

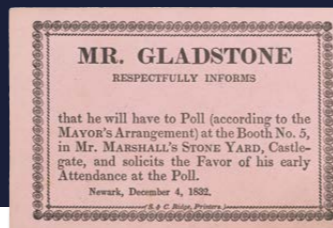
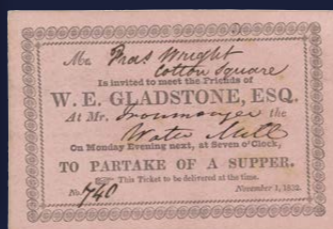
Drink, pubs, and politics

Pubs were important political spaces. People would talk politics in pubs, and at election time, drink often flowed freely as party agents treated voters before the rounds of public polling. The temperance movement saw the pub as a political problem and put sobriety at the centre of a new model of civic participation.



← Peck Lane, Nottingham: a scene of "smoke and politics". Engraving from GM Woodward, *Eccentric Excursions* (1817). Special Collection, Oversize PR109.W6

↓ Invitation card to supper at the Water Mill public house, Newark, to meet 'the Friends of WE Gladstone', 1832. Manuscript Collections, MS 484/12/1



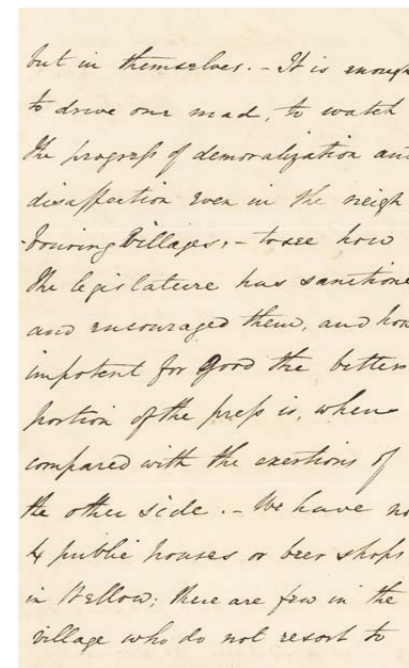
↑ Poll information card, Newark, 1832. Manuscript Collections, MS 484/12/3

In 1830, the Duke of Wellington's Tory government passed a remarkable free trade reform. Keen to address the country's agricultural depression, the Beer Act reduced duties on malt and on beer. It created a new type of premises, the beer house. Unlike all existing licensed premises, these were managed outside of the control of local justices of the peace.

The immediate effect was dramatic. Thousands of new venues were created, and not just in urban areas. Writing to the future 5th Duke of Newcastle from Wellow Hall in 1834, Jonathan Thompson was devastating in his criticism of new beer houses. 'It is enough to drive one mad, to watch the progress of demoralization and disaffection', with labourers being turned into 'habitual drunkards and Sabbath breakers'.

Writing just two years after voting rights had been extended by the 1832 Reform Act, Thompson was clearly worried by the flavour of politics that might be discussed in local pubs and beer houses: 'all who can read may find there the Nottingham Mercury or unstamped papers of a worse description'.

The temperance movement framed sobriety as a step to citizenship, particularly as the second Reform Act of 1867 allowed more working men to qualify for the vote. The Temperance Society at Retford proudly claimed to have supported people to the point where they could request the franchise. Parliament would never enact prohibition, but voters could look to candidates who were pledged to support restrictive liquor legislation.



↑ Letter from J Thompson, Wellow Hall, to Henry PF Pelham-Clinton, Earl of Lincoln, 29 April 1834. Newcastle Collection, Ne C 12976/1-2

purpose of his letter, as a reason for my further inquiry, and my conviction of the power of such a committee as that which returned me to check the system of treating so as that it shall not produce (as on that occasion) general and wholesale drunkenness: and begging to know, whether they, or he for them, concur with me as to the practicability of this object? If so, we ask no more.

← Letter from William E Gladstone to Henry, 4th Duke of Newcastle under Lyne, regarding the need to discontinue 'the system of treating so as that it shall not produce (as on that occasion) general and wholesale drunkenness', 10 December 1834. Newcastle Collection, Ne C 5412