

PUBS, PUNTERS, AND PINTS:
ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON PUB LIFE IN IRELAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Ireland is a country with a rich and unique cultural heritage. It is difficult to imagine that certain facets of Irish culture (e.g. Saint Patrick's Day, the Blarney Stone, or the Ring of Kerry) can ever be taken for granted since they are so widely recognized internationally. One common feature of Irish life that possibly warrants more scholarly attention is the public house or pub. Much has been written about pubs as quaint institutions in popular literature and fiction. Curiously, they remain largely overlooked as vital aspects of Irish culture by anthropologists and others in the social sciences. In many ways, socio-cultural research on pub life in Ireland is woefully under examined. In an effort to better evaluate the significance of traditional pub life to Irish culture, my thesis seeks to integrate and critically assess the existing socio-cultural literature on Irish pub life. Such work will not only help highlight both the commonalities and discrepancies within this area of study, it will more significantly identify those areas of Irish pub life that can benefit from further academic investigation. Two recent trips to Ireland in September 2004 and May 2006, allowed me to observe important aspects of pub life first hand. It became apparent from these encounters that, like the history of Ireland itself, local pubs have a rich historical foundation. Many of the pubs that I visited have been in existence or operational since the Middle Ages. Based on this longevity, one can reasonably argue that pubs in Ireland function largely as locales of social significance and cultural reproduction, not just centers of recreational drinking. Using this experience, I have developed three general research questions that I will explore to varying degrees in the context of this work. These are: (1) what are the origins of pubs in Ireland?; (2) what type of social scientific research has been previously conducted about pub life in Ireland by anthropologists and others?; and (3) what possible developments are likely to affect Irish pubs in the near and distant future?

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“...the happy social occasion is the ideal environment for the human ritual of ‘taking a drink’. As such it has always had – and will always have – great social significance.”

[Desmond Morris 1998]

Ireland is a country with a rich and unique cultural heritage. It is difficult to imagine that certain facets of Irish culture (e.g. Saint Patrick’s Day, the Blarney Stone, or the Ring of Kerry) can ever be taken for granted since they are so widely recognized internationally. One common feature of Irish life that warrants more scholarly attention is the socio-cultural role of the public house or pub. Much has been written about pubs as quaint institutions in popular literature and fiction (Blake and Pritchard 1997; Brown 2004; Cahill 1995; Connery 1968; Ginna 2003; Joyce 1922; McCarthy 2000; Murphy and O’Dea 2005). Curiously, they remain largely overlooked as vital aspects of Irish culture by anthropologists and others in the social sciences. In many ways, socio-cultural research on pub life in Ireland, like other aspects of national culture, is woefully under-examined. As the anthropologist Conrad Arensberg remarks in his seminal work *The Irish Countryman*, “There are newer analyses of Irish custom too. But they do not make, unfortunately, any vast literature. Some are historical and literary, of course, but a few are sociological and anthropological, too” (1968:11).

In an effort to better evaluate the significance of traditional pub life to Irish culture, my thesis seeks to integrate and critically assess the existing socio-cultural literature on this topic. This work will not only help highlight both the commonalities and gaps within this area of study, it will more significantly identify those areas of Irish pub life that can benefit from further academic investigation.

Two recent trips to Ireland in September 2004 and May 2006, allowed me to observe important aspects of pub life firsthand. It became apparent from these encounters that, like the

history of Ireland itself, local pubs have a rich historical foundation. Several of the pubs that I visited have been in existence or operational since the Middle Ages. Perhaps most famous of these is Dublin's Brazen Head, serving punters (pub patrons) off and on since 1198 (Schultz 2003:73; Taylor 1983:45). Based on this longevity, it can be reasonably argued that pubs in Ireland function as something more than just watering holes or centers of recreational drinking. If anything, they hold importance as centers of social significance and cultural reproduction.

Using my travel experience as a starting point for the critical analysis phase of this thesis, I have developed three general research questions that I will explore to varying degrees in the context of this work. These are: (1) what are the origins of pubs in Ireland?; (2) what type of social scientific research has been previously conducted about pub life in Ireland by anthropologists and other researchers?; and (3) what possible developments are likely to affect the viability of Irish pubs as socio-cultural institutions in the near and distant future?

Despite the fact that many of Ireland's pubs have been functional for centuries, some locals now view pub life as a dying cultural component (McKittrick 2006; Modern Brewery Age 2001). These recent developments notwithstanding, I argue that pub life in Ireland is surely not a passing trend.

Thesis Overview

The main objective of this thesis is to produce an overview of the socio-cultural research on pubs in Ireland as centers of local importance. Accordingly, my work fits into a broader genre of anthropological research examining the cultural dimensions of human alcohol consumption and production. Indeed, there has been a significant amount of research conducted about alcohol and alcoholism by anthropologists and others over recent decades. However, in the words of Margaret K. Bacon (1973):

“In spite of their prevalence, through time and across societies, drinking customs per se have received relatively little attention from research workers. Instead, research in this field has been dominated by a social problem orientation and has focused mainly on deviant aspects of drinking...This differential emphasis...undoubtedly reflects multiple origins: the negative image of drinking bequeathed by the Temperance Movement, the disease concept of alcoholism associated with the medical profession, and the realistic and urgent need to control drug-induced incompetence in an increasingly mechanized world.”

Arguably, much research remains to be done on pubs in Ireland, especially within the social sciences. A review of the available literature will elucidate the importance of additional anthropological research on this topic. Essentially, this thesis will provide a basis for the further study of pubs and pub life in Ireland from an ethnographic perspective.

Methodology

Several qualitative and quantitative methods are utilized to gather data to support my assertions over subsequent chapters. Since this work integrates and critically evaluates previously published sources on pub life in Ireland, most of my research efforts are archival in nature. In most cases, data collection involves my drawing upon a variety of library resources. These sources include work from peer reviewed journals, scholarly and non-academic books, travel guides, and general interest magazines. Peer reviewed journal articles come from the Internet or are found within library archives. Anthropological texts and works of fiction are acquired either in the library or purchased through various Internet retailers. All other relevant information is collected either from the Internet or from personal observations made in Ireland during my recent travels. Information concerning Irish drinking laws, namely those dealing with pub licensing is acquired from the individual websites of various trade organizations.

Because some of this information is unavailable in hard copy, I rely on relevant Internet sources related to Irish pub life including the Irish Competition Authority, the Licensed Vintner's

Association (LVA), and the Vintner's Federation of Ireland (VFI). These sources are helpful since they contain more updated quantitative data such as the current number of pubs in Ireland and estimates about the aggregate and per capita quantities of alcohol consumed by local Irish.

At the outset of my thesis, I should point out that my data base is predominantly qualitative in nature since it relies extensively on previously published accounts. Patterns or trends drawn from these accounts with regards to the socio-cultural significance of pubs to Irish culture serve to create a general overview of pubs from historical and socio-cultural perspectives. Specifically, the organized data provides a basis for drawing general conclusions and elucidated debates generated by social scientists and others studying Irish culture and pub life. Areas in this collective body that seem to have only received superficial attention are identified to suggest lines of future research on this topic.

As previously mentioned, past trips to Ireland in 2004 and 2006 afforded me firsthand observation of pub life. Yet, financial and time constraints do not allow me to practice actual ethnographic field research for this thesis. These limitations are the deciding factors in my pursuance of a literature review approach instead of the traditional anthropological technique of participant observation. I intend on returning to Ireland at some point in the near future to expand my research on pubs. Such ethnographically based work will provide the foundation for my doctoral dissertation and PhD in Anthropology.

CHAPTER TWO: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF CROSS CULTURAL DRINKING PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOR

“Despite the obvious importance of the public drinking house most publications about it have been popular articles or propaganda.” [Marshall B. Clinard 1962]

As a subject of anthropological inquiry, drinking and alcohol use has not been limited to one particular cultural tradition. Rather, it has a broad international scope, encompassing numerous societies of varying socio-political complexity throughout the past and present. Anthropological studies on this topic have been undertaken largely to determine the social functions and motives of alcohol use cross-culturally (Arensberg 1968; Bacon 1976; Bales 1946; Cavan 1966; Child et al. 1965; Davis 1972; de Garine and de Garine 2001; Honigmann 1973; Jellinek 1957; Lemert 1962; Marshall 1979; Pittman 1975; Popham 1978; Watson 2002; Wilson 2005). Notably, Dwight B. Heath (Heath and Cooper 1981: ix) raises the importance of anthropologists adopting a broad perspective on this subject by encouraging researchers to document the use of alcohol “as a food, as a sacrament, as a symbol of friendship and hospitality, or as a tranquilizer, an anesthetic, or an adjunct to recreation.”

Anthropological Literature on Drinking

Arguably, the contributions of anthropologists to studies of local drinking culture did not really come into their own until about the mid-20th century. Ruth Bunzel’s 1940 paper, “The Role of Alcoholism in two Central American Cultures” is generally considered to be “the first major anthropological approach to alcohol and culture” (Marshall 1979:3). Marshall cites Bunzel’s paper as using the first “controlled comparison” of two distinct drinking cultures, in this case, the Chichicastenango of Guatemala and Chamula of Chiapas, Mexico (ibid: 3). Donald Horton followed Bunzel’s work in 1943 with his essay, “The Functions of Alcohol in Primitive

Societies: A Cross-Cultural Study.” Marshall refers to this famous work as the first to use statistical cross-cultural comparisons when examining drinking cultures (ibid: 4).

Although there are few contemporary accounts of drinking from a cross-cultural perspective, Dwight Heath (2000) and Thomas Wilson (2005) have each produced important edited volumes about cross-cultural drinking patterns and behavior. Their respective works focus on alcohol and drinking as it relates to social customs amid various world cultures.

Heath’s work *Drinking Occasions: Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture* (2000) is part of the International Center for Alcohol Policies Series on Alcohol in Society. Book chapters address specific research questions such as when people drink, where they drink, who drinks and who does not, how people drink, what they drink, and why. Each features information drawn from specific case studies. Heath’s volume emphasizes contemporary drinking practices as social phenomenon that can be interpreted through various cultural perspectives. The research in this compilation not only has applications for anthropologists, it is also relevant to others examining drinking and alcohol including psychologists and public health officials.

In *Drinking Cultures: Alcohol and Identity* (2005), Wilson compiles a number of cross-cultural studies that examine the interplay between alcohol and ethnic, national, and cultural identities. These studies focus on diverse communities from Mexico, Germany, Ireland, Japan, China, Czech Republic, France, Spain, and the United States. Several examine specific local beverages and alcohol presentation and ritual. Others provide insights on the effect of alcohol on religious and family practices. A few investigate class and gender distinctions within the context of drinking and their effect on identity. Taken as a whole, many of the studies featured in this volume stress the social importance of drinking with emphasis on political ties, suggesting that

drinking culture is as important to a nation as its origins and folklore. Although Wilson introduces the necessity of studying Irish drinking culture in the book's first chapter, this collection noticeably fails to examine Ireland as a significant source of ethnographic information.

As Wilson (2005:3) states:

“Drinking culture in Ireland, at home or in more public domains, has not been a major interest in the ethnography of Ireland, but it should be. The pub, or public house, is a particularly important ethnographic arena, wherein drinking practices and other aspects of Irish culture merge, and where the questions of identity and identification continually matter.”

Lacking a cohesive body of social scientific literature, the study of pub life in Ireland appears subject to a certain degree of public misunderstanding. Indeed, key concepts and expectations about this area of Irish culture seem to be perpetuated by uncritical portrayals in popular fiction, travelogues, and other mainstream sources (Joyce 1922; Schultz 2003; Fodor's 2006; Jones 1999; O'Reilly 2003). Tanya Cassidy (1997) alludes to this tendency when she states, “a conception of ‘Irishness’ that I share with popular sources involves the use, and often even the abuse, of alcohol.” It is debatable whether or not the greatest danger in these more generalized depictions is the reinforcement of erroneous stereotypes or inaccurate concepts which inform prevailing assumptions about Irish culture. It is in this context where the ethnographic approach could make an important contribution to accurately recording the life and lore of pubs in Ireland.

Socio-cultural Literature on Bars and Pubs

Much of the socio-cultural literature on bars in the U.S. has focused on social behavior, space and positioning, rituals, and ceremonies (Cavan 1966; Gutzke 2006; O'Carroll 2006). To date, pubs in Ireland have not really been subject to these kinds of studies. If anything, research

conducted in American drinking establishments provides important insights for further investigation into Irish socio-cultural milieus.

Sheri Cavan's *Liquor License: an Ethnography of Bar Behavior* (1966) examines the various social interactions of American bar patrons. Cavan discusses differing patterns of behavior and variations in bar usage. Notably, in what she terms "home territory bars," she finds similarities in pub/bar behavior,

"In many respects the English pub and what has been called the American 'neighborhood tavern' stand as prototypes of the home territory use of the public drinking place, but the lines along which the patrons of the home territory are drawn are not necessarily limited to residential areas" (ibid:206).

Territorial behaviors in customers are evidenced in both pubs and taverns. There is an expressed sense of ownership in describing the premises as "our bar." Cavan summarizes, "In short, the habitués of the home territory bar typically behave as though the premises were their own home, for which they themselves are responsible" (ibid:233). Proprietary duties are assumed by patrons such as: answering telephones, delivering drinks to tables, cleaning drink spills, collecting empty glasses, and running errands for supplies. This display of ownership is an accepted relationship between patron and staff.

Regular patrons sanction certain moral standards and ritual behaviors. Specific language is deemed appropriate as are sexual role-playing interactions between patrons.

"Profanity and sexual play provide two examples of the lines along which special patterns of behavior within the home territory bar may develop, but they are not the only such cases. Joking relationships, topics of interest, noteworthy events of the past in the bar or in the life of the collectivity may all gradually come to be defined as part of the culture of each particular home territory bar, and for the habitués they may come to stand for the characteristic features of their bar" (ibid:216).

According to Cavan, defending the bar, bar staff, and fellow patrons is a solemn act amongst longstanding regulars. Established drinkers in the home territory collectivity monitor the behavior and levels of sobriety of patrons. Both management and patrons moderate violations in these areas. Violators are either instructed to modify their behavior or removed from the premises (ibid:232).

Research on common rituals and behaviors between Irish pubs and American bars has not really been carried out in any significant way. It appears that this area is open to observation and comparison, raising a number of important questions. Do the Irish express ownership in their pub with similar responsibilities as their American counterparts, or is there a line drawn between publicans and patrons? Do Irish patrons regulate social behavior and interaction amongst one another as Cavan noted in the U.S.? Is the Irish publican solely accountable for maintaining social order within pubs? Cavan's ethnography on American bar behavior prompts further study of Irish pubs.

Although not directly related to the socio-cultural significance of Irish pubs, *Pubs and Progressives: Reinventing the Public House in England, 1896-1960* (Gutzke 2006) is an historical account of how public houses in England tended to reflect cultural and socio-political changes over time. British Progressivism (1870-1930) was a movement that emerged primarily to treat the perceived social ills stemming from Industrialization. At the time, many upper class Britons viewed the working class as variously uneducated, unsophisticated, and undisciplined. In an effort to promote social change amongst every day Britons, the country's upper and new professional middle class implemented different policies and reforms based on scientific efficiency, social control, public order, and cultural renewal.

“Hence, the interwar reformed pub represented not so much a new building as a new philosophy, Progressivism, that inspired brewer-pub improvers to introduce diverse but interrelated changes intended to bring order, efficiency, discipline and moral uplift. The improved pub was the product of brewer Progressives’ unshakeable belief in pragmatism, scientific enquiry, cross-class coalitions, and government intervention to promote efficiency” (ibid:239).

Gutzke maintains that the brewing industry was a major factor in this national reform movement. He cites the contemporaneous history and improvement of the public houses.

“By 1900, the English public house was in disgrace. It had deteriorated into a vile and vilified drinking den, shunned by the respectable. But by World War II, the pub was a popular haunt of the middle classes. It was brewers themselves who achieved this transformation, responding not to government dictates or the threat of nationalization, but to their own Progressive convictions. In reinventing the pub, they consciously sought to change not just attitudes, but behavior and the extent of amenities available to drinkers” (ibid:5).

Notably, this type of social movement may have also been reflected in pubs in Ireland. Other aspects of the Progressive movement, as noted by Gutzke, appear to be reproduced in many Irish pubs.

“Food, bottled beer, sociability, appealing ambience, upgraded toilets, the lounge, and table service symbolized a genteel drinking culture...The lay-out of improved pubs situated customers some distance from the bar at tables, thereby guaranteeing privacy and, for women, eliminating intrusions from males, whether patrons or the publican” (ibid:197).

Unfortunately, the available histories of Irish pubs seem to either overlook this movement or simply have not thoroughly explored the matter. Indeed, Gutzke’s work highlights the importance of similar studies of pubs in Ireland. Irish pubs have arguably served as a mirror and record of the country’s unique culture and history and therefore, remain an untapped source of knowledge.

Linguistics of Bars and Pubs

Shared experiences and traditions give pub patrons a common language. Pub language can be studied from a socio-linguistic viewpoint. There are rules and restrictions for accepted language and language patterns. Following this format, the pub represents a true speech community (Hickerson 2000).

In *Ethnolinguistics: How to Ask for a Drink at Brady's* (1987), James P. Spradley and Brenda J. Mann address sociolinguistic rules on “appropriateness” versus “meaningfulness” in American male bar language. This topic of inquiry is examined primarily on the belief that “drinking affects the way people talk, lubricating the social interchange” (ibid:62). The targeted research location is a college bar that is patronized by students and area regulars. The study focuses on five key features: (1) recording what people actually say (speech events), (2) noting gestures, (3) tone of voice, (4) the setting, and (5) other verbal interactions.

Male speech events are the main focus of Spradley and Mann’s study (ibid:62). Speech events are activities directly governed by rules of speaking. These are identified as greetings, asking for a drink, taking drink orders, and bar conversation. Other speech related activities include answering the phone, giving orders, making announcements, and getting into arguments.

Asking for a drink is the most common speech event according to Spradley and Mann (ibid:64). Despite the simplicity of this action, it is actually more complicated than it may otherwise appear. Ordering a drink can be performed in many ways. A regular patron typically knows the accepted rules, whereas a newcomer may hesitate or make a social mistake. This raises another issue related to the bar as a male ceremonial center. This underlying gender orientation is frequently evident in bar language patterns.

Male bar language is often used in public displays to establish social status and masculinity. “Male values are reaffirmed by the use of elaborate patterns of language” (ibid:68). Spradley and Mann emphasize how ostensibly routine speech events are actually complex “rituals of masculinity” (ibid:65). Sometimes it is not as important “what” is said, but “how” it is said. Familiarity with the bar reaffirms a masculine symbol of membership. The act of asking for a drink generally creates feelings of membership and a sense of belonging. Spradley and Mann pinpoint five methods for asking for a drink. These are (1) dominance displays, (2) ritual reversals, (3) reciprocal exchanges, (4) drinking contests, and (5) asking for the wrong drink.

In dominance displays, the server, in this case a waitress, plays a primary role. Her behavior affects the success of the male patron behavior. The male demonstrates to others that he has masculine attributes in the form of “teasing, hustling, and hassling” (ibid:68). She must correctly handle the situation, whether laughing, ignoring, or removing unwelcome touches. She then can relate an inappropriate situation to other males, allowing them to take on the protector role, another important male dominance display (ibid:68-71).

Ritual reversals are identified as sexual “joking, bantering, and teasing” (ibid:71-72). This mode of asking for a drink suggests that a woman is acting like a man by being sexually aggressive or that a man is acting like a woman by pretending to be homosexual. Typically, no one is threatened by this role reversal, with the joke highlighting the incongruity of the situation and the comfort of knowing the opposite is true and understood.

Reciprocal exchange amongst male patrons is basically buying rounds of drinks (ibid:72-75). This interaction transforms the method of asking for a drink into a shared social experience. This reaffirms male ties and a common membership in the bar’s established clientele (ibid:72-75).

The drinking contest, whereby quantity or speed of consuming alcoholic beverages is tested, challenges masculinity (ibid:75-76). In this context, drinking becomes something of a competitive sport. “How” one plays is typically more important than “who” wins, since the willingness to compete when challenged suggests strength of character (ibid:75-76). Moreover, drinking contest spectators can gain a distinct sense of participation in this ritual.

Mastering male bar language is demonstrated by asking for the wrong drink. Amongst bar regulars, this is the height in masculinity and social status. By having the waitress/bartender recognize that you are joking in your order, proves your social position in the bar. You have been accepted as a regular. This means the employees of the bar know what you usually order and understand the joke of asking for the wrong drink (ibid:76-78).

The study of American male bar language, social position, and social setting raises questions related to analogous situations in Irish pub contexts. Apart from other concerns, do Irish pubs hold the same masculine attributes as Spradley and Mann found in their study? Do Irish bars demonstrate the same underlying gender roles and stations as their U.S. counterparts?

Variations in language and cultural differences between bars in America and pubs in Ireland were evident during my visits to Ireland in 2004 and 2006. Conversations with local male punters enabled me to acquire certain Irish pub terminology. Commonplace terms such as *off one's face* (extremely drunk) and *craic* (pronounced “crack”, a state of being or having great fun) arose during various interactions with local punters. Colin Murphy and Donal O’Dea’s *The 2nd Feckin’ Book of Irish Slang That Makes a Holy Show of the First One* (2005) lists numerous terms used in everyday conversation throughout Ireland. Significantly, these words are integrated into Irish language just as pubs are integrated into Irish culture. In many ways, both

Spradley and Mann's research and my own experience in Ireland illustrate the role of pubs as centers of social reproduction and cultural identity.

Based on the deficiencies identified in the pub literature throughout this chapter, it seems clear that this is an area of study that would benefit from more comprehensive ethnographic research. Anthropological work concerned with local lifeways based on firsthand accounts, interviews, and participant observation would doubtless provide a much more nuanced and less stereotypical account of Irish drinking culture than what often appears in popular culture. Moreover, male bar language and behavior stand to be more accurately recorded, expanding socio-cultural comparisons between the U.S. and Ireland. Documentation of historical heritage would provide an essential context for considering the social interactions found within pubs. In many ways, Irish pubs still present areas open for social scientific investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: ORIGINS OF PUBS IN IRELAND

“A good puzzle would be to cross Dublin without passing a pub.”

[James Joyce 1922]

Pubs have a long and important history in Irish culture. As previously mentioned, these establishments have curiously yet to receive full and comprehensive consideration from social scientists and other researchers. As Wilson (2005:3) states, “Research on pub life by socio-cultural scholars provides few accounts of pub history”.

Generally speaking, it seems that when more recent historical accounts of pubs are published, they tend to be hidden away as isolated paragraphs or dispersed among different chapters within larger volumes of Irish culture (McCormack 1999; Massie 1999; Levy 1996). *The Story of the Irish Pub: an Intoxicating History of the Licensed Trade in Ireland* by Cian Molloy (2002) stands as one of the few critical works focusing on pub history exclusively in Ireland. The following paragraph is a brief synopsis of the history of the pub as conveyed by Molloy.

In the 12th century, the Normans, (also known as Norsemen, Nordmen, and Vikings), ruled over both England and Ireland. In most major cities during this time, wine merchants had shops that functioned mainly as import warehouses. Wine would be shipped into the ports, such as Dublin, and stored at these warehouses. The job of the wine merchant, or *vintner* was to keep the wine cellars of the nobility well stocked. In modern Ireland, when alcohol is sold to be transported elsewhere, it is sold at an *off-license*. Eventually, these shops became places where purchasers for Norman nobles would gather to taste the wine. In order to entice customers to their business, the shops soon began serving food as well. These shops also became places where other merchants, moneylenders, and lawyers would meet their respective clients and seal their agreements with a glass of wine. This tradition has persisted across time into the present. Today you will encounter everyone from businesspeople and politicians to entire families from children to grandparents gathered at their *local*, which is what people call the pub they most often frequent. Therefore, the public house began with wine, not beer. At the time, brewing beer was most commonly a household task. In fact, medieval texts fail to mention just how home brewing grew into alehouses and eventually became associated with pubs (2002:12-18).

Aside from Molloy's account of the genesis of pubs in Ireland, the history of pubs is often preserved as oral tradition (Kearns 1997; Taylor 1983). Kevin Kearns recognizes the importance of pubs to Irish communities. His work, *Dublin Pub Life & Lore: an Oral History*, examines local pub life in the Irish capital. While he asserts that pubs are the "microcosm" (ibid:28) of society for Dubliners, they have thus far eluded any type of social examination. Kearns also gives a full historical background on public houses, highlighting both political involvement and moral movements concerning temperance and alcohol. An integral component of his book is the recorded oral history of publicans, barmen, and patrons. He has interviewed 51 "old-timers" associated with some of Dublin's long established pubs (ibid:6). These men and women range in age from 60 to 93. Kearns has recorded their memories and folklore for historical study, complete with archival photographs. All things considered, Kearns does much to address the rise and importance of pubs in Ireland and Irish culture.

Sybil Taylor focuses on the nuances of each establishment in *Ireland's Pubs: The Life and Lore of Ireland through its Finest Pubs* (1983). Taylor acknowledges the significance of the many facets of the public house saying,

"Officially and politically, Dublin and Belfast are Ireland's capitals, but the true center of Irish life for centuries has been her pubs. In a sparsely populated country (3.5 million for the Irish Republic plus 1.5 million for Northern Ireland), the pub has served many functions; grocery store, funeral parlor, concert hall, restaurant, bar, political forum, congenial meeting place, courting corner, and most of all, a place for talk" (ibid:15).

Separating the 32 counties comprising the island of Ireland, Taylor describes their visual, geographical, and historical variations. For each county, she recognizes individual pubs, illustrating their own traditional importance. County Dublin serves as Taylor's most well documented site. According to her, "Dublin is the great mother of all Irish pubs. When you first

come to Dublin you can almost believe that the town was invented as an excuse for the creation of pubs” (ibid:37).

Taylor highlights the historical importance of documenting pubs. Like Kearns, Taylor recognizes oral history as a vital element in Ireland’s social heritage. “To listen to talk in a 200-year-old pub is to be part of a living tradition” (ibid:15). Taylor notes individual pubs’ demographics, identifying the religious preference, political orientation, and employment expectations as they define each area.

Alcoholism, with chronicled cases of family histories, is also addressed. Alcohol related laws on public inebriation and drunken driving are likewise qualified in Taylor’s work. She classifies past and present laws as they apply to the origins of the pubs and their counties. “In any case, despite the problems it causes, alcohol is still the water of life to most people in Ireland: it’s a medium of exchange, a ritual, a lubricant for talk, a tranquilizer, an inspiration” (ibid:22).

Although some might suggest otherwise, the survival qualities of Ireland’s pubs are still in evidence in the 21st century. With the oldest pub still in operation since 1198 (The Brazen Head), these establishments are all but enduring. Pubs are fixtures of social and historical importance, chronicling over 800 years of cultural trends. Contemporary anthropologists, sociologists, and historians still have much to document in fieldwork and study about this vital expression of Irish culture.

CHAPTER FOUR: PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON IRELAND

" ... whereas most anthropologists who study alcohol tend to focus on belief and behaviour, paying at least as much attention to 'normal' as to 'deviant' patterns, most others who study alcohol tend to focus on 'alcoholism', variously defined, by implying that habitual drinking is invariably associated with some kind of problem or kinds of problems."

[Heath 1987]

This chapter focuses on contributions made to the overall socio-cultural study of Ireland. Specific concentration is on the available works of Irish ethnography, the history of drinking studies involving Ireland, and the medical implications of pubs in Ireland. Also, identified are the ways in which ethnography can enhance each of these areas, including the importance of pubs as locales for socio-cultural research.

Anthropological Studies of Ireland

Conrad Arensberg's *The Irish Countryman* (1968) stands as an important and comprehensive study of rural Irish culture. Arensberg is often credited with producing the first anthropological examination of a "modern" society (Wilson and Donnan 2006). In the 1920-30's, he studied the customs and lifeways of Irish country dwellers. The relationship Arensberg found between country people and townsfolk is significant to the pub-going experience. The pubs he studied were generally combination grocery stores and bars. He found that country-dwellers often brought their trade to town shops or pubs based on pre-established friendships or familial relations. Typically, rural families would choose to do business with the pub in which they already had a connection to trade.

According to Arensberg, one custom for maintaining a successful pub involved matchmaking arrangements between country and town folk. Traditionally, married pub owners would seek out country girls to marry their sons. Country girls were preferred to city girls as

they were believed to be hard workers, who already knew how to cook and clean, and were without “grand ideas” (Arensberg 1968:150-1). Once married, the newlyweds would typically assume operations of the pub when the parents retired. Generally speaking, such a transfer would inject new life into an established pub’s viability. Longstanding pub goers would continue to frequent the grocery bar, but the wife’s family and friends now came exclusively to her pub (ibid 147-8). A similar arrangement would be made if the original pub owners had no male children. Farmers would send one son to apprentice under an established pub owner. The ideal marital candidate for the pub owner’s daughter was a seasoned apprentice (ibid 148).

Arensberg notes that city people recognized their need to reciprocate the wealth of new business. Pub owners were bound to purchase their produce and goods from local farmers. Notably, pub owners also acted as bankers and conducted loans or gave credit to area cultivators. Arensberg found a common credit arrangement to be humorous. The debt between farmers and pub owners was typically never resolved. Usually, if a farmer paid his debt, it marked an end to the friendship, as it indicated he was taking his business elsewhere, breaking all ties with the family or friend (ibid 157).

Moreover, Arensberg points out that pub owners held influential social positions at the local level. Sending a son to apprentice or marrying a pub owner’s daughter was generally considered a step up the social ladder. At the same time, pub owners were often viewed as working class. They were frequently elected to political office, as it was believed that they would have the working man’s interest at heart. Arensberg suggests that Ireland developed politically and achieved “national strength” during this time partly because of the shopkeeper-publican-politician (ibid 162).

Beyond Arensberg's work, Phillip H. Gulliver and Marilyn Silverman's *Merchants and Shopkeepers: A Historical Anthropology of an Irish Market Town, 1200-1991* (1995) stands as one of the few ethnographies to examine a rural Irish community. In this work, Gulliver and Silverman offer a more focused examination of pub history in Ireland, especially in rural locations. Their in-depth coverage elucidates the origins of alcohol marketing and manufacture in a specific locality.

Gulliver and Silverman conducted an inductive study on retailing in Thomastown, an entrepôt in South East Ireland. Their work focuses on the town's past 200 years of retail history. It is important to note that, given its geographical location, Thomastown maintained direct water carriages between major urban centers including Waterford and Dublin.

The beginning of Gulliver and Silverman's research focusing on the late 1700s found that Thomastown merchants were multi-specialists with numerous occupations. Interestingly, half of the town retailers had professions related to alcohol. Local tax records identified them variously as pub owners, vintners, spirit merchants, malsters or malt houses, brewers, grocers, drapers, innkeepers, and boat owners (ibid:61).

Distinctively, alcohol consumption increased as a side effect of poor economic conditions in the 1830s. During this time, there were 26 retail shops for liquor with a local population of less than 3,000 inhabitants (ibid:108-9). Labor and services were often traded for liquor, with alcohol frequently serving as the laborers' only sustenance. Local lore suggests that the Temperance Movement, plus the low quality of products, affected the closing of two local breweries in the 1840's.

While Gulliver and Silverman's research is largely inductive, my own deductions relating to Thomastown's local pubs and brewers seem a worthy line of further inquiry. As a "gateway

locality,” Thomastown is on record for directly trading with Dublin. Thomastown and Dublin are both port towns, connected by a network of water carriages. Among other things, their respective populations were comprised of labor pools of crossover occupations such as malsters, vintners, and boat owners. Malt and flour were exported to Dublin from Thomastown (ibid:96). After the Thomastown breweries closed, local alcohol consumption continued to rise. This increase may be related to the growing availability of Dublin brewed beers. Dublin is home to the famous Guinness brewery, started in 1759, which is known for its stout beer. The fact that this beer was also marketed as having the vitamins necessary for daily sustenance and strength, qualifying itself as “food,” may account for its popularity. Guinness gained renown as a national Irish beverage, shipping primarily along waterways. Thus the rise of alcohol consumption in Thomastown may be linked to the increased availability of Guinness by Dublin waterways.

Although the deductions are my own, they seem to support Gulliver and Silverman’s call for additional research. They cite a lack of historical research on middle class retailers, stating, “The situation for Ireland (compared to Western Europe) is even less satisfactory. There is a lack of general historical and socio-economic surveys, very few local or regional studies, and little interest from historians or social scientists” (ibid: 353-4). The authors surmise that pubs are the mainstay of middle class retailers. Accordingly, economic and historical studies on Irish pubs should reflect this type of demographic associations.

History of Drinking Studies of Ireland and Great Britain

Ethnographic studies examining European alcohol customs and practices date back at least to the 1820’s. Samuel Morewood’s “An Essay on the Inventions and Customs of Both Ancient and Moderns in the Use of Inebriating Liquors” (1824) is widely recognized as the oldest socio-cultural study on drinking customs. In this work, Morewood uses Ireland as a

primary example of a “modern” culture. Morewood, an Irish historian, published his “Philosophical History” of his 1824 study in 1838 (Morewood 1838), one of the first comprehensive histories focusing exclusively on alcohol use.

Robert Popham and Carol Yawney (1967) list J. Dunlop’s 1839 work, “The Philosophy and System of Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usage in Great Britain and Ireland”, as the second oldest alcohol study in their comprehensive work *Culture and Alcohol Use: A Bibliography of Anthropological Studies*.

Based on a cursory examination of the available literature, few more recent accounts of Irish drinking culture have been found that are anthropologically-based, notwithstanding Pittman and Snyder’s still somewhat dated *Society, Culture, and Drinking Patterns* (1962). This work contains an important study by Robert F. Bales, “Attitudes toward Drinking in the Irish Culture” (1944) which is the first qualitative account examining Irish attitudes and perceptions about alcohol. Popham and Yawney (1967) also include Bales’ study and his model “The ‘Fixation Factor’ in Alcohol Addiction: An Hypothesis Derived from a Comparative Study of Irish and Jewish Social Norms” (Popham and Yawney 1967). This latter work is the first study to use Irish society as a basis of comparison for drinking customs. These research efforts establish a foundation for the correlation of alcohol, drinking customs, and various cultures.

The significance of Ireland as a location for research on drinking customs is apparent in Morewood’s (1838) and Dunlop’s (1839) studies. Moreover, Bale’s (1944) work shows the need to have a contemporary standard in anthropological research. This work indicates the lack of continued expansion into the study of Irish drinking culture.

Medical Implications of Pubs

A number of recent studies of pubs in Ireland focus on the medical implications of these institutions on local communities. In particular, this work focuses on the condition and effects of alcohol in Irish society (Ramstedt and Hope 2003; Walsh 1979:394). This perspective tends to criticize the role of the pub in Ireland without taking into consideration certain larger implications, namely cultural context. As Dwight B. Heath (1982:438) states, for example,

"Sociocultural variants are at least as important as physiological and psychological variants when we are trying to understand the interrelations of alcohol and human behavior. Ways of drinking and of thinking about drinking are learned by individuals within the context in which they learn ways of doing other things and of thinking about them--that is, whatever else drinking may be, it is an aspect of culture about which patterns of belief and behavior are modeled by a combination of example, exhortation, rewards, punishments, and the many other means, both formal and informal, that societies use for communicating norms, attitudes, and values" (Heath 1982:438).

Heath noticeably voices the call for more anthropologically based approaches to the use of alcohol and associated drinking customs. At their most basic level, Irish pubs are establishments for drinking and socializing. Therefore, it is essential that researchers recognize the role of alcohol as a socio-cultural component.

Ethnographic work in Ireland would help fill the gap of information Gulliver and Sullivan describe by increasing general historical and socio-economic knowledge and providing more local and regional studies. An Irish ethnography focusing on pubs and pub life would also enhance understandings of the socio-economic role pubs and pub owners play at the local level as described by Arensberg. Moreover, drinking studies in Ireland have failed to focus on the cultural variants of alcohol and human behavior (Heath 1982). Approaching pub life in Ireland from an anthropological perspective would do much towards recognizing pubs as centers of socio-cultural significance and not merely sources of alcoholism and other social ills.

CHAPTER FIVE: MODERN DEVELOPMENTS IN IRISH PUB LIFE

“Whether you love it or loathe it the pub is at the hub of Irish life and to ignore its existence is tantamount to losing sight of the heart of the people.” [Blake and Pritchard 1997]

This chapter examines events that currently affect pub operations in Ireland. Given that a number of laws have changed Ireland’s pub landscape over recent years, the complexity of liquor licensing laws both in the past and present cannot be understated. What is more, current developments in public health regulations have also complicated the ability of local publicans to attract and retain clientele. Based on the profound changes brought by these laws and policies, I will trace the effect of these laws and their local impact over the past 110 years.

The business journal *Modern Brewery Age* (2001) states that a major threat to pub owners are new laws that permit licenses to be shifted anywhere in the country. This legislation permits investors to buy struggling pubs in rural areas, close them, and take the newly acquired licenses to more profitable urban locations. The journal states, "In the small community of Castlegrace, south Tipperary, residents fought unsuccessfully to keep their last pub--the Crossbar--from being closed and it's license carted away" (ibid). Ciarán Cuffe, Dublin City Councilor, recognized concern for the livelihood of pubs when he told Irish media that the old-fashioned pub was “an endangered species” (ibid).

Clearly, it stands to reason that the relocation of rural pub licenses to urban areas would trigger grassroots efforts toward pub preservation. Such a response raises questions about what specific aspects of Irish pub life should be preserved. As previously noted, the socio-cultural significance of pubs in Ireland extends beyond matters of alcohol consumption. These locales historically operate as business and town hall meeting centers (Molloy 2002). Pubs often function as banks, groceries, post offices, and morgues in many small towns (Competition

Authority 1998:2.4). Families and neighbors often gather weekly or daily at local pubs for food and refreshment. Pubs provide a context for social interaction and a venue for catching up on the latest gossip. For these reasons, preserving this aspect of local Irish culture is important to the rural patrons.

Historically, laws governing liquor licensing have been complex and complicated (Gulliver and Silverman 1995:271). “It is illegal to sell alcohol in the State without a licence. Beyond this simple statement, the liquor licensing laws defy easy summary or brief characterization” (Competition Authority 1998:4.1). A brief overview of these laws explains this current state of affairs.

Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1902

The State of Ireland liquor licensing laws enforced today are based upon the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1902. At the turn of the 20th century, it was determined that a set number of pub licenses should be permitted. In real terms, this legislation effectively capped the number of pubs operating nationwide. The 1896 tally was 13,509 for the island of Ireland or 14,326 including off-licenses. This restriction had multiple benefits to the publicans. The set number controlled competition, but mostly attributed a value to the license. Licenses now had the worth of property. They could be bought and sold and used for collateral in economic transactions such as business loans (ibid:4.3-4.8).

In 1925, qualitative limits were assessed by the Revenue Commission regarding the 1902 Act. The Commission decided that sufficient time had passed for settling all licenses and premises, and that all legal situations should be resolved to comply with the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1902. During this time the publican licenses numbered 13,427 for the State of Ireland.

“In 1925 an Intoxicating Liquor Commission was appointed by the Executive Council to ascertain whether the number of licensed premises in the State was in excess of requirements and, if so, to suggest methods to reduce the numbers. The main recommendation of the Commission was that the number of licensed premises in certain areas was excessive (most parts of Dublin being an exception) and therefore a scheme should be introduced whereby a license in a particular area could be abolished on the grounds of an excess of licensed premises in that area” (ibid:2.2).

To reduce the liquor sales outlets, it was first established that no additional licenses would be allowed. Similarly, the Competition Authority was imposed to close pubs with only marginal trading. As a result of the initiatives, a total of 299 licenses were eliminated by 1927. These Competition efforts were not cost effective, as publicans were due compensation for the loss of their property and livelihood. This practice was not officially repealed until some thirty years later with the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1960.

Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1960

Along with the new Intoxicating Liquor Act (1960), further restrictions were placed on the licenses for geographical mobility. A license issued on a rural pub was required to remain in a rural setting. In keeping, urban licenses could only be purchased for use in other urban areas (ibid:4.8).

The abolition of licenses as enforced in 1925 by the Intoxicating Liquor Commission was unsuccessful and a new proposal was recommended and eventually implemented to reduce the number of existing licenses within the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1960.

“In 1957 a Commission of Enquiry was established by the Minister for Justice ‘to enquire into the operation of the laws relating to the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor and to make recommendations.’ The main recommendations were that the granting of a new public house license in both urban and rural areas should be conditional on the extinction of two existing licenses that hotels should be allowed to have a public bar on the extinction of a public house license, and that prohibited hours of trading should be altered. These recommendations, with one exception, were incorporated, with modifications, into the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1960. The recommendation that an

urban license be issued on the extinction of two urban licenses was not accepted” (ibid:2.3).

To open a new rural pub, prospective owners must purchase two existing rural licenses, converting them to one license, thereby lowering the total number of licenses. This effectively doubles the cost of new ownership for rural tradesmen while the new urban publicans remain financially shielded from such measures.

Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000

The Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000 addressed many of the imbalances of the prior Acts (1902, 1960) concerning liquor licensing. A large factor in the changes was the rural to urban migration of population towards Dublin and its suburbs. In 1901, 13.4% of the Irish population lived in Dublin. The 1996 census shows this figure increased to 29% of the State population. To further explain the impact of this growth, 34% of the Dubliners are of the 20 to 34 age range, an active social age; however, in 1996 there were only 9% of the overall State pub licenses in Dublin (ibid:5.13). As the urban areas were growing, the rural customer base was declining. Rural publicans were struggling to sell their licenses, while urban publicans were anxious to open additional bars without the licenses to do so. The new licensing laws did not allow the transfer of rural licenses to Dublin (ibid:4.16).

Table 1. An illustration of imbalance based on 1996 census figures

| LOCATION | POPULATION | # OF PUBS | PEOPLE/LICENSE |
|--|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Dublin | 1,056,666 | 791 | 1335 |
| Tallaght | 62,537 | 11 | 5685 |
| Clandalkin | 41,541 | 10 | 4145 |
| County Mayo | 111,390 | 614 | 185 |
| (Tallaght and Clandalkin are suburbs of Dublin.) | | | (ibid:5.13) |

The Competition Authority sought to relieve this incongruity in the new Act of 2000. The geographical restrictions between rural and urban licensing were withdrawn, permitting rural licenses to be used in urban areas. However, the two-for-one license was still in effect; two rural licenses must be purchased for any new license to be created. The intention was to help shift licenses to Dublin, assist the urban publicans to find licenses, and help struggling rural publicans out of their situations. Unfortunately, in this instance a gain is partnered with a loss. Fears first suggested by the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) and Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI) speakers at the Competition Authority's hearing regarding the interim study on the liquor licensing laws and other barriers to entry and their impact on competition in the retail drinks market came to fruition.

The LVA represents all urban pubs, the pubs exclusively in Dublin City and County. The VFI represents all rural pubs, defined as any pub outside of Dublin City and County. These industry organizations tried to demonstrate the hazards of the new proposed licensing laws before they were put into effect. These problems mainly affected existing publicans. New owners saw positive results from the changes (ibid:3.16, 3.46, 4.21).

The greatest impact was the value of the licenses. The Irish Bankers Federation (IBF) presented the hearing with their concerns, urging this change not to take place. When licensing was not geographically mobile, the value of the licenses stayed secure. The license was a commodity held as substantial property by bankers. The license could be used as collateral for loan purposes. The rural licenses sold on average for £Ir45,000 (\$64,157 US) while urban licenses were selling from £Ir90,000 (\$128,315 US) to £Ir200,000 (\$285,144 US). With the ability to use rural licenses to open urban pubs, the value of the license dropped significantly. A new urban pub could obtain two rural licenses at £Ir45,000 each and open a pub in an area where

the existing publicans paid £1200,000 for their license. This instantly devalued the current urban pub owners' property. The bankers' alarm was in satisfying a loan with the existing collateral.

Licensing changes are not the only challenge to the pub owner. McKittrick (2006) writes that there is concern over the fact that many pubs have needed to close their doors. This trend may be largely due to the 2004 smoking ban in bars and other public places. Similarly, the rising costs of water, waste management, and local authority charges have given publicans, especially those in rural areas, few other viable choices but to scale back or cease operations.

The Results of Change

The benefactors of this change in the law are the new urban pub owners, while the rural publicans remain in decline. A benefit of the lower entry cost to the new urban publicans is the ability to make greater investments in pub amenities, food, entertainment, and other business expenses (Flynn, Ritchie, and Roberts 2000:105). The start-up operating costs are substantially less than the existing pub owner paid and borrowed and now owes. Initially, the growing number of pubs in urban areas will advance toward fulfilling the need for more drinking establishments in relation to the increasing population. In opposition, this increase creates more competition for the existing pubs, possibly reducing their income.

Rural publicans have experienced some lesser positive effects resulting from the change. Comparatively speaking, rural licenses have increased in value, albeit not to counteract the devaluation of the urban licenses. This development enables an exit from the licensed trade especially in cases where a rural pub is operating with negative profits (Competition Authority 1998:4.10-4.14). This change also accounts for less competition amongst profitable rural pub

owners. Thus, customers of the closed rural pubs will begin to frequent the remaining pubs, increasing their business.

Recent changes in the pub landscape of urban and rural Ireland also raise issues about health and safety standards. “Greater ease of entry and exit from the retail drinks market would encourage the entry of unscrupulous operators in a market for a controlled substance” (ibid:3.2). The concern that standards would fall was expressed by the LVA and the VFI in 1998. The value of the license was an incentive to run a reputable and orderly trade. Underage drinking and drunken driving are two social issues affected by an irresponsible shop.

The most serious negative effects of the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000 have been felt by rural consumers. The number of pubs in rural areas has severely decreased. This means that what used to be a walk to the local pub has become a drive to the nearest pub. As a result, the number of drunken driving offenses has increased. Moreover, this is not the only negative impact upon rural communities. As previously mentioned, there are some rural areas with no pubs at all (Modern Brewery Age 2001).

Settling this urban/rural imbalance is necessary to the survival of one of Ireland’s most vital socio-cultural institutions. While some governmental regulations are mandatory for public health and safety, others pose unforeseen constraints on economic viability. The failure of rural pubs has a dynamic effect not just on the socio-cultural fabric of local towns, but also for the whole of Ireland. Similarly, the difficulties of starting an urban pub leave the public lacking essential social hubs. Insights derived from ethnography would surely benefit local communities and their relationship with the government in addressing this problem.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

“I hope that all the old Dublin men die before the old pubs go...because pubs was a tradition in Dublin, a way of life.” [Larry Ryan, publican in Kearns 1997]

The Benefit of Ethnographic Research

Clearly, growing political interest has arisen for urban publicans, who directly benefit by the changing laws. However, a crucial gap remains in specific concern based upon my examination of the available literature and personal experience with pubs in Ireland. It appears that little or no consideration has been applied toward those indirectly influenced by the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000, namely rural punters and communities. In this thesis, I have argued that it is rural consumers and their respective communities who comprise the majority of those negatively impacted by this legislation.

It is not only the distribution of intoxicating beverages or the number of licensed premises that is of concern. Changes manifested through these laws affect the viability and existence of pubs across Ireland. Although an authoritative study has not yet been published, current demand for a more comprehensive study of Irish pub life appears increasingly relevant (Wilson 2005; Inglis 2002; Kearns 1997). Again, the lack of definitive writings on Ireland’s pub life seems curious, given that the country is home to over 8,750 pubs, (Molloy 2002:78).

Due to liquor licensing changes in 2000, several rural Irish towns are now without pubs. The Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000 has had both negative and positive effects upon the licensed pub industry in Ireland (Commission on Liquor Licensing 2001). While the intent of the reform in liquor licensing laws is to reflect current economic conditions, concerns over cultural preservation and Irish pub life have in many ways been overlooked. Given these major changes, it seems that this situation would benefit from a socio-cultural cost and benefit analysis. By

approaching these recent changes from an anthropological perspective, it is hopeful that ways to preserve the culture of Irish pubs can be better delineated. At the very least, such work could reveal pub practices and behavior that are not widely known outside of Ireland.

A number of academics have raised issue with the fact that the social-scientific examination of pubs in Ireland is far from complete. Among others, Wilson (2005:3), writes, "drinking culture in Ireland, at home or in more public domains, has not been a major interest in the ethnography of Ireland, but it should be." Likewise Perry Share (2003:1) contends, "The world of alcohol and its main site of consumption--the pub--have been neglected by Irish sociologists." Similarly, Tom Inglis (2002:31), states, "we still await a major social study and history of this important social institution."

Given their longevity and near ubiquity in Ireland, local pubs are clearly not a passing phenomenon. While it has been expressed in some quarters that Irish pub life is a dying cultural component (McKittrick 2006; Modern Brewery Age 2001), others view it as an institution highly emblematic of Irish culture (Taylor 1983; Kearns 1997) and certainly deserving of preservation. Questions about how this conservation should take place or what specific aspects should be safeguarded are issues dealt with variously at the local level (Commission on Liquor Licensing 2001; Competition Authority 1998; Cuffe 2001).

Why scholars and others interested in Irish cultural life have failed to analyze this particular aspect of Irish culture in more detail is certainly debatable. There appears to be growing demand for a more comprehensive study on Irish pub life (Wilson 2005; Share 2003; Inglis 2002; Kearns 1997). Currently definitive writings of Irish pub life remain hard to come by within the ethnology of the country as a whole (Arensberg 1967; Gulliver and Silverman 1995).

An anthropological approach to pubs in Ireland would do much to fill the gaps in both oral and written histories and represent an effort to maintain Irish pub life. Formal and informal interviews with publicans and punters would provide important data for gaining insights about the socio-cultural significance of Irish pubs. Information derived from structured and semi-structured interviews could serve as a platform for the reform of current liquor licensing laws thus preserving aspects of a vital tradition and institution. Overall, ethnography of Ireland is enhanced by analyzing pubs as previously under-examined cultural components. Ethnography can provide a more nuanced and realistic view of pubs as integral parts of Irish culture rather than stereotypical drinking establishments.

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