Chapter 4 Beer and Belonging: Real Ale consumption, place and identity

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Introduction

The role played by alcohol and its consumption in the creation of personal, group and national identity has received considerable academic attention. A central feature of this has been the recognition that, in addition to the many potential negative personal and social outcomes of heavy drinking, the consumption of alcoholic drinks invariably involves significant articulations of personal identity, collective belonging and, as Mary Douglas and her co-authors (1987) have established, the construction and perpetuation of culture itself. We must acknowledge, therefore, that alcoholic drinks exhibit remarkable symbolic power. Indeed, some even take on totemic positions in relation to national culture, history and identity; Roland Barthes (1972, 67) famously asserted that the performance of drinking wine 'is a national technique which serves to qualify the Frenchman, to demonstrate at once the performance, his control and his sociability' (Barthes 1972, 67). More recently, Marion Demossier (2010, 29) has used her extensive study of wine production and consumption in France to explore how 'through wine consumption, individuals compete and construct their identity and relate to concepts of what it means to be French, exploring the relationship between regions and the nation'.

In the British context it is beer, perhaps more than any other alcoholic drink, which has so readily been held as in some way symbolic of national identity. In classic studies such as *The Pub and its People* (Mass Observation 1943), the omnipotence of beer drinking in working class culture, and British urban life, was identified. More recently, however, a decline of 'traditional' pubs and a diversification of drinking practices (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Hollands, this volume) have meant that beer has played a troubled and ambiguous role in the 'binge drinking' discourses played out in policy and academic debates and across the media during the 1990s and 2000s (see Plant and

Plant 2006). Drinkers are seen to be foregoing the tradition of beer in favour of heavily branded spirits, myriad flavoured 'shooters' and alcopops designed to encourage rapid inhibition (Measham and Brain 2005; Smith 2014). Further still, the potential that British drinkers might abandon beer in favour of a more 'continental' and congenial wine based 'café' culture of Mediterranean drinking has been used to speak of a preferred transition and has informed policy accordingly (Jayne, Valentine and Holloway 2008; Haydock 2014).

However, during this time we have also seen, in the UK and elsewhere, a growth in breweries and beers that distinguish themselves from mass-produced and nationally or globally marketed brands through their link to locality, place and the identity of specific towns, cities or regions. Drinking beer from small and local breweries is perceived, by some consumers, to be 'authentic' and a means by which identity can be communicated and performed through consumption (Spracklen, Laurencic and Kenyon 2013). Meanwhile, work in the USA has shown that many of the smaller scale breweries to emerge in recent decades actively offer their patrons a chance to engage with place and locality through the consumption of geographically specific beers (Flack 1997; Schnell and Reese 2003; Daniels, Sterling and Ross 2009). While I have explored elsewhere the notions of craft and identity exhibited by those brewers involved in the production of such beers elsewhere (Thurnell-Read 2014), this chapter will make an analysis of symbolic trends in Real Ale imagery and suggest that such should be considered to be part of the now sizable heritage industry which has emerged by the creation of events and cultural products that use 'history and heritage to inform a personal and collective sense of place and local identity' (Cohen 2013, 581). Thus, the symbolic imagery of beer consumption now offers drinkers a vast array of often potent symbolic markers of identity and belonging.

As such, this chapter suggests that the consumption of beer involves the invocation of place and identity. The identity, place and heritage present in Real Ale naming, imagery and symbolism is, of course, selective in its construction and possibly rather narrow in its appeal. It is important to note how lines of inclusion and exclusion are first constructed and then animated through embodied

consumption. Further still, the chapter identifies how this symbolism is strikingly gendered and, as such, appears to offer a specifically masculine conception of heritage and identity. The final section of the chapter will therefore explore the evident exclusionary tendency within the symbolic imagery of Real Ale which can signify that while a particular image of 'traditional' masculinity is valorised, the feminine is either rejected or contained.

Consuming Places and Drinking Identity

Noting the influence of Mary Douglas's (1987) work on 'constructive drinking' and that of Thomas Wilson (2005) on drinking cultures, whereby alcohol is central constituent of culture and identity, this chapter seeks to locate an analysis of Real Ale drinking amongst a range of themes relating to how identity is constructed, performed and negotiated through consumption. The suggestion at the outset is therefore that beer is a particularly symbol-laden drink and its consumption can tell us important things about personal, local and national identity. Just as wine and French national identity (Barthes 1972; Demossier 2010), whisky and Scottish identity (Spracklen 2011), beer and Czech identity (Hall 2005) and vodka and Russian identity (Roberts 2014) are semantically intertwined, so too might the pint of beer be seen as a sign or icon of British identity (Rojek 2007, 197). Tellingly, a recent report by *VisitBritain* (2010, 12), the public body responsible for promoting Britain as a tourist destination, has reflected that 'in terms of "living culture", British pubs are a real strength – they are part of the image of Britain and a good experience to have during a visit'.

However, the role of alcohol as a symbolic marker of identity has been underexplored in the social sciences. Indeed, alcohol has largely been omitted from interesting recent work on the potential for food to inhabit the collective imagination and speak to ideas of national belonging, as well as to define 'other' nations through their 'foreign' tastes (Ashley *et al.* 2004). Just as Bell and Valentine (1997) have suggested in relation to food, drink can also be thought of as being 'scaled' across space and place; from the individual tastes, pleasure and guilt of the body and self; through the familiar routines of home and community; and on through region and nation to the global. In several studies,

for example, we see how particular beer brands have become woven into expressions of national identity and belonging in Ireland (Murphy 2003), South Africa (Mager 2005), the Czech Republic (Hall 2005) and Scotland (Gutzke 2012). Notably, as we will return to later in the chapter, in all these studies the consumption of alcohol defines national identity but also overlaps with gender identity where beer and beer drinking are used to shape and define what it means to be an Irish, South African, Czech or Scottish man.

To further theorise this we can turn to various constructivist accounts which show how national identity emerges from and is sustained by acts of communicative action and symbolic meaning making which bind often disparate individuals around 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) of common identity and a sense of belonging. Thus, in his work on *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm (1983, 1) explored how national identity is asserted through customs and traditions which 'attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past'. While nationalism has all too often given rise to extremism and conflict (for example, see Ignatieff 2010), it can also be observed how the performance of belonging is also enacted in everyday, quotidian ways, with acts of consumption being a prime example. The symbolism of national identity and belonging works its way into daily life in numerous mundane and often unremarkable ways in what Michael Billig (1995) has termed 'banal nationalism'. As such, national identity is reproduced and 'flagged' in the daily lives of individuals and in a 'booming' heritage industry which draws on nostalgia and 'patriotic themes' (Billig 1995, 113) in their products and national and sub-national identities can be readily attached to relatively mundane consumption practices (Foster 1999).

Consumption is therefore, as Bourdieu observed (1984, 100), 'a labour of identification and decoding'. Even banal everyday consumer items can and do support a complex and often deeply felt sense of belonging (see Smith, this volume). Particular products are instilled with meaning and, as enacted in their consumption, individuals actively pursue and create a meaningful connection. As John Urry (1995, 28) has observed, 'the consumption of place and the consumption of goods and services are interdependent' meaning 'images of place are routinely used in the symbolic location of

products and services'. This commoditisation of local culture entails 'the creation and valorization of resources that have a place identity and can be marketed directly or used in the marketing of the territory' (Ray 1998, 6). Informed by this work, the chapter seeks to indicate how, rather than being a banal practice, the consumption of Real Ale involves the negotiation of identity and belonging.

Research Methods

This chapter draws on a qualitative study of the British consumer pressure group the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and, more generally, the changing practices and meanings of beer consumption in Britain. Founded in 1971 with the aim of protecting Real Ale, defined as a traditional British style of beer involving secondary fermentation or 'cask conditioning', CAMRA now boasts over 170,000 members spread across in excess of 200 local branches. During this time, and in the past decade in particular, a revival in the fortunes of Britain's small and independent breweries has seen a huge rise in their number, with CAMRA reporting in its annual *Good Beer Guide* that 1,285 breweries were operating in Britain in Autumn 2014.

Research was conducted between August 2012 and May 2014 and comprised 53 semi-structured qualitative interviews with a range of relevant participants involved in CAMRA, including two of the four founders, several senior salaried staff and numerous local branch members. The majority of these interviews took place in and around the English midlands, in or near London and, for a small number, in the rural county of Cornwall. Other key informants include beer writers, brewery staff and members of a university ale appreciation society. Participant-observation was carried out at CAMRA AGMs and branch meetings as well as a range of beer festivals, pub crawls and brewery tours. Additionally, archival and documentary analysis of CAMRA campaign materials (such as the monthly newsletter *What's Brewing?* and the annual *Good Beer Guide*) was conducted as was collection and qualitative analysis of brewery marketing materials including beer branding, logos and imagery.

Place, Identity and Real Ale

The notion of locality as being an implicit feature of Real Ale consumption has been evident since the founding of CAMRA which, as an organisation, sought to challenge the increasing homogenisation of beer production and associated loss of local variety. Thus, an editorial in the 1974 edition of CAMRA's flagship publication, the *Good Beer Guide*, expressed indignation that 'large brewing factories near the motorways are supplying beer for whole regions of the country, where once there were dozens of little breweries each producing ales of different strengths and flavours'. A former CAMRA chairman made a clear connection between place and consumption when observing in an organisation publication marking the 21st anniversary of the campaign that:

> 'A pint of Jennings tastes best in a whitewashed hillside Cumbrian pub with panoramic views; Donnington Bitter is most welcome in a cool Cotswolds taproom with a stone flagged floor' (Hunt 1992,81).

Such sentiments express the important links made between Real Ale and locality. Consumption in general and, in particular, of products so closely associated with specific places as Real Ale often is, must be acknowledge as a means by which individuals and groups can perform and feel identity. Indeed, such can be seen to amount to 'the valorisation of place through an objectification of its cultural identity' (Coombe and Aylwin 2011, 2028) and, further, an example of what Pike (2011) has referred to as 'geographical entanglement'.

These concerns remain at the core of CAMRA's work as a campaign group. Thus, David, a senior CAMRA staff member observed during an interview that:

> 'It's increasingly important to people that they know what they're buying and where it comes from, these are signs of people just feeling a little bit lost in the global world where they don't feel they can bring influence on any of the big things that are happening around us, but they can when it comes to buying basic produce.'

Consuming locality is therefore cast as a comfort in a changing world, and one which provides the consumer with 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991). During interviews it became apparent that a clear appeal of involvement with CAMRA and commitment to drinking ales was rooted in a sense of loyalty to or of belonging to a specific locality. As such, Martin, a local CAMRA branch member, suggested that:

> 'Being from the area, you want to try any beer from the local breweries. The older ones you're familiar with and you have a degree of loyalty and the newer ones are something to try to show your support but, yeah, I'd say I do knowingly, I mean I'm drawn to the local beers.'

Here, Martin's loyalty to the local area is seen as a positive and is deployed in his positioning of himself as a knowing, agentic consumer. Similarly, during a student ale society visit to a CAMRA beer festival in Manchester, where ales by breweries from across the country were available, one member on arriving at the festival venue announced that it was time to 'do my duty' and seek out and consume ales from his home country, Yorkshire. Similar to Murphy's (2003, 53) observation that the Irish participants in her study where *more* likely to drink *Guinness* while travelling or living aboard 'in order to feel closer to home or in order to say "I'm Irish" and use the product as a badge of identity', for this student, studying away from his home appeared to add significance and meaning to his consumption of his 'local' beers. Tellingly, a common means of social interaction amongst CAMRA members and Real Ale consumers is to 'place' each other in relation to beers and breweries. Thus, being from Cornwall, my own interaction with participants became 'placed' as they positioned me in relation to 'good' and 'bad' breweries relating to that region.

Gordon, another interviewee with an extensive career in the industry having previously worked in brewing, as a publican and in an executive role for an organisation promoting independent breweries, reflected on the trend for local produce and was one of many interviewees to draw link between consumer enthusiasm for local beer and that for local food. As such, he observed that:

'If you go to somewhere and you know there's a local brewery and you want to try it, if you go to Cornwall you want a proper Cornish pasty, if you go to Bury in Lancashire you want some black pudding and I'm interested enough in local food to want to do that and you want locally sourced meat and that is a definite customer trend.'

Again, we see consumption of ale as one means of consumers relating to their locality and placing themselves within space and place meaning 'a sense of local patriotism expressible through a preference for buying locally-produced goods and services' (Ray 1998, 17).

Another example relates to two members of the student ale society who were interviewed for the research and, as international students studying at a British university, both made clear reference to Real Ale being a means to 'get to know' the culture of their host country. Peter, who had held several key positions within the society committee, observed that:

'[International students] come along, one or two at first and they say of let's come along for the English beer, for the culture, and for them it's not too easy to meet people if you come in just for one year so for them it's a way to meet people and learn about English culture.'

Similarly, Brenden, an American student on an exchange year at the British university spoke of joining the society as a means of meeting British students and learning about British culture:

'I liked it because I liked the ale, I enjoyed drinking the ales that is, but I enjoyed the British culture in general. My course has about 120 students and there are maybe 4 people actually from Britain in the course and none of them are on my actual module so I don't have any actual British friends from my course so it was nice being able to become friends with a bunch of Brits.'

Elsewhere in the interview, Brenden spoke with pride of knowing the pubs of the local area, breweries from the region and, more generally, a familiarity with British drinking culture that marked him out from other international students more willing to remain within the 'bubble' of the international student community on campus rather than seek out involvement with local social life and culture.

Heroes, Heritage and Drinking Nostalgia

The previous section has identified how place and identity making are 'at work' in the consumption practices of Real Ale drinkers and that this is readily framed by participants in relation to a sense of personal belonging to specific places. However, adding to this sense of spatiality with its linking of personal identity and that of local and regional place, this section will now explore what might be described as a temporal theme within much Real Ale consumption. Specifically, the use of historical themes and 'tradition' is striking when reviewing the growth of Real Ale as a consumer practice. This orientation to the past is a central is contested facet of the Real Ale phenomenon.

Many of the widest selling real ales, if not those most highly regarded by connoisseurs, draw on precisely such symbolism. Indeed, frequently, temporal and spatial specificity overlap. One prominent example is *Spitfire Kentish Ale* which was first brewed in 1990 and took its name from the iconic fighter plane flown during World War II in the Battle of Britain. That the original ale marked the 50 year commemoration of the Battle of Britain and that the Spitfire flew from and fought over the English county of Kent and the adjacent English Channel and North Sea thus exemplify how both the naming and imagery of Real Ale branding invoke specific conceptions of time and place. In a more general sense, military imagery is common, with notable examples being Woodforde's *Nelson's Revenge*, *Broadside* by Adnams, *Bengal Lancer* and *Seafarer* by London based Fuller's Brewery and *Bomdardier* by Wells and Young's. In a good example of Billig's (1995) banal nationalism, the latter even incorporates the red cross on white of the English St. George's flag.

Images of famous historical figures and famous events and industries are prominent. In particular, figures with links to locality are a common feature of ale branding and are frequently name checked both directly and indirectly. For example, *Wainwright* by the Lancastrian brewery Thwaits derives its name 'in honour of the famous fell walker, author and fellow Lancastrian Alfred Wainwright' (http://www.wainwrightgoldenale.co.uk), while *Darwin's Origin* by Shropshire based brewery Salopian was first brewed in 2009 to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth in the Shropshire town of Shrewsbury. Other ales make references to professions associated with the brewery locality. *Haymaker* by Hook Norton and *Boltmaker* by Timothy Taylor are examples of agricultural and industrial vocations being invoked by breweries based in rural Oxfordshire and urban Yorkshire respectively. This appears to parallel Schnell and Reese's (2003: 59) observation of the preference for 'Blue-Collar' historical profession such as 'blacksmiths, or miners, or steamboat captains' amongst small American breweries.

The predominance of names and imagery which situate the beer in time and place is of interest to understanding how Real Ale appreciation is a leisure and consumer practice which serves to both construct and perform specific interpretations of identity. Richard, one of the brewers interviewed for the research, spoke of the importance of needing a 'theme' and chose to link his brewery and beers to local history by using names and images related to the route of the Roman road passing close to the brewery:

> 'We've got a very loose roman connection. All our beer names have got Latin in there somewhere…So yeah that's the brewery logo as such and then we've taken, we've got Gladiator, we've got Centurion.'

While these brands, their names and their imagery, draw on quite disparate themes depending on the specificity of each breweries locality, they all have in common a particular orientation to the past that can be seen to link to a heritage and nostalgia. Worth noting, however, is that very few of these brands are in fact 'traditional' in that they are in the majority products devised and launched only in the last

three decades. Indeed, there is considerable millage in suggesting this to be a largely contemporary development contemporary to rather than predating the great expansion of mass-produced commercial drinks and drinking spaces (see also Hollands; Ross-Houle, Atkinson and sumnall; and Smith, all this volume). For example, it is striking how Frank Baillie's (1973) compilation of Britain's breweries in his at the time influential book *The Beer Drinker's Companion* was characterised by a far more prosaic style of naming which saw the majority of breweries producing beers named descriptively according to style and appearance. The now defunct Hoskins brewery of Leicester, for example, is typical of the period in producing beers simply named *Bitter*, *Mild*, *Best Mild* and *Nut Brown* (Baillie 1973, 174). Thus, such Real Ale brands are notably contemporary yet attempt to draw on a sense of continuity with the past through the incorporation of the pre-existing symbolism of local history. As Hobsbawn (1985: 6) suggested 'sometimes new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation'.

Returning to Urry (1995, 156), who identifies the preservation movements of post-industrial Britain as reacting to a 'profound sense of loss' through the ritualistic and highly symbolic construction of nostalgic images, we can see how certain consumer spaces come to 'stand for' particular places and communities by linking consumption to time and place. Drinking certain ales offers a way of connecting to locality through geographically and temporally specific symbolism. Further still, there is a sense of 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991) being offered by the familiar array of symbolism that links the consumer, via the product, to an identifiable and desired past. As Vesey and Dimanche's study of heritage tourism in New Orleans (2003, 56) indicated, 'the idealised image is remembered by the public as a frame of reference to the past', meaning complexities and anachronisms are easily ignored as long as the central motif functions in a meaningful way for those who engage with it. Unpacking these observations further, it is important to explore what Laurajane Smith (2006) has described as 'the uses of heritage' where heritage is not a fixed thing that is preserved and protected but a social and cultural process that involves identity, memory and remembering, performance and place. Thus, she states that 'heritage is used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of

identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present' (Smith 2006, 3). Both the construction and use of heritage, therefore, involve the selection and valorisation of some themes and symbols over others.

Many within the Real Ale 'scene' were aware of and demonstrated reflexivity in regards to the accusations that Real Ale thrived on 'safe' nostalgic and at times chauvinistic imagery. Roger Protz, perhaps the most prominent and certainly longest serving beer writer with links to CAMRA, wrote in an editorial to the 2002 edition of the *Good Beer Guide* that:

> 'Companies need to be bold. Nostalgia and tradition have their place but building brands for the future demands a more radical approach, which translates such values into a classic, continuing appeal. Most independent brewers have tended to reach for the comfort blanket of their heritage rather than looking to the future.'

Some brewers interviewed had doubts as to the over use of heritage themes by breweries founded only very recently. A local brewer, Steve, reflected that 'there is something disingenuous about that, trying to, you know, pretend you've got this glorious heritage'. However, also worth noting is that Steve's own beers alluded in their naming and imagery to the local area and its previous prominence in the automotive manufacturing industry. More critical, Robert, the proprietor of a specialist beer shop, also suggested a need to move away from the overuse of heritage themes by saying:

> 'There are some good beers out there but to be honest it's a matter of style *and* substance. It could be an amazing ale but if the bottle has a picture of a steam engine or a bloody wizard on it [laughs] I'm going to think twice about having it on our shelves.'

In his sardonic reference to industrial imagery such as steam engines, and mythical or fantastical themes such as wizards, Robert appears to reject a nostalgic iconography which he positions as twee and somewhat dated. Likewise, although expressed with somewhat more ambivalence, a local

CAMRA branch member Michael admitted that 'it's all very blokey and a bit geeky…but that's what we're here for isn't it'.

Notably, as will become central to the proceeding analysis which identified the implicit masculine basis of much Real Age imagery, beer is readily associated with the assertion of nostalgic forms of masculinity. The predominance of local history and industrial themes in ale marketing are therefore reminiscent of the 'male, conservative, hegemonic interpretation of heritage' identified by Edensor and Kothari (1994, 185) and the post-industrial 'golden age' nostalgia discussed by Strangleman (2002). The convergence of beer drinking, masculinity and nationalism is well noted (Mager 2005, 2010; Gutzke 2012). Hugh Campbell (2000) identifies how the practice of drinking beer and the setting, in the case of his study the rural pubs of New Zealand, are gender specific and much work is done to keep it so. As the discussion above indicates, much of the symbolic landscape of Real Ale is implicitly masculine and, it should be argued, this feeds into actual physical spaces and practices. The wide spread use of the phrase 'old man pubs' to informally describe local pubs that typically might serve Real Ale to an exclusively male clientele makes foregrounds this gendering of drinking spaces as masculine, perhaps in notable contrast with the emerging mixed-gender drinking spaces of style cafes and bars (see Latham 2003).

More broadly, we might locate this within the wider perception of a loss of a reliable and reassuring traditional industrial male identity where the 'nostalgia for a bygone age' in the face of diverse socioeconomic upheavals means industrial heritage has a particular surety which appeals to discursive constructions of masculinity (Beynon 2002, 127). Real Ale might therefore be seen as part of a wider ready market for the symbolic imagery of traditional masculinity. It is the passing away of a clearly identifiable industrial masculine identity that makes the symbolic allusions to it such a pertinent and, for many, welcome anchors for identity. As noted above, Real Ale consumption appears to offer consumers, at least many of those interviewed for this research, a sense of certainty embedded in locality and tradition (see also Spracklen *et al*. 2013). As Hobsbawm (1983, 4) notes, 'we should expect [the invention of tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society

weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable'.

We might therefore frame these debates within a compensatory thesis where 'men who have suffered pangs of emasculation in this new environment have sought to symbolically reaffirm their status as real men through compensatory consumption' (Holt and Thompson 2004, 425). For instance, Gee and Jackson's analysis of the 'Southern Man' advertising campaign of New Zealand beer brand Speights suggests that the success of the campaign rests on a 'hegemonic representation of rural, white masculinity in southern New Zealand' which is 'notable for being unapologetic', yet, equally, the campaign might be read 'a nostalgic valorisation of local hegemonic masculinity in a time of destabilised male identity politics' (Gee and Jackson 2012, 84-85).

'Top Totty' and 'Retro' Women: The place of women in Real Ale

So far, the chapter has sought to illustrate how Real Ale drinking can be seen, like wine is in France, as 'a marker of national and regional identity and as a complex arena for asserting and negotiating questions of competition, power, identity and social ordering' (Demossier 2010, 7). Evident in this has been the way in which the identification with place and time offered by Real Ale production and consumption is gender specific, with a distinctly masculine landscape of industrial, military and heritage themes and imagery apparent. As anthropologist Nelson Graburn (2001, 68) has observed, 'the concept of heritage requires a sense of ownership, and the consumption of heritage requires a sense of permission'. Much of the above is clearly coded as masculine and evidently involves a 'claiming' of territory where Real Ale, and beer consumption more generally, has been fenced off as a masculine space.

This final section will further this discussion by exploring the ways in which, as a flipside of this assertion of masculinity through nostalgic heritage, women, and the female body in particular, are marginalised and excluded. As Tim Edwards (2000, 146) observes, practices of conspicuous

consumption that provide some with 'the means to form an identity and to maintain or develop a particular status or standing in society' also 'operates to exclude others and to reinforce the underlying divisiveness of the overall situation'. As in Cara Aitchison's (2003) instructive work on leisure and gender, a picture of can be drawn of how such exclusionary forces run through much leisure and consumption practices. It is clear that the bodies and embodiments of male and female drinkers are held to quite different standards and patterns of moral judgement (see Thurnell-Read 2011, 2013; and Lyons, Emslie and Hunt 2014 respectively). While the identity work of Real Ale consumption asserts a confident, if nostalgic, masculine identity, the symbolic position of women within this is highly problematic. A number of examples serve to illustrate this observation.

Perhaps the most striking case of this in recent years can be found in the ale called *Top Totty*, brewed by the Staffordshire based brewer Slater's. Described by the brewery as 'a stunning blonde beer full bodied with a voluptuous hop aroma' the beer branding features the image of a blonde, bikini and bunny ear clad, female figure carrying a glass of beer on a serving platter. The beer gained notoriety when, in February 2012, shadow equalities minister Kate Green expressed her concern during Prime Ministers question time that a product featuring such sexist imagery should be served in one of the Houses of Parliament bars. While the beer was promptly withdrawn – or, by other accounts, had simply 'run out' – Slater's brewery reported a huge increases in sales following media coverage of the controversy, and posters began to appear in pubs bragging 'Banned from parliament but not from here'. While a predictable media led 'backlash' ensued framed the debate as 'political correctness gone mad', with Green being attacked specifically as 'humourless' and prone to 'knee-jerk puritanism' (Martin 2012), the event illustrates how women are frequently overtly demeaned and marginalised in sexist Real Ale branding.

The response to the *Top Totty* incident exhibits similarities to the use of 'humour' and 'irony' as a defence within the sexist narratives of men's lifestyle magazines serving to distance those outside of the group and, further still, act as a defence mechanism against allegations of political incorrectness, chauvinism and sexism (Whelehan 2000; Benwell 2003; Benwell 2004). While not addressing

chauvinism directly, Stan, one of the brewers interviewed about their work, said: 'at the end of the day it's a bit of fun isn't it? Some of the beer names are a bit childish, you know, puns and that'. Further, this (mis)use of female bodies in beer related imagery draws some ready parallels with the 'Tennent's Lager Lovelies' as described by Gutzke (2012) where the Scottish brewery's use of female models on lager packaging during the 1960s and 1970s whereby the 'patriotic beer-drinking Scotsmen could claim lager as theirs in buying cans with pictures of nubile Scottish women in provocative poses' (Gutzke 2012, 555). The implication running through this is that, as Aitchison (2003, 44) has observed in relation to leisure, women are positioned as a support function to the main event of masculine leisure and consumption.

Some well-intentioned attempts to 'open up' beer consumption to female drinkers have perhaps unintentionally further highlighted these symbolic gender boundaries. For example, *Animee*, a 'beer for women' launched in the UK by Canadian firm Molson Coors in 2011 with a £2m marketing drive, based its branding around smaller, curvier bottles, pale pastel colours, fruit flavours, and the promise of a 'lightly sparkling' and therefore 'feminine' product (Atherton 2011). That Molson Coors initially gave away free samples of the beer through the Toni and Guy chain of hair salons appeared to further reinforce a derivative, and to many commentators, patronising image of drinking femininity. Commenting on the launch of the brand, beer writer Melissa Cole astutely suggested that:

> 'There are several factors that stop women from buying beer: a lack of education, too much gassy rubbish and ugly glassware. Top of the list, however, is that they find the inherent sexism in beer advertising and marketing off-putting – and there's certainly little that says "it's not pink and fruity enough" and UK beer industry "have busily been disenfranchising women from the beer market for the past 40 years and are now clumsily trying to entice them back.'

Critics of the evidently misguided campaign were quickly vindicated as the company announced the withdrawal of the product within a little over a year.

Two further examples of how attempts to address these issues have been counterproductive can be drawn from within CAMRA. In the March 1997 edition of *What's Brewing?*, the long running CAMRA monthly campaign newspaper, a story title 'Do you know this ale fan?...we'd like her number' ran alongside an image of a young women holding a glass of ale between her legs, taken at the 1995 Great British Beer Festival. The story aimed to locate the woman in the photograph and recruit her to 'spearhead' the promotion of that year's festival. One campaign member, responding in the letter section of the following edition of the paper, said:

> 'If you want to shed the bearded blobby man image then show a picture of a clean cut, slimmer man. There are plenty in the organisation. Why want a picture of a woman when it is the man's poor image that needs altering?'

More recently, in October 2014, CAMRA released to several university ale societies a promotional leaflet for distribution to students with the aim of recruiting new members to the campaign. The leaflet, featuring a blonde haired female model wearing blue hotpants and a low-cut white top on the front page, and a pair of female models on the inside both appearing to be wearing 'pin-up' style bodices, provoked a spirited response with many ale societies refusing to accept the leaflets and directly criticising CAMRA for the poorly conceived and executed initiative. It was reported on a Facebook page of young CAMRA members that a response from CAMRA 'HQ' had indicating that the campaign was authorised following a 'design brief' to several agencies to commission the leaflet. Accordingly, 'one of the popular themes submitted by an agency was the use of 1950s imagery using professional 'vintage' models to help echo beer advertising imagery of 60 years ago' and that a 'focus group of both young male and female focus groups (both equally represented) and certain committees liked this approach and felt it was something different for CAMRA'. They also apologised if it was interpreted as 'a discriminatory / sexist campaign' and stated that this was 'seriously not our intention'.

While to a great extent the unfolding of this particular example indicates some of the long lying tensions within CAMRA as an organisation, here it is interesting to note how the attempt to include new members by targeting young women involves 'looking back' to a 'retro' image. The representation of femininity in such 'retro' images is telling. As Elizabeth Brunner (2013) suggests, the 'visual evocation of cultural nostalgia' in such 'patriarchal visual rhetoric' serves to contain women's presence in leisure and consumption.

One research participant in particular, a female beer expert and writer involved in various elements of promotion and industry engagement with consumers, Mary stated in an email correspondence that:

> 'Beer marketing campaigns need to be revolutionised. A lot of mass market beer marketing is either blokey, sometimes sexist, aimed at young men, laddish, often assuming that they are childish losers (a recent *Foster's* ad is a good example of that), and where women only feature as totty, or as harridans spoiling the party.'

Mary's comment captures well how the boundaries enforced by the symbolism and imagery of ale branding work to signal beer drinking as a practice which is implicitly masculine and from which women are to be excluded. Her reference to the depiction of men as 'childish losers' strikes a chord with Smith's work on the infantalisation of drinking culture (2014 and this volume).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how Real Ale might be seen as a symbolic landscape infused with heritage and nostalgia. In particular, the chapter observes how industrial and pastoral symbolism emerges precisely at the time when such is passing away. Reminiscent of Roberts' (2014, 306) observation that chocolate and vodka packaging in post-Soviet Russia 'has increasingly been designed to reproduce, and promote, the myth of the Great Russian past', the use of nostalgic, yet bold, images of a proud British past can evidently not be disentangled from wider social changes. As AlSayyad (2001, 9)

suggests, heritage involves not only preservation but also an 'attempt to resuscitate' motivated by both, on the pragmatic level, financial gain in attracting consumers but also 'to serve as 'banks' of national memory and pride to ward off the subversive effects of historical change'. Thus breweries and beers that draw on the nostalgic imagery and language of industrial heritage do so in a way which situates and 'places' both the brewery and its locality within a national narrative of Britain as 'Great' industrial power.

The chapter has sought to show, following the likes of Billig (1995, 175), that by looking at the symbolism of heritage 'we are noticing the depths and mechanisms of our identity, embedded in routines of social life'. Like other forms of heritage, Real Ale can convey 'a sense of place and of the past' (McIntosh and Prentice 1999, 590). As such, Real Ale consumption proves to be an interesting case which demonstrates the links between consumption and identity and how consuming alcohol can be a way of feeling one's identity and one's place in the world (Mansvet 2005; also see Ross-Houle, Atkinson and Sumnall, this volume). As Cohen (2013) notes, it is important to consider how the 'validation' of heritage constructions and memory are enacted in both official and, importantly, unofficial ways. Taking the former, as noted above, tourism authorities such as *VisitBritain* have repeatedly endorsed the 'iconic' British pint consumed in a 'traditional' British pub as an important, and saleable, expression of national culture, heritage and identity. Further still, an array of informal engagements with such cultural symbolism, many involving resistance and contestation, mean that the consumption of Real Ale demonstrates how alcohol and identity are linked.

Yet, parallel to Graburn's (2001, 81) observation that heritage and tradition invariably involve 'paradigms of belonging and ownership', the chapter has explored how the rich symbolism of Real Ale that frequently draws on images of long since passed industrial, imperial or pastoral Britain which exhibits exclusion as well as inclusion. While the 'invented traditions' of nostalgia and heritage are valuable 'evidence' for historians as they throw 'considerable light on the human relation to the past' (Hobsbawm 1983, 12), so too are they of analytical use to sociologists considering the present and potential 'uses' of heritage. This chapter has identified how belonging and identity are evidently

constructed through the consumption of Real Ale, as well as how others are contained and excluded by the very same imagery.

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