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Temperance in Lincoln 1830-1870¹

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In the late 1820s, an increasing number of people in Britain named drink abuse as the principal cause of ruined lives and poor living standards. The early temperance advocates (mainly middle and upper class) campaigned seriously from 1828 for people to moderate their intake of fermented liquor and to eliminate entirely the consumption of spirits. In the later teetotal or total abstinence phase of the movement, all strong drink was to be abandoned through voluntary self-denial, in order to achieve material and moral benefits. The majority of the teetotal advocates were from the working classes, and they mainly targeted those from a similar background, believing them to have the most to gain from adopting teetotalism. Although the idea of eliminating the demand for strong drink in order to wipe out consumption was never abandoned altogether, from 1853 the suppliers were targeted by an increasingly active parliamentary lobby of MPs and others. It was thought that legislative prohibition of drink selling would effect the desired change in drinking habits. None of the methods proved successful, and today drink related problems still abound in Great Britain, with no effective solution in sight.²

This paper will examine temperance/teetotal activity in the forty-year period between 1830 and 1870 in the relatively small English city of Lincoln. Placed in the rural county of Lincolnshire, where hops and barley were grown in profusion, its preponderance of brewers and drink sellers make it an interesting case study and an alternative to the few temperance studies made of large, industrial cities like Bradford and Manchester.

Lincoln's ancient castle, cathedral and some houses are on the top of a steep hill, and constitute the upper city or 'above hill'. The gentry originally

¹ This paper is an abridgement of chapter six of my unpublished doctoral thesis, *Tipplers, Drunkards and Backsliders, The Temperance Movement in England 1830-72, including a case study of Lincoln*, 2002, Universidade do Minho, supervised by Doutor Hélio Osvaldo Alves. It is a modest tribute to my friend and mentor.

² The temperance movement was moribund by the late 1940s.

resided there, moving out as the nineteenth century progressed and poorer people, many attracted into the city by the prospect of work on the new railways, took residence in the increasingly run down accommodation. 'Below hill' constituted the area around the steep high street, including the inland port of Brayford Pool, the commercial centre of the city. It housed the poor, and was an important site for the later foundries. The waterway, and later the railway, served as a vital transport link. The Witham still flows through the city, although its importance nowadays is purely recreational.

Just before the period under study (1830-1870), Lincoln had maintained the characteristics of a predominately agricultural market town. There was a consequent dependence on the extensive trade associated with agriculture. Drink selling/hospitality in hotels, inns, public houses or beerhouses employed a large number of people. The number of beer retailers, for example, rose from 25 in 1835 to 55 in 1870, and the total number of licensed premises rose from 95 to 172 in the same years.³ The preponderance of markets and fairs was probably responsible for the relatively large number of eating and drinking places per head of population. Most traders came in from outside the city and would need refreshment/accommodation. However, there was a rise whenever the laws regulating drink sale were relaxed, as in 1830, 1860 and 1863.⁴ A few temperance hotels and coffee houses catered for the non-drinkers, the first dating from 1837.

Brewers and maltsters were also important to Lincoln's economy. In 1836, there were over 40 maltkilns bringing in over £40,000 a year. The tendency to the 1870s was of diminishing numbers, however: 26 brewers and maltsters in 1830 as compared with 21 in 1867.⁵

By the 1850s, Lincoln was showing noticeable signs of development. Industrialisation had finally caught up with the semi-isolated city, bringing with it the usual influx of labour from the countryside. The population rose from 7,205 in 1801 to 17,536 in 1851 and 26,723 in 1871.⁶

Weekly markets and fairs were important to the commercial and social life of the city's inhabitants. Lincoln Races were popular with all classes of people, but the crime and drunkenness that inevitably followed big races like the Lincolnshire Handicap were regularly criticised in local newspapers and pulpits. In 1831, over 500 thimble-riggers and pickpockets attended, and riots broke out. Booths selling ale and spirits were set up as early as 11 p.m. Saturday, for Sunday races. Lincoln boasted few opportunities for the working classes to amuse themselves and so drinking places provided important recreational opportunities. There were also the annual village feasts when many would

³ Lincoln commercial directory for 1835 and the *Stamford Mercury*, (henceforward *SM*): Oct. 14 1870.

⁴ The 1830 Beerhouse Act threw open the beer selling trade, in 1860 Gladstone made wine and spirit off licences more freely available, and in 1863 beer off licences were similarly freed.

⁵ See *Tipplers, Drunkards and Backsliders*, henceforward *Tipplers*, p. 432 for probable reasons.

⁶ *Morris and Co.'s Commercial Directory & Gazetteer of Lincolnshire*: 1868, p. 2. Figures for 1871 are from Hill, 1974, p. 306.

return 'home' to enjoy the festivities. Drinking and riotous behaviour, especially on the Sabbath, was evident up to mid-century and progressively criticised.

Although drink-related crime was visible in Lincoln between 1830-70, it was not excessive. The understaffed police force⁷ was generally content to let those found drunk and disorderly in public find their way home, unless another crime was committed. This attitude was periodically criticised by the newspaper watchdogs, however, and seems to have been affected by magisterial guidelines, which in turn reflected the prevailing governmental attitude to drink abuse; tougher laws required more attentive policing and *vice versa*. In 1841, 140 drunk and disorderly people were arrested in Lincoln (22 of whom were female), in 1851 137 (29 were females) were arrested, and in 1863, despite the rising population numbers, only 67 prosecutions for drunkenness are recorded.⁸

Temperance activity

The main source of information, in the absence of temperance society records for the period 1830-1870 (except for the 1857 Temperance Society Annual Report) is the local newspapers: the Liberal *Stamford Mercury* and the Conservative *Lincolnshire Chronicle*. These sources are complemented by various temperance journals and other temperance literature.

The first Lincoln Temperance Society was established in 1833 by 'several intelligent well-wishers to the improvement of the poor and of society in general'. The American plan, i.e. personal abstinence from spirits together with a prohibition on offering strong drink to others, although initially favoured, was not adopted. Members pledged themselves as follows:

We agree to abstain from distilled spirits except for medicinal purposes, and to discountenance the causes and practice of intemperance.⁹

The change was probably made in order to accommodate the more moderate-minded people. Sir Edward French Bromhead, the Hon. A. L. Melville (elected president), the Rev. George Quilter (Church of England rector at Canwick), the Rev. D. S. Wayland (Church of England vicar at Bassingham), and the Rev. Samuel Bergne (Independent Methodist minister at the High Street chapel, Lincoln), as well as other ministers, were instrumental in setting up the society. The prime movers of this society were either Conservative members of the upper and middle classes or religious ministers, this being consistent with the national pattern at the time. They allied themselves to the moderationist, anti-spirits, London-based British and Foreign Temperance Society (B.F.T.S.- established in 1831), whose royal/aristocratic patronage

⁷ In 1856, it consisted of one superintendent and commons' warden, one inspector, sergeant, nine constables and three supernumeraries.

⁸ *SM*: Dec. 2 1864. For details of Lincoln police and other drink-related crimes see *Tipplers*, pp. 436-41.

⁹ *SM*: Sept. 13 1833.

probably attracted Bromhead and Melville, although it would obviously have been advantageous to be affiliated to a national organisation at that early stage.

Several hundreds of people had to be sent away from the inaugural September 11 meeting at the Guildhall, for there was insufficient room, indicating great popular interest in the cause. Opposition was also present, indicating future struggles. By December 1833, there were 116 members and meetings ensued that were enthusiastically attended by those wishing to hear the visiting speakers. However, on November 28 1834, the *Stamford Herald* reported the suspension of the society 'principally through the want of willing and efficient persons to superintend its operations'. Sincere commitment was probably not translated into hard campaigning work, for aristocrats, clergy and gentlemen usually made poor party workers. However, the newspaper also stated that the 'deserved sanction' had not been forthcoming, and noted that a remodelled version would be presented, hopefully including 'individuals who had a conscientious objection to its previous constitution'. This is probably a reference to unsupportive clergy who objected to the pledge either in its entirety or in the specific form adopted. This was not uncommon at the time.

By 1837, the more extreme form of temperance, teetotalism, was spreading around the country. Lincolnshire was not exempt from its influence, the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* reporting in alarm on January 5 1838 that:

Teetotalism is becoming so prevalent that the consumption of malt is diminished to an extent that already touches the markets, and which, if further practised, will seriously affect the price of barley.

The British Temperance Advocate and Journal relished in the 'blaze of [temperance] prosperity' that seemed to 'pervade the mass of the population'.¹⁰ Even parish clergy were said to be preaching teetotalism, and thereby both reclaiming many from intemperance and bringing them into the church. Interestingly, Rev. Wayland, the pioneering Lincolnshire temperance advocate, objected to the teetotal societies on the grounds that some teetotalers aligned themselves with socialists and infidels and thereby showed teetotalism as advocating a change in political and religious institutions and the destruction of private property and the home 'under the pretence of promoting the public good'. For the Rev. Wayland, those who disassociated teetotalism from Christianity could not be supported.¹¹

Notwithstanding opposition from Rev. Wayland and others, the Lincoln Teetotal Society was formed in April 1837.¹² Weekly meetings were held in the Wesleyan Sunday School rooms. This venue is elucidative, for the established church in Lincoln had been involved in the earlier moderation temperance society, but it was the dissenters, principally Wesleyan and Independent

¹⁰ Vol. I, 1839, p. 86.

¹¹ *The Temperance Penny Magazine*, October 1840.

¹² Despite not finding records of the inauguration, the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* (henceforward *LC*) and the *Stamford Mercury* both report the first anniversary celebrations on April 20 1838.

Methodists, who supported the radical teetotalers. The 'striking and pleasing' conversions at the weekly meetings indicate that the gatherings mirrored the Methodist services.¹³

The 'Teetotal Blacksmith' John Hockings delivered a memorable teetotal lecture in the Mechanics' Institute in February 1837 to a 'large and attentive', mainly middle class audience. They listened approvingly as he blamed inebriety for almost all the distress of the labouring classes. They were probably content to agree with this representative of the working class as he blamed the workers themselves for their plight, pointing out that the remedy lay within each individual. The audience would have felt comfortably removed from a problem that they perceived affected them only indirectly at that time. They would also have been entertained by the black-country dialect, gestures and inflexions that characterised Hockings' speeches. The *Lincolnshire Chronicle* praised his 'strong, natural talents' while exalting the importance of the teetotal cause and recommending it to the Christian and patriot, thus counteracting criticism from some quarters that teetotalism was anti-church and country. The *Chronicle* would reverse its stand in 1838, only to support the cause again in 1848 as it gained national respectability. The following tirade was printed on March 25 1842, during the *Chronicle's* anti-teetotal phase:

This being Good Friday, that heterogeneous jumble of chartists, socialists, methodists and many other ists, championing what they call the teetotalers, intend celebrating the passion of Our Lord, by beating up with music and parading the streets of Lincoln in procession. Surely such exhibitions should no more be [allowed] on this day than on a Sunday, the law requiring both to be held sacred in an equal degree. There is to be a grand gathering for tea in the afternoon, which will be followed by the usual harangues, in which holy writ is often distorted, and temperance held up as the only virtue.

The fortunes of the 1837 Lincoln Teetotal Society flagged in 1838, but the energetic, eloquent Rev. John Mussendine Holt almost single-handedly revived them. By 1840 the habitual annual teetotal procession through the streets with flags and band music, followed by tea in the Assembly Rooms and animating addresses had taken on a new lease of life. The *Stamford Mercury's* report of the event was the occasion to proclaim the merits of teetotalism for the first time. Perhaps the negative attitude of the Conservative *Chronicle* had something to do with the Liberal *Mercury's* positive stand.

The 1841 festival was also well attended, over 300 people having tea at the City Assembly Rooms and 24 new pledges being obtained. The Independent Methodist Minister Samuel Bergne led the procession that year, the *Mercury* writing that Lincoln's other ministers (Church of England) were not charmed by it, for they had scrupled 'to mix with reformed drunkards, and discard the principle that is the basis of the moral regeneration of mankind'.¹⁴

¹³ There was a strong resemblance between teetotal and Methodist methods of operation.

¹⁴ *SM*: April 16 1841. See also *Temperance Intelligencer*, vol. V, 1841, pp. 135-6.

Lincoln's Church of England clergy followed the national pattern in the early 1840s, working in the teetotal background, if at all, while many dissenters supported the cause up front in various ways. Lincoln's Bishop Wordsworth was antagonistic even in the 1870s, a time when the established church was establishing its own temperance societies throughout the country, as his *On Temperance Societies*, 1873, shows very well.

The visits in 1844 of the illustrious lecturers James Teare and Dr. R. B. Grindrod, as part of their separate nationwide tours, stimulated interest in teetotalism and encouraged many to join Lincoln's Teetotal Society. Teare mustered up 'several', according to the antagonistic *Chronicle*, 'several hundreds' according to the supportive *National Temperance Advocate*.¹⁵ (According to Russell, the 1846 Annual Report shows the Teetotal Society had 900 adult and 400 juvenile members).¹⁶ Dr. Grindrod's popular illustrative physiological drawings underlined the physical advantages of total abstinence (teetotalism). They were so popular that they were put on public view at the end of his tour. Presumably, it was this aspect that enticed such large, mixed audiences to his Lincoln lectures. For the first time, the habitual 'large respectable' audiences were diluted with members of the lower classes: 'ministers, physicians, surgeons, lawyers, magistrates, distillers, brewers, publicans and wine merchants', along with the workers, making up the 'motley assemblages', according to the *Metropolitan Temperance Intelligencer and Journal*.¹⁷ The Lincoln masses were finally being drawn into the teetotal circle.

'Much secret opposition' existed in 1845 towards the teetotallers, according to John Norton, who spoke at the annual tea. Nevertheless, he was sure that temperance principles would soon 'rule the fashion of the day'. The secret nature of the opposition is interesting, leaving tantalising questions in the air. Who were the opponents – the usual ministers of the church, or were brewers, distillers and drink sellers also piqued by the teetotallers' pressure on local inhabitants to give up strong drink? Certainly, no local defence association was established until the Licensed Victuallers' Defence Association for Lincoln and Lincolnshire was formed, relatively late, in November 1871.

Despite indications of flourishing activity in 1846, the following year the hoped-for increase in signed-up members did not materialise. Even powerful stalwart speakers, like James Teare were unable to transform the listeners, into *bona fide* members of the society. However, the Independent Order of Rechabites (I.O.R.), a teetotal friendly society, had established Oak Tent in Lincoln in July 1838.¹⁸ This was probably done with the help of the Rev. John Mussendine Holt, for he was the District Chief Ruler for Lincolnshire, and one of the founders of the total abstinence movement in that county. He held many posts in the order and in other teetotal associations.¹⁹ The Rechabites were set

¹⁵ LC: June 7 1844; vol. I, new series, 1844-5, p. 81.

¹⁶ Russell, R. C., 1987.

¹⁷ January 18 1845, p. 23.

¹⁸ By 1857, there were over 300 registered friendly societies in Lincolnshire.

¹⁹ See *Tipplers*, p. 472.

up in 1835 with the aim of providing insurance, health and other benefits for its paying, teetotal members. It is still exercising this function today. Unfortunately, little is known of its workings in Lincoln apart from the fact that they joined in the annual teetotal festivities on Good Friday of each year and held their own anniversary celebrations in July/August. It is probable that members of the I.O.R. were also members of the Lincoln Teetotal Society.

A Sons of Temperance Working Men's Association was set up in Lincoln around 1851. The Sons of Temperance, originally established in America on September 29 1842, was (is) also a teetotal friendly society. Their Working Men's Association may well have been influenced by the national self-help movement of Young Men's Temperance Societies, conducted by W. A. Fletcher 'and others' from 1851. Its name implies that it was class based. Rev Metcalfe (Independent Methodist) supported the Lincoln Association by allowing the use of 'his' Newland Chapel. The Association's objectives in 1851 were: to afford mutual assistance in times of sickness; to provide money on the death of a member; to elevate character; to enlist workers to reclaim strong drinkers; to save the young from strong drink; and to assist in every way the suppression of the drink traffic. The Association not only offered support for its members but was also outward-looking, in that members tried not only to reclaim habitual drunkards but also to protect the young (before the habit was ingrained), particularly through restricting access to drink by curtailing its sale.

In November 1871, a branch of the teetotal Independent Order of Good Templars (IOGT) was established in Lincoln, on the instigation of Brother Thomas Fawcett of Sleaford. This order, again originating from America, did so well in Lincoln that a second lodge was opened in the Independent Chapel, St. Peter's-at-Gowt's in December 1872. Joseph Malins had successfully introduced the IOGT to Britain in 1868. It strove to maintain the sobriety of recovering alcoholics and appealed to the working classes who wished to improve their social and economic position. Keir Hardie later testified: 'If it had not been for Good Templary, I would have remained a hewer of coal and a drawer of water'.²⁰

By the early 1850s, the temperance movement in Britain had begun its third phase. The United Kingdom Alliance (UKA) was established in Manchester in 1853 to completely stop the sale of alcoholic drink in order to save people from its nefarious effects. This was to be done through the legislature, so pro-temperance MPs were mobilised to propose the necessary parliamentary bills and exert the required pressure on their peers. Members could be teetotallers or simply moderate drinkers. The schism that this new approach provoked in the temperance/teetotal movement cannot be broached here. Nevertheless, despite differences of opinion regarding the best approach to achieving a non-drinking society, Lincoln accompanied the national trend and established a temperance society in 1854 that was closely linked to the UKA.

²⁰ Rutherford, D., 1998, n.p.

William Richardson, Charles Akrell 'and others' were responsible for setting up this society, although it is unclear whether the older Teetotal Society had ceased or whether the two societies co-existed.²¹ According to the Temperance Society's 1857 Third Annual Report, some of the 1854 founders had been connected with the movement for over twenty years. It seems likely that the 1854 society replaced the 1837 one, especially as no reports of schisms appeared in the press.

The society's affinity to the UKA can be seen in its resolution to co-operate as far as possible with the said organisation. The Lincoln Temperance Society subscribed to Alliance funds from 1868-70, probably continuing to do so after this date. *Alliance Weekly News* recorded the society's support for the Permissive Bill in 1859, and the promise of a petition in its favour.

Although the UKA accepted abstainers and non-abstainers as members and had no pledge, the 1854 Lincoln Temperance Society's pledge was: 'I agree to abstain from all intoxicating liquor as a beverage, and in all suitable ways to discountenance their use throughout the community'. It was, thus, more binding than the UKA. Membership numbers have not been found for the 1854 Lincoln Temperance Society, but an *additional* 120 pledges were taken between October 1856-7, and 61 new subscribers added. The committee was pleased that not only former inebriates had joined, but also young men who had never been intemperate. The sixteen-man committee, meeting monthly, carried out the society's work. Interestingly, there was a marked decrease in the social activities of the society as compared with the former temperance societies, for the entire membership met only three times a year. Rule 9 prohibited remarks of a party or religious character, thereby maintaining the temperance tradition of striving for as harmonious and all-embracing a society as possible.

Despite visiting Alliance lecturers and others, on July 1 1859 the *Stamford Mercury* was noting the habitual slump.

"Total Abstinence", though an excellent practice, seems to be at a discount in Lincoln, two or three lecturers having essayed to address the public on the subject on the Cornhill, but though they have "piped, few have danced".

A further attempt to establish a temperance society was made, in 1866, Charles Akrell again being involved. This was also pro-United Kingdom Alliance, and received prominent speakers who addressed a varied audience (for example Neal Dow, J. H. Raper and Frederic Lees). Petitions were signed in favour of the Permissive Bill which may have galvanised the society. There was something concrete to do – canvassing. The *Mercury* stated there were 1,200 Lincoln teetotallers in 1869, and the popular American orator G. H. Pearce drew large audiences of 2,000 people in 1870. An energetic campaign was organised for the summer of 1870. Public meetings at diverse city venues, open air meetings and lectures in school rooms were all programmed, as the movement took on a new momentum both nationally and locally. A house-to-house canvass of support

²¹ For details of the founders, see *Tiplers*, pp. 477-8.

for Sir Wilfred Lawson's Permissive Bill was undertaken in July 1870, and a petition was got up destined for the House of Commons. Two thousand signatures were obtained as well as a memorial with 1,000 signatures to Charles Seely, Lincoln's MP, requesting him to vote in favour of the bill.

From the 1850s, the temperance activists had turned their attention to a previously neglected group, the youngsters. Without neglecting their reclamation of inebriates, prevention was increasingly considered an easier path than cure. Juvenile temperance societies, the so-called Bands of Hope, were set up all over the country from 1847. As early as September 1848, 300 juveniles sat down to plum cake and tea at 3d each, at the Lincoln temperance festival. They performed the first of many subsequent theatrical dramas in the evening, to an audience of 400 who had paid 4d for the privilege. This festival marked the beginning of a focus on the youth of Lincoln that was to intensify with the years. William Richardson, Charles Akrell, W. H. Blow, John Richardson, Thomas Picklay and others formed the first Lincoln Band of Hope on November 16 1855. Lincoln was slow to institutionalise the drive to capture the youth, however, for the initial expansion of Bands of Hope had occurred between 1848 and 1852. Nevertheless, meetings were held at the Clasketgate Wesleyan Chapel, the minister Rev. Marshall Randles being the first Band of Hope president. There was a strong religious link to this Band of Hope, therefore, whose professed objective was 'the promotion of total abstinence among the young, and [...] the advancement of morality and religion'. Total abstinence and 'good moral conduct' were essential for membership. With parents' permission, children signed the following pledge:

I agree to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, and from tobacco in all its forms.

The inclusion of a prohibition on tobacco is interesting, for this was not usually included in the adult pledges. Teetotallers were often involved in other campaigns – vegetarianism, anti-Corn Law, etc., but it complicated matters if these issues were mixed with temperance. Contributions were one penny a month. Rule 15 was rather chilling:

Those who manage [the meetings] will, in a few years, be removed by death, – qualify yourself to carry them on when they are dead.

The Wesleyan Band of Hope had obtained 675 members by 1862, although, obviously, not all kept up with the meetings, and, eventually, they outgrew the association. Nevertheless, despite a deficit of £2 14s 9d in that year, the weekly meetings, lectures and classes in shorthand and singing testify to an active society. This continued up to 1870, the limit of this study, with annual outings and other activities ongoing.

A second Band of Hope was set up in Lincoln in 1858 by the Silver Street Independent Methodists, but despite activities recorded up to 1868, beyond that date no reference was found to this society. It may well have disbanded. Another Band of Hope is recorded as being set up in 1862, and having its meetings in the

Free Methodists' Saxton Chapel. Others may have had an ephemeral existence, their small-scale activities not warranting the attention of the local press. One can conclude that the predominance of dissenting influence in the adult temperance societies in Lincoln was clearly extended to the juveniles long before the established church made such efforts to protect the children. None were traced in Lincoln up to 1870.

Space does not permit reference to other features of temperance activity in Lincoln, particularly the long history of the building of the temperance hall, finally completed in 1871, and the temperance gatherings and galas held especially in the Temple Gardens. Nevertheless, one can conclude that, despite Lincoln's predominance of breweries and relatively small, provincial nature, the city was not negligent in promoting temperance/teetotalism. A succession of temperance societies mirrored the progress of temperance nationwide from 1833. When zealous, energetic people took the reins, the crusade advanced in a lively manner, only to slow down as the workers tired or disappeared. The dissenting churches provided the most help, but there was a mixture of protagonists and supporters. Opposition was present but the drink sellers never seem to have made much anti-drink impact on the city, at least not in an organised way.

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