

XVII

From St Giles to Marylebone: The gin mad girl and an MCC Tie.

DAVID ALLEN

*This article traces the changing status of gin in nineteenth-century British culture by exploring two artefacts: an image from *The Drunkard's Children* and a neck tie from the collection of the Marylebone Cricket Club. Despite their apparently disparate nature, the items combine to relate how the story of gin touches on social status, group identity, and gender politics.*

The history of gin ‘is a rise from grime to grandeur, from notoriety to acclaim, from recourse for the desperate to accessory for the fashionable’; its transformation ‘has quite literally been a journey from the slums to the Savoy’.⁶⁷⁵ In addition to being a transition from poverty and disreputableness to affluence and desirability, the narrative of gin is also a gendered one, with ‘Ladies Delight’ gradually becoming more accepted as a drink for the fashionable male population. This paper will illustrate this process of change by comparing two artefacts: a plate from George Cruickshank’s folding book, *The Drunkard's Children* (1848) and an early tie from the collection of the Marylebone Cricket Club (M.C.C.). Aspects of Hogarth’s *Gin Lane* (1751) will be used to link the two.

Gin as a problem straddled the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. London was the centre of most gin production in what was essentially an unregulated trade. In 1750, one house in fifteen in the City was a gin shop and Westminster had 1,300 licensed and 900 unlicensed premises.⁶⁷⁶ A succession of gin Acts of varying efficacy gradually shaped the industry, and by the 1830s, the slum venues had been replaced by slightly more salubrious and often highly decorated gin palaces ‘on every second

⁶⁷⁵ Olivia Williams, *Gin Glorious Gin: How Mother's Ruin Became the Spirit of London* (London: Headline, 2014), p.2.

⁶⁷⁶ Jenny Uglow, *Hogarth: A Life and a World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 494.

street'.⁶⁷⁷ Though modes of production and venues for distribution had become more sophisticated, the impact was the same: excessive levels of drinking amongst the most vulnerable in society.

The Drunkard's Children (1848), was a follow-up to Cruickshank's earlier picture narrative, *The Bottle* (1847). The latter had tracked the decline of a prosperous family through the father's abuse of alcohol, culminating in his son and daughter bearing hapless witness to his final incarceration in a 'madhouse'. Cruickshank now sought to capture the secondary impact of drink upon the children themselves, trapped in their own cycle of disadvantage. The plates tell of how the two protagonists suffer separate degradations following the breakup of their family, with the boy being drawn into crime and dying during transportation, and the girl descending into prostitution. The stage for their demise is again set by alcohol, the first plate in the series being located in a gin shop.

The celebrated artist was no stranger to the dangers of drink. His father had reputedly died following a drinking competition, his brother was a chronic alcoholic, and Cruickshank himself was a celebrated toper in his twenties during which he had developed a love for 'blue ruin'.⁶⁷⁸ The latter was one of several slang names ('blue ribband', 'blue tape') for gin that made reference to the colour, an epithet thought to derive either from the blue skin colouration that resulted from alcohol poisoning or from the colour of gin produced by amateur distillers, the acidity of which sometimes reacted with copper salts in stills.⁶⁷⁹

By the time that the two series of prints appeared, Cruickshank was a reformed character and particularly zealous supporter of the Temperance movement, his enthusiasm for abstinence over moderation drawing him into conflict with Dickens, for whom he had illustrated a number of works including *Oliver Twist* (1838).⁶⁸⁰ *The Drunkard's Children* was originally designed to end at the seventh plate with the death of the son, but Cruickshank chose to add an eighth and final illustration that has been viewed as one of 'his greatest concepts'⁶⁸¹ and 'great images of nineteenth-century art'.⁶⁸² It depicts the final demise of the daughter as she flings herself from Waterloo bridge (Figure 1). The accompanying caption states, 'The maniac father and convict brother are gone-the poor girl, homeless, friendless, deserted, destitute, and gin mad, commits self murder'. The image is a powerful one. The emotion and movement of the central figure contrast dramatically with the cold and static structure of the bridge, reflecting the disparity between chaos and order which is at the centre of this moral tale.

⁶⁷⁷ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (Aylesbury: Heron, 1972), p. 214.

⁶⁷⁸ Robert L. Patton, *George Cruickshank's Life, Times and Art, Volume 1: 1792-1835* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1992), p.210.

⁶⁷⁹ Williams, pp.87-8.

⁶⁸⁰ Robert L. Patton, *George Cruickshank's Life, Times and Art, Volume 2: 1835-1878* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1996), p.50-94.

⁶⁸¹ Hilary Evans and Mary Evans, *The Man who Drew the Drunkard's Daughter: The Life and Art of George Cruickshank 1792-1878* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1978), p.134.

⁶⁸² Patton, (1996), p.259.

The bridge's immovable lines and rectangles help create the illusion of a rapidly accelerating figure, a perception reinforced by the girl's detached bonnet, her unfettered hair and skirts billowing against the rushing air. She shields her eyes from her own fate and her mouth gapes in a silent scream. In the background is a full moon, a popular emblem of madness, but also a traditional female symbol associated with maturity and pregnancy, perhaps signifying that the gin mad girl was with child.⁶⁸³ If so, there is an inherent irony given the supposed role of juniper in precipitating miscarriages and in gin being the drink of choice for self-induced abortions.⁶⁸⁴ A series of ship's masts confirm that her grave will be a watery one and remind the viewer that this scene is taking place in a major centre of commerce and therefore a place of both extreme wealth and extreme poverty. On the bridge itself, two figures reach out in helpless shock, showing a societal concern for the girl's plight not evident in life.

In this period around five hundred river suicides took place each year in London, some thirty on average from Waterloo bridge alone.⁶⁸⁵ The bridge is significant in that it is the nearest river crossing to the district of St Giles, an area forever associated with the first gin craze further to the publication of Hogarth's *Gin Lane* in 1751. At the time, a quarter of the houses in the parish sold gin 'besides about 82 twopenny houses of the greatest infamy where gin was the liquor drunk'.⁶⁸⁶ That this was an enduring picture was confirmed by Dickens some eight decades later in *Sketches by Boz* (1839), also illustrated by Cruickshank, in which he described how a new plague of gin palaces now flourished in the 'filthy and miserable' area.⁶⁸⁷

That the figure leaping off the bridge is female is not without meaning. While alcohol abuse was not restricted by gender or age, the drinking of gin by women had become portrayed as a particular problem. At the height of the eighteenth-century gin craze, the spirit has acquired a female identity by virtue of its nicknames, 'Madam Geneva' or 'Mother Gin'.⁶⁸⁸ Women frequented gin shops and prostitutes often plied their trade from the same venues, the 'twopenny houses' referred to above being 'common lodgings which were also brothels and safe houses for thieves and stolen goods'.⁶⁸⁹ An inevitable association between femininity, promiscuity, crime and gin therefore became established in the Georgian and Victorian mind. Concerns were also expressed that hard-drinking women were giving birth to enfeebled children by the Royal College of Physicians early in the eighteenth century, long before foetal alcohol syndrome was formally recognised.⁶⁹⁰ A number of sensational cases, such as

⁶⁸³ Miranda Bruce-Mitford, *Signs and Symbols. An illustrated guide to their origins and meanings* (London: DK, 2008), pp.18-19.

⁶⁸⁴ Williams, pp.107-8.

⁶⁸⁵ Patten, (1996), p.259.

⁶⁸⁶ Uglow, p.494.

⁶⁸⁷ Dickens, p.214.

⁶⁸⁸ Lesley Jacobs Solmonson, *Gin: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p.47.

⁶⁸⁹ Uglow, op.cit.

⁶⁹⁰ Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), p.69.



PLATE VIII. — THE MANIAC FATHER AND THE CONVICT BROTHER ARE GONE. — THE POOR GIRL, HOMELESS, FRIENDLESS, DESERTED, DESTITUTE, AND GIN MAD, COMMITS SELF MURDER.

Figure 1. William Cruickshank, *The Drunkard's Children*, (1848), plate eight. Glychograph (?) on paper, 215 x 330mm. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial –ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA4.0) licence.

those of Judith Dufour (who murdered her own child in order to sell its clothes for gin in 1734) and Mary Eastwick (who allowed a child in her care to burned to death while she was intoxicated in 1736) had already established the extreme impact that gin could have on women in the public conscience. Gin-raddled hags, such as Diana Trapes in *The Beggars Opera* (1728) and Sarah Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), became almost stock characters in literature. Perhaps most famous of all inebriated females is the woman at the centre of *Gin Lane*, Hogarth's image of 'the city as ravaged desert'.⁶⁹¹ Her bleary drunken eyes focus on her snuff box and her legs are covered in possibly syphilitic sores.⁶⁹² Her grotesque figure is bare breasted, suggesting that she has just suckled the child who is now toppling over the rail to its presumed death. Cruickshank's falling girl is therefore a direct descendant of Hogarth's falling child (Figure 2), both let down by parents whose ability to function responsibly was significantly impaired by gin.

⁶⁹¹ Uglow, p.495.

⁶⁹² Williams, p.7.

The gin mad girl's raised arm exposes her threadbare clothing and points to the fact that drunkenness in general and the consumption of gin in particular was portrayed as a problem of the lower classes. Fielding was one of the first to express concern on this issue:

A new kind of drunkenness, unknown to our ancestors, is lately sprung up among us, and which if not put a stop to, will infallibly destroy a great part of the inferior people. The drunkenness I intend here is [...] by this Poison called Gin.⁶⁹³

Dickens took a similar view a century later when he proposed that drunkenness 'is the vice of the poor and wretched, and the guilty [...] (but) it is not the vice of the upper classes, or of the middle classes'.⁶⁹⁴ As Williams observes, this fallacy is an example of political control and selective reporting as, despite wide-spread outrage about the impact of gin upon the poor 'the upper classes could continue to get merrily drunk on sherry, brandy and claret without interference as heavy drinking in elite circles never made it onto the political agenda'.⁶⁹⁵

That gin was particularly accessible to the poor is however beyond doubt. Britain's early attempts to replicate Dutch genever, a malt-based drink more like fine whisky, produced a potent and foul tittle. Low-quality grain or old potatoes were used to produce a neutral spirit which was then cut



Figure 2. William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*, (1751), (detail). Etching and engraving on paper. Full image 387 x 321mm. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial –ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA4.0) licence.

⁶⁹³ Henry Fielding, *An Enquiry Into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers, &c.* (London: A. Millar, 1751), pp.27-28. <<https://archive.org/details/anenquiryintoca00fielgoog>> [accessed 29 Dec 2017].

⁶⁹⁴ Charles Dickens, 'Demoralisation and Total Abstinence', in *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays*, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.107-116, (p.110).

⁶⁹⁵ Williams, p.26.

with sulphuric acid, alum, oil of turpentine or worse; sweeteners such as rosewater and sugar were then added to disguise the typically unpleasant flavour. The resulting product was estimated to be 160 proof and cheap to produce and purchase. To those in poverty it was a panacea that temporarily brought distraction from hardship, created a sense of warmth and silenced crying babies.⁶⁹⁶

By Cruickshank's day, more sophisticated distilling techniques led first to the production of Old Tom, a cordial-style drink which was sold in barrels to retailers who would then choose to sweeten it or not, and then London Dry ('dry' denoting that the gin was unsweetened). The invention of the continuous still in 1827 allowed for greater quantities to be produced but, more importantly, it also delivered a clean spirit that was free of impurities, had a higher concentration of alcohol in the final distillation, and obviated the need to cut the final product to mask the taste.

As gin itself became more sophisticated, it became increasingly acceptable to and popular with the upper classes, a trend marked by the advent of the elite distillers (such as Gordon's, Booth's and Tanqueray's). It was soon to become a staple in the gentlemen's clubs of London through popular cocktails such as Gin Punch, Twist and Sangaree, recipes for which were provided in *The Gentleman's Table Guide* of 1871.⁶⁹⁷ While many clubs such as Boodle's and Brooke's served a purely social function, others were formed around increasingly popular and organised sporting pastimes, such as cricket. The Marylebone Cricket Club (M.C.C.), founded in 1787, was pre-eminent amongst the latter. Though within a short walk of St Giles and with its own problems of poverty and prostitution, Marylebone was already established as a favoured locale for London's gentry.⁶⁹⁸ As such, it was an obvious site for a sporting club catering for their needs.

Amongst the new breed of respectable nineteenth century distillers were John and William Nicholson of the Nicholson company, founded in 1803. The family had been involved in gin production since the 1730s; the earliest bottle label from the company's collection is shown in Figure 3. In 1854, William Nicholson junior, the son of John, became its chair. Nicholson was a celebrated cricketer who, despite his prowess on the pitch, was arguably more renowned for a series of loans made to the M.C.C. enabling it to purchase the freehold of its Lord's ground in 1866, thus saving it from developers, and to make further ground improvements thereafter.⁶⁹⁹

Just as bottle labels act as identifiers, clothing can denote symbolic affiliation to a particular group. Such affiliations can be positive or negative. For example, a requirement that those seeking parish welfare should wear a prominent badge to identify their status and parish of origin on their right

⁶⁹⁶ Uglow, p.493.

⁶⁹⁷ Solmonson, pp.78-9.

⁶⁹⁸ The Howard deWalden Estate, 'The history of Marylebone: from rural manor to urban village, via pleasure gardens and Georgian developers', <<http://www.hdwe.co.uk/about-marylebone-history.aspx>> [accessed 31 Dec 2017].

⁶⁹⁹ Lord Harris & F.S. Ashley Cooper, *Lord's and the M.C.C.* (London: Hebert Jenkins, 1920), pp.145-6.



Figure 3. An early Nicholson's gin label c.1900. Print on paper. Dimensions unknown. By permission of Nicholson and Company.

shoulder was enshrined in the *Poor Act* of 1697 and only repealed in 1810.⁷⁰⁰ The young gin drinkers in receipt of charity in *Gin Lane* wear such badges. The initials are hard to identify with certainty and appear inverted, but Williams asserts that they are the 'SG' of St Giles (Figure 4).⁷⁰¹ Though the requirement to wear a poor badge would have lapsed by her time, the gin crazed girl's ragged clothing similarly acts as an informal badge of destitution.

Signifiers of belonging are of course not restricted to the needy nor to markings of poverty. M.C.C.'s early years corresponded with the evolution of sporting colours in the shape of blazers, caps and ties that enabled the wearer to demonstrate more affirmative associations. The blazer has its origins in the rowing kit of the great British schools and universities, rowing colours having first developed at Oxford around 1805.⁷⁰² The introduction of club colours therefore had clear class associations:

Men's clothes, at least until very modern times, have been incurably class conscious. All "gentlemanly" clothes are intended to show that the wearer belongs to an exclusive social caste. And what happier method of reinforcing this impression could there be than by wearing a tie which indicated membership of an exclusive club?⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ Keith Wrightson, *A Social History of England 1500-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.323.

⁷⁰¹ Williams, p.76.

⁷⁰² Jack Carlson, *Rowing Blazers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), p.9.

⁷⁰³ James Laver, *The Book of School, University, Navy, Army, Air Force and Club Ties* (London: Seeley Service, 1968), p.31.



Figure 4. William Hogarth, *Gin Lane* (1751), (detail). Etching and engraving on paper. Full image 387 x 321mm. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial –ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA4.0) licence.

Whereas the badge worn by the St Giles children and the ragged clothes of the gin crazed girl signified membership of an underclass, early sporting colours often demonstrated membership of an exclusive upper class. Few clubs were more elite than the M.C.C. and, even today, its waiting list stretches to twenty-seven years. Dramatist and amateur cricketer, Frederick Reynolds, joined soon after its formation in the late eighteenth century, his diary reporting that ‘Being unanimously elected, I immediately assumed the sky-blue colour of the club’ (‘sky blue’ coincidentally being another common-use name for gin).⁷⁰⁴ Though the exact date is not known, sometime in the 1860s, these colours were changed to yellow and red, the colours of the Nicholson’s gin company, reputedly in recognition of William Nicholson’s financial benevolence.⁷⁰⁵ The change was therefore contemporary with the publication of *The Drunkard’s Children*, occurring a dozen or so years after the latter.

While the decision to adopt the Nicholson colours lacks documentary evidence, it has been upheld by succeeding generations of the family and passed into the (possibly invented) traditions of the club.⁷⁰⁶ One of the earliest flags in the club’s collection, dating from around 1860, features these colours.⁷⁰⁷ The advent of the modern form of neck tie dates back to the 1860s and the earliest available

⁷⁰⁴ Harris and Ashley Cooper, p.23.

⁷⁰⁵ Neil Robinson, ‘Egg and Bacon with Crimson’, *MCC: Magazine of the Marylebone Cricket Club*, 6 (2012), pp. 8-11, (p.8).

⁷⁰⁶ Robert Cuphrey, Archive Catalogeur, MCC, private email to the author, 3 October 2017.

⁷⁰⁷ Stephen Green, *Lord’s: The Cathedral of Cricket* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), p.59.



Figure 5. An early M.C.C. tie c. 1900. Silk, 1130 x 57 mm (at widest point), manufacturer unknown. By permission of the Marylebone Cricket Club.

example of the use of red and yellow in an M.C.C. tie comes from around 1900 (Figure 5).⁷⁰⁸ In pristine condition, the pure silk of the ‘egg and bacon’ tie would have contrasted sharply with the rags of the gin crazed girl. Whereas the tie would have been flaunted by its wearers and seen as a sign of affluence and success, the formal and informal badges of the poor were humiliating signifiers of privation and failure. The residents of St Giles would certainly not have been amongst the club’s members, which in the nineteenth century was dominated by the aristocracy. Neither would women, the first female member having only been admitted to Lord’s in 1998.

Both gin and the M.C.C. have been regarded as quintessential indicators of Englishness, so much so that they have almost become caricature symbols of nationhood. The same might be said of drunkenness, something which every British government from the sixteenth century to the present day has attempted to curb.⁷⁰⁹ Perhaps the ultimate irony in gin’s dual association with the binge drinking of the poor and the leisure pursuits of the rich is summed up by the fact that the third Lord’s pavilion,

⁷⁰⁸ Laver, p.30, and Neil Robinson, Library and Research Manager, MCC, private email to the author, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁰⁹ Williams, p.25.



Figure 6. The 'Gin Palace' at Lord's. Designed by Thomas Verity, built 1889-1890. Photograph, 3800x 4750 mm. By permission of the Marylebone Cricket Club.

built in 1889 and also funded by loans from Nicholson, was colloquially known as 'The Gin Palace' (figure 6).⁷¹⁰ In a final link to the gin mad girl, the Victorian era saw a series of suicides amongst famous and not-so-famous cricketers, several of whom played at Lord's and a number of which involved alcohol as cause or effect.⁷¹¹

In summary, *The Drunkard's Children* can be seen as a 'Hogarthian progress-as decline' vignette that demonstrates how the Victorian era, despite dramatic changes in politics, technology and prosperity, created social distress 'on a scale never before experienced' and which 'extracted a high price in human terms'.⁷¹² Whereas Cruikshank's art portrayed the latter, the M.C.C. tie represents the former: the artefacts comment on each other by their mutual link to the changing status of gin in British culture. By the late nineteenth century, blue ruin had assumed such a position of respectability that its profits could be used to help fund an elitist organisation like the M.C.C. without an apparent hint of societal concern. That a drink historically associated primarily with women should help underpin an exclusively male establishment is a further irony. The tie can therefore be read as an emblem of gin's transformation as well as of male exclusivity.

⁷¹⁰ Green, p. 88.

⁷¹¹ David Frith, *Silence of the Heart: Cricket Suicides* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2001), pp.53-69.

⁷¹² Patten, p.238, and Barbara Dennis, *The Victorian Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.7.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Dickens, Charles, *Sketches by Boz* (Aylesbury: Heron, 1972).

——— *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Aylesbury: Heron, 1972).

——— “Demoralisation and Total Abstinence”, in *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays*, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Gay, John, *The Beggar’s Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

SECONDARY SOURCES

Bruce-Mitford, Miranda, *Signs and Symbols. An illustrated guide to their origins and meanings* (London: DK, 2008).

Carlson, Jack, *Rowing Blazers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014).

Clark, Peter, ‘The “Mother Gin” Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 38 (1988), 63-84.

Cuphrey, Robert, Archive Catalogeur, MCC, private email to the author, 3 October, 2017.

Dillon, Patrick, *The Much Lamented Death of Madam Geneva: The Eighteenth Century Gin Craze* (London: Thistle, 2013).

Dennis, Barbara, *The Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Evans, Hilary, and Mary Evans, *The Man who Drew the Drunkard’s Daughter: The Life and Art of George Cruikshank 1792-1878* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1978).

Fielding, Henry, *An Enquiry Into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers, &c.* (London: A. Millar, 1751), <<https://archive.org/details/anenquiryintoca00fielgoog>> [accessed 29 Dec 2017].

Frith, David, *Silence of the Heart: Cricket Suicides* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2001).

Green, Stephen, *Lord’s: The Cathedral of Cricket* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003).

Hampshire History, *William Nicholson, Gin and cricket in Privet*, <<http://www.hampshire-history.com/william-nicholson-gin-and-lords-cricket/>> [accessed 05 Nov 2017].

Howard deWalden Estate, *The history of Marylebone: from rural manor to urban village, via pleasure gardens and Georgian developers*, <<http://www.hdwe.co.uk/about-marylebone-history.aspx>> [accessed 31 Dec 2017].

Harris, Lord, & F.S. Ashley Cooper, *Lord’s and the M.C.C.* (London: Hebert Jenkins, 1920).

- Laver, James, *The Book of School, University, Navy, Army, Air Force and Club Ties* (London: Seeley Service, 1968).
- Patton, Robert L., *George Cruickshank's Life, Times and Art, Volume 1: 1792-1835* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1992).
- *George Cruickshank's Life, Times and Art, Volume 2: 1835-1878* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1996).
- Robinson, 'Neil, Egg and Bacon with Crimson', *MCC: Magazine of the Marylebone Cricket Club*, 6, (2012).
- Library and Research Manager, MCC, private email to the author, 18 July, 2017.
- Solmonson, Lesley Jacobs, *Gin: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).
- Uglow, Jenny, *Hogarth: A Life and a World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
- Warner, Jessica, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002).
- Williams, Olivia *Gin Glorious Gin: How Mother's Ruin Became the Spirit of London* (London: Headline, 2014).
- Wrightson, Keith, *A Social History of England 1500-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).