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## **Drinking and toasting in Georgian Britain Britain: group identities and individual agency**

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### **Résumé :**

Le toast était un rituel omniprésent dans la société britannique du long dix-huitième siècle. Il servait à cimenter les identités collectives et les allégeances politico-religieuses. Le rituel jouait son rôle au prix d'une pression des pairs parfois pesante. Les règles portant sur le genre et l'exclusion des étaient strictes. L'individu (du moins les hommes des élites) cependant, gardait une part de liberté et jouait avec les contraintes, comme en témoignent des exemples choisis parmi les milieux conservateurs à partir de la Révolution française.

Toasting was an omnipresent ritual in Britain in the long eighteenth century. It served to cement collective identities and politico-religious allegiances, but the efficacy of such ritual depended on peer-pressure, which could weigh heavily on the individual. There were strict rules bearing on gender and the exclusion of women. However men from the élite classes kept some agency and played with constraints as can be seen in examples drawn among conservative social sets from the time of the French Revolution.

The linkage between food and identity in eighteenth-century England is well-established through the avatars of John Bull, the well-fed Englishman who contrasts with the starving, frog-eating French. This patriotic self-identification was given ritual form in clubs, one of the archetypical forms of sociability in Britain in the period; it expressed itself in the arms, in painting and engraving. A famous example showing the interconnectedness of those developments is William Hogarth, who immortalized the Roast Beef as an emblem of Old

England in *The Gate of Calais* or *O, the Roast Beef of Old England* (painted in 1748, engraved the next year) and who was a founding member of the ‘Beefsteak Club’. The ‘Sublime Society of Beefsteaks’, to give the club its full name, consisted of artists, publicans and others, who met in Covent Garden from 1735 around theatrical impresario John Rich (Stephens). The club boasted an enormous gridiron in its room and used the gridiron as an emblem on badges and other club utensils. James Boswell, visiting the club in 1762, noted that ‘[t]he Presidents sits in a chair under a canopy above which you have in golden letters *Beef and Liberty*’, a motto that makes the club’s patriotic orientation clear. ‘We had nothing to eat but beefsteaks, & head wine & Punch in plenty & freedom. We had a number of songs.’ (Boswell, *London journal* 13). Despite the centrality of beef, it is arguable that drinking and especially the practice of toasting were also essential to the club’s identity. Punch, with its central bowl from which drink was ladled out into men’s individual glasses, served as a focus for the group (Harvey). Further down, a short discussion of the Beefsteak Club will serve to show toasting contributed to bonding and group formation. A number of historians have established that toasting cemented group identities, and helped solidify and transmit political ideologies, be they those of the Jacobites, or of the Whig and Tory parties. From the time of the American, and especially the French, Revolution on, splinter, dissident, ‘radical’ and ‘ultra-radical’ groups, in London and in the provinces, also used toasting and published long toasting lists to propagate their views (Foner; McCalman, ‘Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838’; Epstein; Hooock; Baer; Powell; Orme). Toasting has been shown to be a highly ritualized process that allowed of high seriousness and enables parties to disseminate their values, publicize their deeds and popularize their leaders and heroes. Toasting has also been shown to have encouraged fun, parody and inventiveness in both party and extra-parliamentary politics. This article will examine processes of group formation again, but also investigate the individual dimension of drinking and toasting, through three aspects: individual choices of alcoholic drinks; the constraints of gender; and possible individual strategies to avoid conflict during volatile political toasting. The examples will be taken primarily from gentlemen’s clubs and from Tory/conservative milieus to show that conflict, peer pressure and individual inventiveness were not limited to radical groupings, but also lay at the centre of gravity of the ruling classes, among the sociability of more conservative strands of the middling orders and aristocratic classes of Britain.

## 1. Social distinction and individual taste in choice of alcoholic drinks

2. Toasting, polite masculinity and women's drinking
3. Political toasting: peer pressure and individual strategy

### **(1) Social distinction and individual taste in choice of alcoholic drinks**

Drinks served as social markers, as signs of distinction between the ranks of society. Only the middling ranks and their betters could afford wine.<sup>1</sup> The world of upscale claret was an aristocratic preserve. The poor drank beer, or when they wanted cheap and quick intoxication, they reached for gin. However, the political struggles of the seventeenth century had also resulted in the political coding of beverages, claret being associated with royalism and beer with Cromwellian republicanism (Keblusek; McShane Jones). This division continued well into the eighteenth century, if not always in practice, at least in public discourse. The association of claret with toryism was maintained in the eighteenth century but the Whig oligarchy also drank French wine, which meant that, despite its political overtone, claret was a drink of the aristocracy rather than a Tory wine.

The legislation maintained those social hierarchies by ensuring some wines were out of reach for some customers. In the history of wine, the date of 1703 is more important than George I's accession in 1714: the Methuen Treaty guaranteed that the tariffs on Portuguese wine would always be lower than those on other wines (especially French). This had consequences on consumption but also on symbolism and perceptions of England's identity. In the realm of the history of ideas, Adam Smith, and later David Ricardo, discussed England exchanging cloth for wine with Portugal; this example illustrating the economic law of comparative advantage is to be found in any economics textbook to this day, thus enshrining the image of Britain as a manufacturing, wine-importing country (Ricardo 131–149). More immediately, the Methuen treaty encouraged social differentiation, with the middling orders (the bulk of consumers) drinking Portuguese wine instead of French claret. Charles Ludington has shown how, due to the incessant wars and the alliance with Portugal port appealed to the middling orders as a patriotic wine – in England at least. As for claret, the élites always preferred it to port and drank it freely. The Whig grandees saw no contradiction between their

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<sup>1</sup> The passages on wine are based on Ludington.

public condemnation of trade with France and their professed tastes for claret.<sup>2</sup> To put it bluntly, drinking cheap claret was treason; drinking expensive claret was polite. The Scots, on the other hand, still kept to claret thanks to massive, quasi-institutional smuggling; this can be interpreted as a form of national affirmation and resistance to Anglicization.

Politicians became expert at playing with differences in taste. Sir Robert Walpole, master wire-puller and prime minister for more than a decade, expertly served his clients wine appropriate to their social status, from premium claret to Lords to middling port to lower middle-class hangers-on. However, even a shrewd politician like Walpole could not master of the cultural politics of drink altogether. His proposal of subjecting wine and tobacco to excise caused a major crisis that nearly ousted him from power. In 1736 the Gin Act, a crackdown on gin sellers, was extremely unpopular and provoked riots (Clark 81). The ‘gin craze’ ended because of changes in fashion, and new beverages, not because of legislation or the work of philanthropists. Hogarth’s well-known twin prints contrasting horrendous ‘Gin Lane’ and orderly ‘Beer Street’ (*Beer Lane and Gin Street*, 1751), are an enduring testimony, but the point of view defended did not prevail. Perhaps even more telling of the sensitiveness of the politics of drink was the Excise Crisis which nearly brought down the government in 1733. Walpole’s scheme for extending excise duties to alcoholic beverages and tobacco raised more fundamental issues of liberty and corruption. The powers of search given to revenue officers (who could search houses and gouge beer vats for instance) came to embody the government’s intrusion into people’s private lives. The longstanding hatred of excisemen, combined with sensibility about alcoholic beverages and tobacco, united Country gentlemen and the urban middling sorts and for the first time, trade was firmly linked with patriotism in opposition to the government (Wilson 124–136).

As the century wore on different classes continued to drink different beverages; but there was some levelling as the élites started to adopt wines dear to the middle ranks. Around mid-century, punch emerged as a middle-class drink. Both the exotic, imported, ingredients and the punchbowls (manufactured in China and often decorated with exotic or patriotic patterns) contributed to turn punch into a symbol Britain’s imperial dominance, and punch parties into homosocial celebrations of the empire, by urban merchants who benefited by imperial expansion (Harvey). From the 1760s on, the élites started to drink port, imitating the middling classes in an interesting example of taste trickling up rather than down the social

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<sup>2</sup> Ludington, *Politics of Wine*, 3

scale. According to Charles Ludington, the beleaguered élites were submitted to so much criticism after military losses (especially after the losses of the American colonies) that they adopted the drinking patterns of the middling ranks to reestablish their claims to power (Ludington 144–162).

By the time of the French Revolution, then, beverages had lost their political import and were markers of social status, not partisan allegiance. In 1795, when Parliament considered a ban on distilling to fight against impending famine, Edmund Burke wrote, in *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), that it was an act of mercy to go on distilling and keep gin available because the poor could not drink wine and could not get drunk rapidly on beer:

if not food, [ardent spirit] greatly alleviates the want of it. It invigorates the stomach for the digestion of poor meagre diet, not easily alliable to the human constitution. Wine the poor cannot touch. Beer, as applied to many occasions, (as among seamen and fishermen for instance) will by no means do the business. Let me add, what wits inspired with champaign and claret, will turn into ridicule—it is a medicine for the mind. Under the pressure of the cares and sorrows of our mortal condition, men have at all times, and in all countries, called in some physical aid to their moral consolations,—wine, beer, opium, brandy, or tobacco (Burke 142).

During the scarcity of 1795 and the following years – the context that inspired Malthus’s ideas on population – the hierarchy of beverages was thus clearly established, and Burke interestingly dismissed the views of some pampered rich ‘inspired with champaign and claret’ and asked for some empathy for the poor’s predicament.

During the Revolution and Waterloo, the élites continued to drink French wine while supporting the war (for the most part). James Boswell is a case in point. In late 1792 and later, he recorded a rather gloomy mood in his journal. He brooded over ‘the horrible murder of the Queen of France’, and drew portentous parallels between the French Revolution and the Great Rebellion that destroyed Charles I and his monarchy, remarking on 4 November 1792 (the

day of the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution): ‘I felt as in the reign of Charles I’.<sup>3</sup> On 29 November he celebrated the publication of his *Life of Samuel Johnson* with friends; they drank the Tory classic ‘Church and King’, ‘Health and long life to the *Life of Dr. Johnson*,’ ‘the pious memory of Dr. Johnson,’ etc. etc.’ (Boswell, *Boswell, the Great Biographer, 1789-1795* 202). On the next day, he dined at the home of Dr William Langford, canon of Windsor: ‘Today we had madeira (pretty well), hock (good), burgundy and claret (both rather poor), champagne and port (excellent). The glasses are uncommonly large. I was *gravely heated*, and though the night was very cold, wandered in St James’s Park unwisely.’ (Boswell, *Boswell, the Great Biographer, 1789-1795* 203). Getting intoxicated on luxury French wine was acceptable for a supporter of Pitt and opponent of the Revolution. The war did have an impact, though, on Boswell’s drinking: on 16 December, at Langford’s again, he noted: ‘The war with France having obstructed the importation of champagne, that exquisite wine was cut off. But we had madeira, sherry, hock, port, and claret, and good malt liquor; and I took enough to warm me rather too much.’ (Boswell, *Boswell, the Great Biographer, 1789-1795* 265). Boswell, of course, may not have drunk all the liquors he listed,<sup>4</sup> but the telling point is that he only judges the wines’ taste, not their moral or political conformity.

Boswell’s daily records of his degrees of inebriation are also indicative of a personal relationship to wine and spirits, consumption and its medical and psychological effects. While élite men took to port as a group and a sociological logic of distinction was at play as Ludington showed, this same logic also implied that those men prided themselves on their *personal* taste and their own ways of drinking and appreciating wine. Connoisseurship, which developed in the eighteenth century, was one such sign of taste. The diary of Joseph Farington (1747–1821) teems with notations on élite men’s drinking practices and discourses on drink. The Duke of Clarence ate ‘only fish, & salad & a little pudding & drank no wine’; he abstained from meat and wine because he found them ‘nauseating’ not because his doctor forbade it (Greig 131). ‘Dr Smith scarcely drinks any wine, but only green tea. [...] Sir Joseph Banks never eats flesh meat or drinks wine or spirits. He lives upon Pudding & Vegetables only, – and his fits of the gout have since been more moderate’ (159, 163). Freedom to abstain was relative, however, as those men lived under the gaze of their heavy-drinking peers and

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<sup>3</sup> Boswell 245, 193. In 1794 he read Clarendon’s history of the reign of Charles I, fuming about ‘the abominable conduct of the rebellious rascals in the beginning of Charles the First’s reign. I shall see it grow worse and worse as I proceed.’ (302).

<sup>4</sup> Ludington traced a shift in Boswell’s taste from claret to port from the 1760s; this ‘changing taste represented a broad trend among elite Scottish wine consumers’ (170). Boswell may have tasted a variety of wines when dining out.

were expected to perform toasting rituals. They discussed one another's drinking practices and their occasional subterfuges. On 6 June 1807, Farington's party discussed wine while drinking 'Port, Madeira, & red champagne'. Sir Nathaniel Holland, it was said, 'has a strong prejudice against wine & thinks it a kind of poison', but though he never drinks any alone 'in company [he] passes the bottle so as to keep up an appearance of drinking some wine' (148). Ultimately a man's diet was part of his identity. After the death of painter John Opie in April 1807, 'Opie's mode of living was spoken of. He was very abstemious in respect of wine, but Dr Alderson observed that He was a gross feeder; eating of made dishes in preference to plain meat' (119). 'A gross feeder': what an obituary! Drinking and toasting were linked to 'identity' in more ways than one: not just because one's partisan or social identity prescribed a choice of beverage, but also because an idiosyncratic handling of alcohol was an expression of identity. This can mean abstaining from alcohol and escaping the universal injunction to drink. In that sense drinking and toasting conveyed identity (involving a degree of creativity and personal choice) not just allegiance to a pre-existing cause or group. It was however a sign of distinction. Only the aristocracy and the most affluent of the middling orders could really choose their wine and food. In return for gorging themselves selectively and fashionably they acquired bodily signs of such privileged status such as stoutness, and especially gout (Porter).

## **(2) Toasting, polite masculinity and women's drinking**

The choice of wine, however, went beyond individual preferences. The shift from claret to port signalled a conversion, from a polite ideal, to a more aggressive, martial masculinity in the wake of criticism of the élites following the disasters of the Seven Years' War and the War of American Independence (Ludington). Historians have used the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' to refer to a model of male behaviour that the ruling classes find desirable and adopt (Cohen; Capdeville; Ludington). Such dominant models of masculinity justify the subordination of women but also of most men. Changes in hegemonic masculinity are reflected in behaviour, including fashion and drinking patterns. Through their rituals, including their toasting rituals, gentlemen's clubs were the crucible of a 'polite' masculinity (Capdeville).



In eighteenth-century Britain toasting was a highly ritualized process with predefined roles for the toast-master, the men who gave the toast in turns and the audience. In formal dinners toast lists were negotiated and drafted in advance. Clubs and societies, and later political parties, adopted standing toasts that reflected their identity. Such ceremonies excluded women but also paid homage to them as objects (not subjects) of toasting. The ritual of toasting may be introduced with the example of a famous-club, the aforementioned Beefsteak Club. The club had evolved elaborate toasting rituals that baffled newcomers. ‘From time immemorial, a Victorian historian of the club wrote, it had been the custom for the President to propose the visitors’ health separately. That done – and as all speeches were prohibited – they were expected to rise simultaneously to return thanks as best they might. It was a great source of amusement to see the doubt and anxiety of the uninitiated as to who should take precedence in acknowledging the toast’ (Arnold 17–18). What was unnerving is that the club flouted the rules which in all other clubs prescribed that one person only returned thanks. Another surprising request for the visitor was that the demand that he gave a toast. ‘If he hesitated too long he was, perhaps abruptly, told he might give anything the world produced; man, woman or child, or any sentiment, social or otherwise.’<sup>5</sup> ‘Sentiments’ could be serious or vain, concern most aspects of life indeed as the quotation suggests, but they were expected to be witty. As most gentlemen could not invent a witticism off the cuff, ‘the confused guest would nine times out of ten propose the only toast he was prohibited from giving, “The prosperity of the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks”’ (Arnold 18).

Toasts clearly contributed to the club’s identity, partly because they kept up the jolly humour and mirth that was one of the main reasons why men visited it. As a custom followed ‘from time immemorial’ according to our Victorian commentator (though the club’s birth is duly dated from 1735 and he was writing in 1869) the toast contributed to the club’s history (shrouded as it was in the mists of antiquity, like the English constitution). The ritual of toasting visitors also defined the club’s limits, and bolstered the members’ sense of comradeship because it separated club members from the ‘uninitiated’, who would be the butt of gentle jokes. The ritual includes some men while it excludes others. The Beefsteak Club is exemplary of the way in which the ritual fulfils a function of male bonding around common goals, ideals, pastimes or pleasures. It is a ‘rite of institution’ in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense: what

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<sup>5</sup> Sentiment is defined in the *OED* as: ‘An epigrammatical expression of some striking or agreeable thought or wish, often of the nature of a proverb or in proverbial language, announced in the manner of a toast by a person proposing to drink with others in company.’ ([‘Sentiment, N.’](#))

matters about rites of passage is not the ‘passage’ from one status to the other, but the ‘line’ that separates the participants and non-participants, the initiated and the uninitiated (Bourdieu 118). The ritual of toasting changes or confirms the status of the men who take part in it (guests are included; members are confirmed) but above all it excludes women (by nature non-participants) and most men (as socially or culturally inferior).

Another club, the Society of the Dilettanti, can serve to illustrate this socio-cultural, *polite* dimension of masculinity that was constructed through toasting.<sup>6</sup> The club was founded in 1732 by a group of gentlemen who met on the Grand Tour in Italy. Horace Walpole wrote that it was ‘a club, for which the nominal qualification is having been in Italy, and the real one being drunk; the two chiefs are Lord Middlesex and Sir Francis Dashwood, who were seldom sober the whole time they were in Italy’ (Kelly, *Society of Dilettanti (Act. 1732–2003)*). The club’s toasts were Latin and Italian: *Viva la virtù*, *Esto praeclara, esto perpetua*, *Grecian taste and Roman spirit*, and *Seria ludo*. They bolstered the clubmen’s claims to mastery of the classics, refinement and polite learning. The toasts had a complex meaning: *Esto praeclara* were words pronounced by a Republican hero on his deathbed, and thus made sense in the context of a republican culture steeped in the values of the Venetian Republic and sixteenth-century Italy (Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti* 12). The toast to *virtù* reveals that the definition of a polite, yet manly (non effeminate) masculinity was at stake; the Italian language, which referred of course the Grand Tour as nominal condition for membership, could also function to signal the seriousness of the club’s undertakings (with the stern Roman, republican meaning of virtue) and its funny, pleasurable side linked to modern Italy and the Grand Tour. The polysemy of *virtù* – sophisticated, cosmopolitan, Italianate manhood, possibly libertine, but also sternly republican – was thus ideal for a toast, a vehicle for complex elite cultural values and a ritual which could accommodate seriousness and light-heartedness, or temper the one by the other. ‘Thus, the toasts *Esto praeclara, esto perpetua* and *Viva la virtù* meant much more than simple simulation of the mottoes might suggest. Their sentiments were statements of social status and moral worth – a reminder to a generation of elite Britons that they were somehow distinct from the rabble’ (Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti* 18–19). The *apparent* simplicity and its hidden meanings made it ideal for members to decipher meanings hidden from the hoi polloi.

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<sup>6</sup> On politeness, see Klein; on the concept of the polite gentleman: Carter, especially chapter 2.

Nowhere more magnificently is the club's ethos captured than in the pair of group portraits painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds between 1777 and 1779 (reproduced in Simon 70–71). The so-called 'vase' picture, representing a meeting of the club in 1777, is scene of male sociability, with a conspicuous exclusion of women, featuring a toast given at the top of the painting. The gracious gesture reflects the ritual nature of toasting, which celebrates the erudite accomplishments of the Dilettanti, whose erudite love of vases and archaeology is signaled in the books and plates in the bottom of the picture. Translucent wines and decanters participate in the atmosphere of polite refinement. On the face of it the painting celebrates the Dilettanti's love for classical learning, but the picture contains elements that the initiated would interpret (one of the men is holding a woman's garter) suggesting an undercurrent of a more obscene, sexual masculinity running alongside the polished classical manhood (Simon). Another pair of pendant portraits, by George Knapton, represents *Thomas Villiers, Later Baron Hyde of Hindon and 2d Earl of Clarendon* (1741), and *Sewallis Shirley* (1743), again in ritual toasting, one holding a glass bearing the inscription 'RES PUBLICA' the other a glass cover bearing 'ET VIVAT'. Those portraits have confused critics, some of whom surmised the two men were republicans, anti-monarchists wishing the perpetuity of the republic, while Venice symbolised the Jacobite cause. The toasts encoded social meanings (the Grand Tour) and 'individual political sympathies' (Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti* 49). Such paintings are expressive of the opacity of toasting, which functioned as a code known to the initiated – not only in secret societies like masonic lodges and illegal Jacobite meetings, but in the heart of London's choicest clubs.

Knapton's, and especially Reynold's, paintings combine key elements of refined toasting – beverage, body language, and glassware – which are absent from most written accounts of toasting focusing on the words uttered. The custom of toasting resulted in the creation of new glassware, in particular 'toastmaster glasses' which have a thick bottom giving the illusion that the glass holds more wine than it actually does. It was a necessity as the toastmaster had to down a glass at one go after every toast (refusing to do so was a breach of etiquette) and at some formal dinners more than a hundred toasts could be given. Some clubs used custom-made glassware, crockery and utensils that bore the clubs' emblems. The 'Beggar's Benison' was an upper-class sex club that operated in Fife from the 1730s to the 1830s. Its concern with sex, obscene songs and stories, and anatomy was reflected in its 'prick glasses' that were used to toast members in good standing (Stevenson).

Toasting was a male ritual, at least in all-male clubs, on public occasions and on public premises. Men toasted women in their absence: in a libertine club like the Beggar's Benison, 'the main advantage taken of male exclusivity were to get drunk and talk dirty' (Stevenson 21); in more polite clubs there could be profanity and bawdy talk at the expense of women, and endless discussions about which women were toastable and which were not. In the eighteenth century women were objects not subjects of toasting. The Kit-Kat Club and other clubs of the early decades of the century popularized the expression 'toasts of the town'. Verse epistles were written for the glasses of the Kit-Cat Klub. However, as Judith Hawley wrote, '[f]or a woman to be a toast was a dubious honour' (Hawley 313). Women found themselves at the bottom of toast lists, well below the King and other respected authorities.

Another reason was that some men toasted women to take revenge on them or insult them, and the conversation and toast could take on a sexual character, whatever the lady's fault was. A famous case is Samuel Johnson's punishment of historian Catharine Macaulay for her allegedly 'levelling' political opinions. Johnson was a stickler for hierarchy and hated republicans. Catharine Macaulay, known as 'our celebrated female historian' for her republican *History of England*, bore the brunt of Johnson's disapproval when he visited her at some point before 1763. He offered to let her 'very sensible, civil, well-behaved citizen, [her] footman' sit down and dine with them. This was, Johnson told Boswell, a 'lesson in the absurdity of the levelling doctrine. She has never liked me since.'<sup>7</sup> (317). There was no love lost between the two: in 1765, in a company of twelve men (probably Oxford Tories), Johnson 'began to be very great; stripped poor Mrs. Macaulay to the very skin, then gave her for his toast, and drank her in two bumpers.' (Boswell, *Life of Johnson* 344). The stripping, read in conjunction with the earlier discussion on 'levelling', suggests the toast was an act of humiliation of one he had levelled to the degree of a prostitute or a promiscuous, common woman.<sup>8</sup>

Women were toasts rather than toasters (still less toastmasters). Respectable women would not take part in public drinking, though they could raise their glasses in their own homes or when invited to private parties. Toasting, then, seems to respect the division of

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<sup>7</sup> 'Levelling' was not a mere metaphor. Macaulay had some sympathy for Levellers of the Civil War like John Lilburne, and she sided with Charles I's opponents. (Hill)

<sup>8</sup> Boswell's is one of several competing versions of the story in circulation. The anecdote raises the issue of the reporting of toasts through gossip and rumour, which is outside the scope of this article. On this anecdote, see Greentree.

public and domestic spheres closely. However the line could be blurred. There is evidence of women drinking toasts publicly during the French Revolution—but they were British women supporting the French Revolution at dinners in Paris, not London. On 18 November 1792, a group of Britons held a dinner in Paris to celebrate French victories; the guests were radical sympathisers of revolutionary France like John Hurford Stone and Helen Maria Williams. Toasts included ‘[t]he lady defenders of the Revolution, particularly Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Miss Williams, and Mrs. Barbauld’ (Alger 98). In London, however, all-male parties were still the norm. Some radical reformers attempted to smooth the rougher, masculine edges of traditional artisan culture (in the London Corresponding Society) but at the same time groups of ‘ultra-radicals’ in cheap taverns of the East End of London perpetuated a culture of bawdy jokes, song and toasts with toasting competitions on sexual/political topics. This syncretic culture was partly indebted to the libertine tradition mediated from the Earl of Rochester and Restoration rakes down the social scale through Grub Street literature and then on to the French Revolution period (McCalman, ‘Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838’; McCalman, *Radical Underworld* 121–123). Thus toasting may be presumed to have maintained rather than challenged misogynistic attitudes, whatever other political and religious norms it fought against.

After Waterloo, and especially after Peterloo (1819) women drinkers became more numerous – at least more visible in reforming and radical circles. A rare print of a ‘Female radical society’ of 1822 (reproduced in Navickas 76) shows a group of women drinking gin. In addition to meddling in politics, they are guilty of two gross forms of indecency on the print: several are seen drinking gin in small glasses and in the door frame, one of them lets herself be embraced very closely by a well-dressed man. Gin had long had connotations of working-class drinking; it was also a feminine drink, in popular representations if not in reality: ‘Mother Gin’ was an icon by the time of the 1730s ‘Gin Craze’ (Warner and Ivis). This negative view of working-class women reformers reflects both female intrusion into the masculine world of politics and strong censure of it, Tory and probably middle-class in origin.

### **(3) Political toasting: peer pressure and individual strategy**

Despite the encroachment of a number of women pamphleteers and militants, and however those women might be toasted and fêted in some Whig and radical circles, politics was still a key arena of contention and competitive masculinity. Politicians were notoriously

heavy drinkers, especially Pitt and Fox at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Whig and the Tory parties each had their toasts. Public toasting was a highlight of election dinners. It was also central to commemorative dinners, especially the Fox dinners (for the Whigs) and the Pitt dinners (for the Tories) that developed around 1800 (Orme; Masaki).

Toasts were taken seriously. They expressed a man's deeply-held principles, and his deeply-felt denominational, national, and/or local identity. It was a truth universally acknowledged, that no man must drink a toast if it went against his principles. Refusing a toast was a mark of manliness and independence of mind. Here it should be noted that the conservatives, not just the conspiratory or radical fringes of Georgian Britain, had their disagreements and splinter-groups. A significant toasting-related quarrel took place when Prime Minister George Canning objected to the Pitt Clubs drinking 'Protestant Ascendancy'. For Canning the toast was a betrayal of William Pitt's principles since he had been in favour of Catholic Emancipation. In a classic strategy of avoidance, Canning and Castlereagh kept away from club meetings to avoid drinking the toast. After a series of open letters, the rift could not be breached and several members left the club (Masaki 401). In periods of high political tension toasts were used as loyalty tests. If a man refused to drink a toast or equivocated he was considered unsafe and risked punishment. The following paragraphs illustrate ways in which toasting expressed a "sense of place" while their meaning and degree of commitment remains somewhat opaque and elusive to historians today. The end of the section also examines cases of individual accommodations with a standing toast, through the example of the Tory classic 'Church and King'.

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689, Jacobitism was rife and supporters of the ousted James II would not drink to the new king and developed a complex semiotic system. They held court in exile until their final defeat in 1746. Their choices of wine were very deliberate and always French. In 1718, they tried Provence (and rejected it for it was too bad), then Côte Rotie (which they found good) and finally settled for château Margaux (Corp 50). Jacobites in Britain and in exile performed the ritual of 'toasting the king over the water', passing the glass over a bowl of water. The toast was so famous it became proverbial and may be found as shorthand characterization in a novel like *Tom Jones*, published three years after Culloden in 1749. But many other Jacobite toasts were often undecipherable to the uninitiated. They went along with a rich material culture which historian Murray Pittock considers to have resisted the dominant 'commercial' model of Hanoverian Britain. A glass could be 'occasionally or ritually smashed as a Jacobite toast was given', Pittock contends, so that the

glass could not be reused ‘for a less glorious toast’ as the formula went (Pittock 51). Whether Jacobite glasses were smashed or not, the coded nature and elusiveness of toasting meant that it could serve as a secret signal and a test of loyalty. But this begged the question of the significance of such toasting. While specialists of Jacobitism like Eveline Cruickshanks tend to stress the prevalence of Jacobite sentiment, toasts can also be read as evidence of a much more diffuse anti-Hanoverian sense of grievance and frustration, or as Nicholas Rogers put it, “a sense of place, a defence of local traditions, a heritage of anti-Whiggery in a palpably Whig age” (Rogers 47–48).

Official ceremonies usually comprised a round of toasts, starting with the monarch and royal family, and then paying homage to the city or county and to local worthies. Toasting also enabled partisan clubs (the Pitt Clubs after 1808 for instance) to link local partisan meetings with the network of clubs, the mother club in London and national issues: local civic pride mingled with national allegiances (Masaki 398). That toasting both reaffirmed loyalty to king and country, and elicited a sense of place, and could even summon it into being, is perhaps best exemplified by colonial settings. Inga Clendinnen narrates the first encounter between a party of British explorers and Australian aborigines. On the King’s birthday in 1789, the first in a penal colony that had been established the previous year, Governor Phillip plied the convicts and the soldiers with rum and porter so that they could drink the King’s health. As for himself and his guests, they partook of ‘mutton, port, ducks, fowls, fish, kangaroo, sallads, [sic] pies and preserved fruit’. After the compulsory toasts to the King and the royal family, the governor drank to ‘Cumberland County, the first British-style county in the new world, existing as yet only in the mind, but, as Phillip proudly declared, “the largest in the world”. Its name, he said, would be “Albion”’ (Clendinnen 72). Toasting retained something of the religious aura it had in the early-modern period, which made it a fitting context for this act of performative naming. The synchronous nature of ceremony (performed everywhere on the 4 June, George III’s birthday) helped knit the empire together and overcome the tyranny of distance that separated Australia from the metropolis; at the same time the ceremony of toasting was an affirmation of local particularity and pride of place. The same can be said of toasting in other British colonies, where toasting also diffracted British identity into its component parts. St Andrew’s Day and Burns Day were celebrated in Canada, Australia, and later New Zealand, and such occasions gave rise to toasting to Britain, to ‘the Land of Cakes’ (Scotland) and to local, colonial institutions and individuals. (Tyrrell 1845–59; Bueltmann)

Such ritual toasting was meant to cement group identities; it could well help form multi-layered identities (Scottish, British and colonial) but it could also be divisive and force individuals to take a stand or negotiate. The Tory toast 'Church and King', that routinely drunk everywhere in England, is a case in point. It is unlikely that 'Church and King' mobs and, even more, 'Church and King' riots, expressed unanimous, unwavering Tory sentiment when they drank it; Edward Thompson, in particular, otherwise keen to emphasize the agency of the masses, noted the permissiveness of the local establishment who tolerated, if not actively encouraged riots, as in Birmingham on 14 July 1791 (Thompson 79–80). During the French Revolution a suspicion of political manipulation from above hangs over episodes like the spate of ritual burnings of Thomas Paine in effigy that erupted throughout England from November 1792 to March 1793. Frank O'Gorman showed that that the ritual, that included crying and 'Church and King' toasting, had deep roots in popular culture and thus constituted public performances confirming people's local and national identities (O'Gorman). Toasts seem to be clear indexes of popular sentiment but when read in context, the meaning of disturbances becomes less clear than that of the sentiments. In 1792, a mob in Shrewsbury received money and drink from the aldermen and mayor to shout 'Church and King' but a loyalist reported that once very drunk a few cried 'Tom Paine for ever' (Claeys 145). *In vino veritas*? What level of drunkenness made the poor drink the King or Tom Paine?

If 'Church and King' could be drunk by a mob whose motivations are complex and partly unclear, there is also evidence of clash or accommodation in private settings by gentlemen and members of the middling orders. Staunch whigs would not drink the toast; Dissenters could not drink it in conscience because of the 'Church' of England that they objected to. The simplest option was for men of different persuasions to avoid drinking together, but this could happen as shown in a letter by James Boswell to Andrew Kippis. Boswell had conservative, Tory leanings and Kippis was a prominent Dissenting clergyman and a Whig reformer (a close friend of Dr Richard Price, who had enraged Burke into writing *Reflections on the Revolution in France*). Boswell wanted to dissuade Kippis from attending a Bastille day dinner on 14 July 1791:

Oblige me then dear Dr Kippis by abstaining from celebrating the Anniversary of the French Revolution at least till it is certain that it is a Revolution upon the whole beneficial to mankind.



Boswell invited Kippis to dine at his home instead.

I am too liberal-indeed a toastmaster to load *your* bumper with *church*. But I am sure you will cordially join in drinking the health of our most excellent *King* who shows himself the *Father* of his Subjects of all denominations(*James Boswell to Andrew Kippis*).

By negotiating the toast Boswell wants to avoid the embarrassment of having Kippis refuse to drink to the Church of England. But Boswell's seemingly generous offer might also be an underhand way of sounding out Kippis's possible republicanism, because Kippis might refuse the King's health and thus reveal his political identity. This example, in the polarized situation of 1791, shows how toasting or not toasting can function as a test of loyalty and respectability. The French Revolution was still in a relatively early phase, and when France declared war on Britain in February 1793 pressure against republican, anti-monarchical, or 'Jacobin' toasting intensified as it could be indictable as 'seditious' talk.<sup>9</sup> Boswell's letter – I was unable to any answer by Kippis – illustrates the way individuals had to steer their way to avoid conflicts of loss of face. Around the same time, the toast to the King had clearly become a test of loyalty, and those who failed were beyond the pale for loyalists.

## **Conclusion:**

Toasting was ubiquitous in Georgian England. It was performed in a wide variety of settings, from official gatherings and public meetings like county meetings, election dinners, outdoor charring of members at the end of elections, to the world of tavern and alehouses, and the secrecy of private homes and masonic lodges. Given that variety of venues and contexts, and the growing social differentiation of British society, especially in London, any food and drink had some socio-political meaning; alcoholic drinks, in particular, were legislated and commented upon. Drinks, as well as utensils tableware and also gestures (polite or uncouth), were means of social distinction, but also sources of inspiration for artists who, like Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted scenes of polite toasting to immortalize club life. Travellers like Abbé Le Blanc described toasting as a 'ceremony' (*la cérémonie des tostes*) that must be performed by

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<sup>9</sup> On the extension of the field of treason and sedition law, and the political trials that ensued, see (Barrell).

men and that could not be eschewed (Le Blanc 326–329). Perhaps the only permanent feature throughout the century was the exclusion of women from public dinners (with some exceptions the early nineteenth century), and from after-dinner toasting at home as well. If women could give toasts at home or as guests in friends' home they were expected to be paid homage to rather than initiate toasting. Toasts could express an infinite variety of ideas, serious and farcical, provided the drinkers agreed on them. They offered individuals occasions for idiosyncratic wit and brilliancy as well as ways to show goodwill and will of integration into the group. Toast lists was usually negotiated in advance because the process was fraught with tensions, for instance when the individual dissented in the group or when the group failed to agree on shared values. Peer pressure could be intense and resulted in what, in an article on seventeenth-century criticisms of health-drinking, Rebecca Lemon called 'compulsory conviviality' (Lemon). The phrase captures the binding obligation imposed on men by communal homosocial drinking. In the end, the 'compulsory' character of toasting, the group effect, led to possible clash in public or strategies of accommodation (avoidance, pre-dinner negotiation).

Toasting provides a rich source of material on mentalities; if it has largely been exploited by historians of high politics and popular politics as an index to ideology, commitment and organizational structure, it could be used to reveal mentalities in Georgian Britain. Looking at toasts across the century and a half separating the Glorious Revolution to the First Reform Act, one has a sense that around 1700 toasting signalled allegiances: to the monarch (but which one?), to aristocratic houses, to the Whig and Tory parties locked in strife and struggle, and to religious denominations. Toasts were stereotypical and divisive: 'Church and King', 'The Rump'. Allegiances persisted but from the mid-eighteenth century there was greater freedom in adapting and parodying toasts. Toasts could even express idiosyncrasies, among élite males at least. Identities ranged from the local (city, country), to the national (royal family, national politics) and the imperial, as was shown with the example of Australia. A global identity emerged during the American and French Revolution, with cosmopolitan sentiments drunk to the liberty of 'mankind', in support of the Insurgents and the Jacobins, and, in the 1820s, to Bolivar and the new South American republics. The study of drinking and toasting may help to trace the emergence of trends—individualization of lifestyle and hobbies, political identities and negotiations, ideals of world citizenship—that are recognizably modern and still with us.

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