘sober, industrious and peaceful’ habits of their highland parishioners which was attributed to firm measures being applied to indigenous activities and customs. Although condemnation of alcohol and licensed premises, the ‘petty public-houses, the pest of the morals of the people’ was commonly articulated, a number of returns attributed positive results to the impact of legislative and judicial action. According to the minister of Urquhart and Glenmoriston, writing in 1835, ‘The recent suppression of smuggled whisky, there is no doubt of their morals being in the course of improvement’.⁵⁶ The Kingussie contributor agreed that smuggling, ‘entirely abandoned...a sensible amelioration in the morals of the inhabitants has consequently taken place’.⁵⁷ A change in the drinking practices at funerals was noted in the parish of Moy and Dalrossie, and was attributed to the influence of the local judiciary,

⁵⁵ *The John O’ Groat Journal*, 27 December 1839, p. 3, col. 4.

⁵⁶ NSA, Parish of Urquhart and Glenmorriston, Vol. XIV, p. 47

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. 14, p. 74

‘They [mourners] do not drink much of ardent spirits at funerals, since they are limited by the Justices of Peace to three glasses of whisky, two in the house before starting and one in the churchyard’.⁵⁸ A more comprehensive account of changing habits can be gleaned from the Rev Clark’s submission for Duirinish on Skye and was representative of circumstances in numerous rural communities in Hebridean islands and the Western Highlands.

This report indicated that, although smuggling and illicit distilling were eradicated, other factors were responsible and pointed to the impact of religious revival among the lower classes.⁵⁹ Rev Clark comments on the abandonment of the old customs at funerals and weddings with the former notorious for ‘the ungovernable influence of intoxication’ which often led to violence. Weddings had become more sober occasions with ‘not a tenth of the whisky consumed’. His comments on the pious habits of the people and the abandonment of traditional social habits and customs suggest a strong religious influence and although almost all attended the established church at the time of his comments, by 1843, a number became adherents of the newly formed Free Church of Scotland.

Ian Dean’s study of the Hebrides and alcohol suggests that the puritanism of the Free Church, with its disapproval of frivolous leisure activities such as dancing, secular music, piping at the graveside, and, understandably,

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Parish of Moy and Dalrassie, Vol. XIV, (1845), p. 107.

⁵⁹ *NSA*, Parish of Duirinish, Vol. XIV, pp. 358-360.

drinking, was a persuasive authority in curbing any excesses in the Western Isles.⁶⁰ However, the formation of temperance societies in the urban centres of Stornoway and Portree suggests that this ministry was insufficient.

The impact of the temperance movement was also apparently responsible for the people of Dingwall being ‘in general of temperate habits...in consequence of temperance societies’.⁶¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, two out of the three most prominent ministers connected to the total abstinence movement in Inverness credited the TAS with progress against intemperance. The Rev Munro of the Gaelic Church was positively assertive that he was unaware of any of his congregation ‘given to intemperate habits’.⁶² The third minister, Rev Scott, however, was more negative in his appraisal of his parishioner’s drinking habits and supported a firmer approach to intemperance.

Taking the pledge at the newly formed Wick and Pulteneytown Total Abstinence Society in 1840, marked a change of direction for the temperance movement in the Highlands and Islands. Dunlop’s ‘moral suasion’ argument of social change through education, example and positive association that had underpinned the highland and national temperance movement in the early years was proving to be insufficient in altering public attitudes and tackling the ongoing social problem of drunkenness. Speakers at a Thurso temperance

⁶⁰ A. Dean, ‘Hebridean Culture’, p.

⁶¹ Poor Law Inquiry, Appendix II, Part Two, containing Minutes of Evidence taken in the Synods of Ross, Argyll, Shetland, Orkney, Sutherland and Caithness, Glenelg, Moray, Aberdeen, (1844), p. 57.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 463, 489.

meeting in 1837 pinpointed different reasons for this lack of headway. While Mr Goldie attributed ‘the slow progress of temperance principles’ to ‘the veneration of custom’ at births, marriages and funerals, Mr McKidd deplored ‘the lamentable effects of intemperance in the church’ and was dismayed at the low number of ministers involved in the movement..⁶³

Although individual ministers from the various Presbyterian denominations supported local societies, the reluctance of the established Church as an institution to engage with the temperance movement was regarded as inimical to the cause. The ‘melancholy progress of intemperance’ was how the ‘drink question’ was described in a pastoral address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1841.⁶⁴ This sentiment challenged the apparent disinclination of the established Church to support a temperance movement founded and endorsed by laymen and Secessionist churchmen.⁶⁵ Such intervention was regarded as a challenge to its authority as the guardian of the spiritual and moral health of the nation, and contravened the Church’s conviction that drunkenness could be overcome, under its ministrations, by faith and following the tenets of the Bible. This confidence was dented somewhat by accusations of a fondness of alcohol and inebriety levelled at some ministers that was not conducive to altering the drinking habits of their parishioners.

⁶³ *The John O’ Groat Journal*, 17 February 1837, p.4, cols. 1-2.

⁶⁴ *Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, (1841), p. 1108.

⁶⁵ E. King, *Sober and Free*, p. 9.

During a public temperance soiree in Inverness in 1840, Sir Francis Mackenzie, a temperance supporter, recounted a recent occasion when ‘in the company of ten where nine of them agreed in the principles of abstinence, and the only gentleman present who took a glass was a parson’.⁶⁶ Criticism of such clergy who were also accused of self-preservation and material comfort rather than attending to the spiritual needs of their parishioners, was a favoured barb of the Evangelical faction of the Church of Scotland. The Rev. John Kennedy, of Dingwall, biographer of the renowned evangelical preacher, Rev. John McDonald, was scathing in his view of:

The parson in one of these parishes was the great cattle-dealer at the market, the leading dancer at the wedding, the toastmaster at the farmer’s dinner, and if the last to slide off his chair at the drinking bout, it was because he was more “seasoned” than the rest.⁶⁷

While this particular generalisation was more characteristic of the divisions in the Church before the Disruption in 1843, it is worth noting that within a few years of the schism the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland had approved a Committee on Temperance in 1847 which included a highland member, a Mr Thorburn.⁶⁸ The following year the Church of Scotland appointed its own Committee of Inquiry regarding intemperance. By the late 1840s, temperance reform was not the preserve of any one Church and the

⁶⁶ *John O’ Groat Journal*, 4 September 1840, p. 4, col. 4.

⁶⁷ Reprint (Kessinger, 2010) of J. Kennedy, *The Apostle of the North: the Life and Labors of John McDonald, 1867*, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1867), pp.69-70.

⁶⁸ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1843), pp. 57-8.

temperance movement benefited from increasing co-operation between the different agencies.

An issue that connected temperance and religion was related to Sabbatarianism. To their mutual benefit, highland religious bodies and temperance reformers were united in the objective of curtailing the availability and consumption of alcohol, albeit coming from specific standpoints. For the former, the observance of the Sabbath was desecrated by the availability of alcohol on a Sunday and the drunken hangover from a Saturday's over indulgence was blamed for much of church absenteeism. Temperance reformers were hopeful of furthering their aim of restricting access to drink and minimising drunkenness while perhaps gaining greater clerical support for their cause. A public meeting in 1847 was one of many future proposals to petition Parliament against the sale of alcohol on the Sabbath.⁶⁹ The report of the meeting cited an array of moral, religious and economic arguments presented by the speakers against drunkenness and in favour of legislation. It also noted the attendance of civic leaders, ministers, merchants, and professional men. The support of men of standing in the community was of significant value.

Some landlords, supportive of the temperance movement, were contributing to changes in a highland drinking culture. Sir Francis Mackenzie of Gairloch, was a frequent speaker at temperance meetings and celebrations and his funeral in 1842 was believed to be the first occasion of 'a highland

⁶⁹ *The Inverness Courier*, 4 February 1846, p. 3, col. 3.

chieftain buried on temperance principles'.⁷⁰ Highland employers realised the financial benefits of a sober workforce and the more conscientious among them, the welfare of their employees. By discontinuing 'injurious customs', this influential section of the community was in a position to bring about change in attitudes and practices thereby furthering the temperance cause.

In a letter to the Wick and Pulteney Chamber of Commerce, the Duke of Sutherland lent his support to temperance objectives by endorsing a proposal to replace whisky with money as payment to the fishermen of Wick.⁷¹ Other neighbouring landlords and employers such as David Anderson of Strath and Mr Crawford and fellow members of the Chamber of Commerce, were equally supportive having either already stopped the practice or by expressing their intention to follow suit.⁷² One surprising supporter, due to his connections with the opium trade was James Matheson, Member of Parliament for Ross and Cromarty. At a public temperance meeting in Stornoway in 1847, he declared his intention not to employ anyone 'found guilty of intemperance' and would give preference to 'members of the teetotal and total abstinence societies'.⁷³

The efforts of temperance reformers to change the ingrained habits in working practices among the fishermen and fish workers further north in Shetland and Orkney was having mixed results. In 1840, Lerwick Total

⁷⁰ *The Temperance Recorder for Domestic and Foreign Intelligence*, Third Series, No. 17, (Dec 1843), p. 275.

⁷¹ *The Abstainer's Journal*, 1853, (The Scottish Temperance League), pp. 60-61.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁷³ *The Inverness Courier*, 14 December 1847, p. 3, col. 1.

Abstinence Society was condemning a continuation of drinking customs in its local fishing industry as a main culprit for drunkenness and anti-social behaviour.⁷⁴ However, inroads were being made when a year later it was reported by a temperance agent, James Stirling, on a mission to the Orkneys in 1841, that ‘most of the curers had ceased giving whisky and instead, give money or coffee or molasses’.⁷⁵ Although having alcoholic content, molasses was viewed as preferential to whisky.

However, there were indications of a developing middle class and ‘respectable’ working class culture that was having an impact on public attitudes and behaviours. Lyn Abrams’s conclusions of the moderating effects of a developing middle class culture on masculine codes and rituals of violence in highland society, can be similarly applied to the drink question.⁷⁶ Alcohol was inimical to personal and societal well-being and advancement. An awareness of what constituted acceptable behaviour was challenging the ritualised place of alcohol and a ‘cult of respectability’ was driving initiatives of self-improvement and self-help. Temperance was one means of respectability that was not confined to the middle class but attracted the ‘respectable’ working class.⁷⁷ Evidence can be gleaned in the membership of temperance societies and straddled class, trades and professions. Builders, joiners, and other tradesmen joined with merchants, solicitors, teachers and doctors.⁷⁸ Joining the church or

⁷⁴ *The John O’ Groat Journal*, 31 January 1840,

⁷⁵ *The Scottish Temperance Journal*, No. 52, September 1842, Hume Tracts, p. 158.

⁷⁶ L. Abrams, ‘Taming Highland Masculinity’, pp. 100-122.

⁷⁷ B.H. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872*, (London: Faber, 1971), p. 6.

⁷⁸ A list of Highland and Island Members of the Scottish Temperance League, *The Scottish Temperance League and Abstainers’ Almanac*, (Glasgow, 1851), pp. 17-37.

membership of local recreational societies and engaging with opportunities of self-improvement were other avenues.

The Imperial Gazetteer listed a variety of institutions in Inverness that promoted ideas of thrift, health, education and constructive recreational activities while the moral and religious needs of Invernesians were delivered by a total abstinence society, a temperance society, religious associations and numerous denominational churches.⁷⁹ Libraries and reading rooms were a particularly widespread initiative and were found in temperance chapels, halls and coffee houses. Others were sponsored by various organisations, such as Mechanics Institutes in urban centres and the Fishermen's coffee houses located at fishing towns in Wick and Kirkwall. Established 'for the benefit of the working man', these venues provided opportunities for self-education with a variety of newspapers, magazines, local notices, leaflets and books available to users. These expectations, however, were dependent on the facilities being well used. Despite the anticipation of benefactors and temperance reformers in Wick that, 'the quiet charm of the reading room...in preference to the dram shop, with its meretricious and demoralizing enticements' would be an attractive option means of self-improvement, this facility continued to be 'ill-used'.⁸⁰

F. M. L. Thompson regarded the temperance movement in Britain as 'much more of a religious than a class movement' due to its roots of dissenting

⁷⁹ Rev J. M. Wilson, (ed.), *The Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland; or Dictionary of Scottish Topography, Compiled from the Most Recent Authorities and Forming a Complete Body of Scottish Geography, Physical, Statistical and Historical*, Vol. II, Gordon-Zetland, (Edinburgh: A. Fullerton & Co., c. 1854), pp. 123, 129

⁸⁰ *John O' Groat Journal*, 22 September 1854, p. 2, cols., 1-2, *J. O' G Journal*, 28 November 1856, p. 2, col. 8.

and evangelical activity.⁸¹ This view discounts the variations that existed within the movement in its diverse locations. During the nineteenth century, the region experienced a period of both evangelically based religious and social reforming initiatives with temperance at the heart of both. Callum G. Brown, viewed temperance as part of ‘a diffusive evangelical culture’ in Shetland, being established and driven by a strong dissident influence and, post- Disruption, supported by the Free Church.⁸² Other examples of religious initiatives of temperance formation have been indicated in this study. However, intemperance was also perceived as a lower class problem, and was ‘the source of evil of every kind...and one great cause of pauperism’.⁸³ Highland temperance was at the heart of philanthropic and voluntary campaigns to improve the social conditions of the poor in society.

Local branches did not operate in isolation and there was a considerable interaction with neighbouring and more geographically distant societies and organisations. These alliances illustrated the ‘associational culture’ that Irene Maver has posited in her study of West of Scotland urban temperance.⁸⁴ Co-operation and unity were illustrated also by local societies’ involvement in regional organisations and in their affiliation to national movements. The Northern Temperance Union and the Scottish Highland League were local

⁸¹ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of the Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 310

⁸² C. G. Brown, *Up-helly-aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland*, (Manchester: Mandolin, 1998), pp. 106-7.

⁸³ *Inverness Courier*, 18 April, 1848, p. col. 2

⁸⁴ I. Maver, ‘The Temperance Movement and the Urban Associational Ideal: Scotland, 1820s to 1840s,’ in G. Morton, R. J. Morris, and B. M. A. de Vries, (eds.), *Civil society, associations, and urban places: class, nation, and culture in nineteenth-century Europe*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 159-74.

branches of mainstream Scottish organisations in which highland members held official appointments and were also represented on committees.⁸⁵ At a national level, Sir Forbes Mackenzie of Gairloch was a patron of the Scottish Union for the Suppression of Intemperance although he later resigned from his position because of his opposition to the direction the society was taking.

Positive co-operation and connections were also evident when local societies supporting appeals from national organisations which aimed to put pressure on the legislators to tackle intemperance and drunkenness. A nationwide temperance campaign to pressure the government for legislation to restrict the availability of alcohol to children was endorsed by highland reformers. This joint pressure contributed to the implementation of the 1853 Licensing (Scotland) Act which prohibited the sale of alcohol to under 14s. The legal enforcement of tighter regulations regarding opening hours, in particular Sunday closure, licence holders and their credentials in keeping an orderly establishment was a positive development in the temperance campaign.

The following chapter will examine the value of these networks within the context of an important fundamental principle of spreading the message of temperance

⁸⁵ A list of office bearers in *The Scottish Temperance League Register and Abstainer's Almanac in 1851*, p. 5, detailed John Mackie, Wick and James Shearer, Kirkwall as 'Honorary Directors'. Members from the highland towns of Dingwall, Dornoch, Inverness, Portree, Tain and Wick were listed alongside Nesting, Shetland, and Holm, Kirkwall and Sanday, Orkney, pp. 13-36.

Chapter 3: Spreading the Message: Purpose and Strategy

Rule IV: 'To advance the mental, moral and physical improvement of the members, the Society shall hold meetings and do all in their power to distribute tracts, procure lecturers and diffuse correct ideas of the chemical properties of intoxicating liquors and their pernicious effects on the constitution'.⁸⁶

Highland societies adopted a range of strategies and methods in order to promote the temperance cause, sustain existing members and persuade others to adopt their principles. Temperance literature such as monthly journals provided morally sustaining articles on the evils of drink and the benefits of sobriety for members, and were available to the wider public in church halls, reading rooms and libraries. Publications, as an integral part of spreading the message, had, on occasion, provided the impetus for individuals to come together to establish local societies. In a letter, members of a newly formed society wrote, 'simply by reading publications on the subject, 20 persons had resolved to abandon the use of spirituous liquors and had formed themselves into an incipient Society'.⁸⁷ Although the bulk of publications, along with pamphlets, tracts, periodicals and books were published and distributed from central co-ordinating organisations,

⁸⁶ *The John O' Groat Journal*, 29 January 1839, p.3, col. 5.

⁸⁷ Letter from Rev. Andrew Kennedy to *The Temperance Society Record*, No. XII, Vol. II, (1831), p. 111.

such as the Scottish Temperance League based in Glasgow, local societies also sponsored the publication of their own material which provided a local resonance and relevance. *The Northern Abstinence Advocate*, a monthly periodical, was first published in Wick in 1840. Inverness TAS announced at a meeting that the society was ‘about to start a cheap monthly publication for advocating temperance principles’.⁸⁸

Tracts and leaflets were popular means of transmitting the message of temperance and articulated the numerous arguments against alcohol in an easily distributable format. Thurso Temperance Society was a keen advocate for their use in its campaign when in 1839, committee members concurred with a proposal by the secretary of ‘increased tract circulation as a means of promoting the principles of temperance’.⁸⁹ Members were urged ‘to do all in their power to distribute tracts’ as part of their commitment to the cause.⁹⁰ This responsibility meant direct and contact with drinkers in pubs or on the street which was challenging work.

The emotional content of a moral tale which recounted the personal journey of reformed drinkers and emphasised the contrast between the life of a drunkard and the abstainer, relayed a Christian message of personal salvation. The effects of drunkenness in the family, particularly on children, in *The Drunkard’s Raggit Wean*, was another highly emotive topical message that

⁸⁸ *The Inverness Courier*, 29 August 1858, p. 3, col. 3.

⁸⁹ *John o’ Groat Journal*, March 1839, p. cols. 1-2

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

resonated with middle class social welfare concerns and with the intended recipient.

Highland readers were also kept informed by medical contributions to temperance publications, such as *The Scottish Temperance League Register and Abstainers' Almanac*, which warned of the potential physical and mental diseases as a result of alcohol while emphasising the health benefits of teetotalism.⁹¹ The more factual content of these complementary tracts brought gravitas and crucially the influence of medical practitioners to the pro-temperance cause. Of particular significance to teetotallers was the medicinally prescribed wines and spirits and efforts were made to encourage doctors to discontinue this practice. Dr McKenzie, who lectured in the Inverness area, was asked by a temperance reformer to remind doctors of their 'duties to society and their patients' in his speeches, in order to enlist their support.⁹² The medical argument was expressed also in lectures by informed speakers such as Dr Lees from Leeds, who travelled extensively throughout Britain. The Inverness TAS appreciated the benefits of a series of lectures in 1848 that included one on the differing physiological and mental condition between drinkers and abstainers which was well received.⁹³ Dr Lees was part of the extensive missionary work undertaken by a committed band of agents, who helped to expand the geographical dimension of the movement.

⁹¹ *The Scottish Temperance League Register and Abstainer's Almanac*, (Glasgow, 1851), pp. 69-70.

⁹² Mc Nab, 'Stray Thoughts', p. 40-41

⁹³ *The Inverness Courier*, 19th October 1848, p. 3, col. 1.

Although the initial groundwork was usually undertaken by local reformers moving from community to community, highland societies were boosted by regular visits from voluntary agents or employed by central organisations. Temperance was already active by 1831 in the Shetland Islands with societies in Lerwick, Dunrossness, Sandwick, Weesdall, Nesting, Unst and Walls, when a local Methodist minister, Richard Tabraham was anxious to enlist extra support to build on existing results. A recognition of the limited effort that only local members could achieve led to a request to the Scottish Temperance Society for ‘an Edgar, a Collins or a Cruickshank’ to help reach more potential members.⁹⁴ Shetland and Orkney, despite their geographical distance, became destinations on the temperance lecture circuit with visiting agents such as James Stirling from Glasgow and the renowned Rev Gray Mason from Edinburgh.

As one of the most highly respected agents, Rev Mason travelled extensively throughout the highlands promoting the total abstinence cause. The outcome of his schedule round the Shetland and Orkney islands in 1840 was mixed with the formation of societies in only some localities. However, his lectures and preaching appeared to excite interest as they drew large attendees and on Unst new members included, ‘three clergymen of the Established Church, four teachers and an influential medical gentleman’.⁹⁵ On a previous tour he provided ‘an impetus to the cause’ in Inverness.⁹⁶ A few days

⁹⁴ Letter from Richard Tabraham to the editor of *the Temperance Society Record*, Vol. II, No. XII, (1831), p. 107.

⁹⁵ *The John O’ Groat Journal*, 4 September 1840, p. 3, col. 1.

⁹⁶ *John O’ Groat Journal*, 27 December 1839, p.3, col. 3

previously, the membership of the newly formed Wick and Pulteney Total Abstinence Society was increased substantially thanks to ‘the forceful and touching manner’ of his address with similar results being reported in Thurso, Golspie and Tongue.⁹⁷ These visits illustrated the value and efficacy of missionary work and the responsive desire of highland societies to spread the temperance message.

The temperance movement was based on principles of inclusivity and the needs of the Gaelic speaking population were recognised at an early stage. Various strategies were suggested and adopted in order to attract potential converts. Dugald Cameron, an itinerant lecturer from Dumbarton, after a tour of the Highlands, in 1830, realised the need for temperance tracts in Gaelic. He was confident that it was ‘the only method by which temperance may be promoted in the Highlands’ and suggested ‘sending thousands of tracts in their own language’ to Gaelic speaking areas.⁹⁸ Further afield, the welfare of Highland migrants was subject to the attention of several charitable organisations including temperance. The Total Abstinence Society in Glasgow sought financial help from benefactors to support the newly formed Highland Branch of the Glasgow TAS where meetings would be conducted with Gaelic speakers and temperance tracts in Gaelic would be published and distributed.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *John O’ Groat Journal*, 27 December 1839, p. 2, col. 6.

⁹⁸ *The Temperance Society Record*, Vol. II No. IX, February 1831, pp. 40-41.

⁹⁹ *Circular announcing subscription appeal for Total Abstinence Society, 1841*, published to the Internet: <http://www.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-000-576-403> accessed 13.3.17

The use of Gaelic speaking agents in missionary work in the Highlands was another promising initiative. A Mr. Stewart travelled to various parts of the Highlands, lecturing in Gaelic and English at meetings in Inverness, Invermorriston, Drumnad, Dingwall and Tain.¹⁰⁰ Evidence of the impact of these measures can only be measured in terms of the growth of temperance support in predominantly Gaelic speaking areas. In addition to the aforementioned locations, temperance societies were active on Mull, Skye, and Lewis and the Gaelic Chapel in Inverness being very supportive by holding regular meetings would suggest positive results. Another significant development was the active participation of women in the movement at the forefront of temperance work.

The gendered nature of temperance underwent a modest shift during the course of the period under review regarding the role of women in the movement. This was a male dominated organisation in which committees and a large percentage of the membership were men and reports in newspapers of highland meetings during the early days mentioned the attendance of women at meetings, ‘a few were present’, almost as an afterthought. Drunkenness was an issue among women as well as men, and temperance thinking realised the ‘beneficial influence’ that women could bring to progressing the abstinence cause. By the early 1840s, female agency in the highland movement was evident. Women’s participation in the public arena was boosted by a female temperance society in Inverness, female committees in various highland locations, mainly to organise

¹⁰⁰ *The Temperance Society Record*, p. 179-80.

catering for meetings and soirees, and the appearance of female speakers at meetings and lectures.

In 1841, Mrs Maclellan and Mrs Mclean addressed a meeting of the Inverness TAS. The former was already a practised speaker, having been on the platform at a soiree in Avoch the previous year. She spoke of the need for women to demonstrate public support for temperance in the face of opposition to female participation, and urged women to use their influence in forbidding the use of alcohol in their homes and their presence. Mrs Mclean's appeal was for more support from women to become actively involved in the mission work of 'raising a fallen sister'.¹⁰¹ Outside female speakers such as 'the popular and distinguished temperance advocate', Mrs Theobald, who was engaged by the Inverness Total Abstinence Society in 1856 to give two lectures, were becoming a more frequent presence on the meeting floor.¹⁰² While these examples illustrate the roles of women in temperance societies, the hospitality trade also provided opportunities to assist the cause.

Women also played a practical and important role in the promotion of temperance by running temperance hotels, restaurants and coffee houses. These establishments which were the epitome of Victorian respectability and sobriety were suitable sources for women to earn a living while following their principles. It was perhaps out of necessity that Mrs MacPherson, 'at the

¹⁰¹ *The Inverness Courier*, 29 January 1841.

¹⁰² *The Inverness Courier*, 27 November, 1856, p. 1, col. 2.

suggestion of Friends' turned her 'commodious dwelling house,' into the Commercial Hotel in Cromarty in 1857 as a temperance establishment.¹⁰³ Temperance coffee houses such as Mrs Coghill's, established in Inverness in 1840, under 'the patronage of the Total Abstinence Society', was also a useful and convenient outlet for temperance publications among the other newspapers and periodicals.¹⁰⁴

In 1841, Mr Anthony Doull's premises in Wick, – ironically, the former John O' Groat Tavern – was also representative of a wave of alternative and respectable refreshment venues to the public house and the dram shop. The rise of temperance hotels was another indication of changing preferences. These 'dry' establishments exemplified a growing number of temperance related commercial enterprises and would appear to have powerful backing. The first temperance hotel in Nairn's High Street open for business in early December 1853 by James Hay, was 'in compliance with the wishes of a number of influential parties in Nairn'.¹⁰⁵ These venues, however, fulfilled a minor role in a change of habits as they attracted and met the requirements of a 'respectable' clientele who could afford these services.

Publicising the temperance cause to attract new converts and to keep the movement in the public eye was an important aspect of the work of local

¹⁰³ *The Inverness Courier*, 14 May 1857, p. 1, col. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *The Inverness Courier*, 22 April 1840, p. 3, col. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *The Nairnshire Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Northern Counties*, 29 December 1853, p. 1, col. 2.

societies. Local newspapers provided broad coverage of highland temperance activity. The articles, whether contributed or covered by the paper itself, advertised meetings, lectures, soirees and social gatherings and sober Christmas and New Year celebrations when alcohol fuelled misdemeanours were commonplace and merited severe disapproval from the authorities. A newspaper report attributed a quieter, and presumably more sober, festive period of 1847 in Shetland to the early closure of public houses and the joint patrolling by the authorities and special constables.¹⁰⁶

The beneficial publicity for the temperance cause regarding its value to society was illustrated in an article in 1847 when, ‘fewer occasions of riot or drunkenness were reported’ and accredited ‘the improved tone of society here’ [Inverness] to such social initiatives as the New Year’s Temperance Ball.¹⁰⁷ Reformers were aware of the need to provide a sober environment that drew the working class in particular away from the rough setting of the public house and offer ‘rational, attractive, and cheap amusements of a moral tendency amongst the working classes, connected with temperance’.¹⁰⁸

By the mid- nineteenth century, the pursuit of what W. H Fraser has described as ‘a rational, moral way of filling increased leisure time’ was being adopted by many of the middle and upper middle classes and their temperance

¹⁰⁶ C. G. Brown, *Up-Helly-AA: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland*, (Manchester, 1998), pp.91-92.

¹⁰⁷ *The Inverness Courier*, 6 January 1847, p. 2, col. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Recreation for the Working Classes on Temperance Principles*, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, p. 5.

members, as part of their strategy, were keen to maintain and promote this practice to the working classes.¹⁰⁹ Highland temperance societies, while engaging their members in self-improving leisure activities such as meetings, talks and lectures, also sought to provide less serious minded events for members and attract new recruits to join the cause. The anniversaries of the founding of a society were a cause for jubilation and celebration.

A typical example was the occasion of the second anniversary of the Inverness Total Abstinence Society in 1839 which was celebrated in the Academy Park with a full programme of activity. Although the event included speakers voicing the temperance message, the social attraction of temperance was represented by refreshments, music, singing and dancing and fellowship. The publicity accorded to these events was invaluable, particularly if it mentioned the presence of 'individuals who had been rescued from the paths of intemperance'.¹¹⁰ Temperance gatherings were all welcoming affairs cutting across class and status but an important objective was to attract and engage the young who were perceived to be most at risk of succumbing to the temptations of drink.

Exposure to alcohol was an everyday occurrence for children with a parent or parents with a drink habit and public houses able to serve drink to children until upper age limits were imposed. Although it was a challenging

¹⁰⁹ W. H. Fraser, 'Developments in Leisure' in W. H. Fraser and R. J. Morris, (ed.), *People and Society in Scotland, 1830-1914*, (Edinburgh, 2000),

¹¹⁰ *The John O' Groat Journal*, 5 July 1844, p. 3, col. 2.

but not impossible task to convert the more resistant older youth, the belief was that prevention was better than cure. Educating younger and more impressionable children about alcohol and the potential consequences of intoxication was viewed as essential work. Temperance literature urged fellow reformers ‘to preserve the uninitiated in the mysteries of drunkenness, from the influence of intoxicating liquors’.¹¹¹

From the early days of temperance in the Highlands and Islands, juvenile members were a welcome addition to temperance organisations, with children encouraged to attend meetings and gatherings, temperance being a family orientated movement. Many temperance reformers were active supporters of Sabbath Schools and the formation of juvenile societies provided a further means of delivering moral instruction. By 1851, juvenile societies were active in Inverness, Lerwick, Tain and Wick and attracted considerable numbers of members.¹¹² Temperance societies were encouraged to pay heed to ‘what the young of all classes look for entertainment, and if you do not give it to them of a moral, good, and attractive kind, they will be drawn away by bad temptations’.¹¹³

From the 1850s, the Band of Hope movement aimed to fulfil these objectives by providing fun-filled but meaningful activities imbued with a moral

¹¹¹ J. Adam, ‘The design and constitution of temperance societies explained and defended’, a lecture delivered in Mill Street Chapel, Perth, August 17 1830, *Hume Tracts*, No. 12, p. 5.

¹¹² *The Scottish Temperance League Register and Abstinence’s Almanac*, (Glasgow, 1851), p. 47.

¹¹³ Recreation for the working classes, on temperance principles’, *Bristol Selected Pamphlets*, (1857), p. 4.

and Christian content. The Band of Hope Gala days were a colourful example while expressing a very public display of juvenile temperance. These occasions such as one held at Dingwall in 1858, aimed to attract young recruits with their pleasurable elements of music, games, food and ‘their favourite drink, water’, albeit with an underlying and more pointed message relayed on banners with mottoes such as ‘Happy Homes’, ‘Stand Fast’ and ‘We Will Do You Good’.¹¹⁴ Annemarie McAllister’s research exploring the use of illustrations in temperance literature, of music and symbols has suggested the powerful effect of such stimuli on the young.¹¹⁵ Breaking what were perceived as cross generation habits was intended to create a cultural identity of a moral, healthy and Christian life to take into adulthood, and in so doing perpetuate the ethos and principles of temperance.

¹¹⁴ *The Inverness Courier*, 29 July 1858, p. 6, col. 2.

¹¹⁵ A. McAllister, ‘Picturing the Demon Drink: How Children were Shown Temperance Principles in the Band of Hope’, *Visual Resources*, Vol. 28, No. 4, (2012), pp.309-323.

Conclusion

Attempts to change the public attitude towards drink in the Highlands and Islands from the early decades of the nineteenth century can be accorded to diverse social, religious, economic and legislative forces. Temperance played an important and influential role in this process in numerous communities throughout the region. Concern for the moral, physical and social consequences of a ritualised and habitual consumption of drink was a local and national issue and early highland campaigners were eager to adopt and promote the principles of voluntary moderation and, by initiating societies, positive association.

Geographical distance from the origins of the temperance movement in the Lowlands did not insulate the region from innovative initiatives. Although the temperance message spread rapidly eastwards and northwards, the quick response in highland communities illustrated both their receptiveness and a useful network of existing connections with neighbouring and wider communities. Although missionary work by agents from further afield encouraged and sustained the adoption of temperance principles, it was the indigenous support of local individuals and societies within the Highlands and Islands that contributed to its development.

The early decades of the nineteenth century were also notable for the determined efforts to stamp out the illegal activities of illicit distilling and smuggling of whisky which were operating throughout the area. While temperance reformers were concerned with the drunken effects of alcohol from

any source, religious condemnation of these practices and the proliferation of public houses in their areas signalled a more personal commitment to the moral and spiritual wellbeing of their parishioners. Pressure from legitimate suppliers and the fiscal consequences and moral concern expressed by successive Committees of Inquiry provoked the government to legislate for stricture measures to eradicate an activity that for many small operators was conducted out of economic necessity or personal use.

The role of the diverse Protestant denominations in the highland temperance movement was complex and shifting. The beginnings of organised temperance lay with the dissenters from the Church of Scotland and although individual ministers were supportive, they and pioneering temperance societies often faced ridicule and contempt from their peers and members of the public. As a moral and Christian based movement the temperance movement gained institutional support after initial religious opposition in the Established Church that felt threatened by a crusade initiated and led by laymen and the Dissenting denominations. The years following the Disruption of 1843 saw increasing involvement from the breakaway Free Church and the Church of Scotland with established committees to investigate the 'drink question', and collaboration with other denominations at public meetings.

A shift by many new and existing societies to advocating total abstinence marked the next stage of the campaign from the late 1830s. Reformers, impatient with the slow progress of temperance support, sought a

different approach to tackling the ongoing prevalence of drink, drunkenness and social problems still evident in their communities. The public support by influential members of the community such as ministers, doctors, teachers, employers, the local elite and civic leaders was of significant value to furthering the cause although their motivations provide sufficient speculation for further in depth analysis. The incentives of the economic benefits of a sober workforce, welfare concerns, public protection, respectability, and social advancement lay behind measures to curb drinking habits, although personal commitment was also present.

Temperance societies became part of a broad middle class and upper working class social reforming movement that propelled ideologies of self-help, self-improvement, respectability, thrift and Christian morality. Temperance reformers regarded education as the means to alter attitudes towards alcohol and break the cycle of the continuance of generations of habitual use. Educating the youth against the evils of drink was a prime objective and was part of an overarching policy of moral and religious instruction. The formation of juvenile societies and subsequently the Band of Hope was a means of introducing temperance values, protecting the young and vulnerable and perpetuating the temperance cause into the future. Temperance songs, bands, banners, posters concerts, processions were integral to creating a cultural identity that contrasted with one associated with alcohol and for many what constituted everyday life.

Highland temperance societies were adept at publicising and promoting their cause. Spreading the message was essential work and this period was one of high temperance visibility with regular coverage in local newspapers, public meetings, temperance coffee shops and hotels, reading rooms and public soirees, lectures and parades. The direct involvement of women while nudging at a top heavy male gendered orientation demonstrated female agency and helped in promoting temperance and women's public role outside the domestic realm. The provision of constructive leisure activities was part of a strategy to draw men and women away from the attractions of the public house and encourage family life. Temperance literature was an essential means of reinforcing the potential consequences of drink and the opportunity to have a sober and fulfilling life.

Although affiliated to regional and national movements, highland temperance was composed of independently run societies that challenged local attitudes and implemented the universal principles of temperance ideology. Highland temperance made a significant contribution during the mid-nineteenth century to altering public attitudes towards alcohol and ritualised alcohol related behaviour, thereby enabling the development of an improved moral code.

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