

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



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“Wine o’clock?”

Andrew Misell is a member of Cardiff Quaker Meeting and a director of the charity Alcohol Concern. Here he shares his insights into some of the work they do.

2015 was the third year of the ‘Dry January’ challenge from the charity Alcohol Concern. The campaign aimed to get people who consider themselves to be normal social drinkers to try taking a month off. There was also a much bigger goal – to provoke honest conversations about alcohol.

For hundreds of years, we’ve been looking for ambiguous ways to describe our drinking. The 15th century gave us “tipple” and “tipsy”, in the 19th we came up with “snifter” and “nightcap”. In the 1960s, the journalistic euphemism “tired and emotional” became popular, more recently replaced by “worse for wear”. In short, we’ve been discussing alcohol in code – our own language of hints and bravado. The dialects vary according to gender, social class and geography, but have one common theme: helping us avoid thinking too much about alcohol when we talk about it.

We encourage each other to be sociable and join in with the drinking, but mock those who disgrace themselves when drunk. As the bible of upper-class manners Debrett’s lets us know, the social drinker must walk a tightrope to stay on good terms with their fellows.

“The true drunk will inevitably be regarded as a social pariah. Drink makes fools of us all, plunging us from an agreeable state of

intoxicated merriment and social bonhomie into maudlin introspection, aggression, or neediness and over-emotionalism...Over-indulgence is socially unattractive, but complete abstinence can sometimes seem rude, anti-social and holier-than-thou.”

Historically, drinking has been seen as a male preoccupation. From the rugby club to the exclusive gentlemen’s club – it’s assumed that blokes like to booze and to talk about boozing. When Alcohol Concern spoke with drinkers on a night out in Aberystwyth in 2010, we heard a range of thoughts from men about the point of their evening.

“A good piss up” “Getting mashed with my mates” “Drinking shedloads”

These comments reflect, at least, a relatively honest approach to alcohol. Once we stray into the more formal world of the mainstream media, it all gets a bit more coded. Here are two pieces by male journalists, one from the Guardian and the other from the Daily Telegraph, on the joys of drinking midday.

“Here we are, scoffing and guzzling in our tiny boozy universe, a constellation of tables...A boozy lunch somewhere nice is always, always special.”

“Boris [Johnson] has a point: liquid lunches...can have an extremely positive effect on productivity...A lunchtime loosener freed the brain from its shackles and gave us some of our most brilliant, leftfield and funniest ideas.”

But it’s not just the boys. Few changes in



drinking culture in recent decades have been as marked as the growth of the idea that white wine is the normal way for women to relax. Once a hard-working woman has finished for the day, it's "wine o'clock", time for "mummy juice". As in the case of men, the way many women discuss their own drinking reflects a reluctance to think too much about what we're up to, albeit in a different code, as these comments on the Mumsnet website suggest:

"If I drink wine I'll be talking in scribbles after 2 glasses...However, if I'm on the vod[ka] and o[range] j[uice] I can drink this at an all-day event (girly day/wedding etc) and be absolutely fine the next day."

"I regularly drink a bottle of wine in 1 night (well, each Friday or Saturday). Doesn't always get me pissed, occasionally does, not to the point of falling down though – just fuzzy, happy, merry."

Whilst it's clear that we must take responsibility for our own evasive language when it comes to alcohol, this kind of talk is exactly the sort of thing the drinks industry has been keen to encourage. Advertising regulations state that alcohol can't be shown as "capable of changing mood", so the industry has developed its own code to describe the pleasures of drinking. Beer giants SAB Miller say they "bring refreshment and sociability to millions of people all over the world", whilst the world's leading spirits corporation Diageo promises to help us to "celebrate life". Supermarket chain Waitrose side-steps rules against implying that a drink may be preferred because of its greater alcoholic strength, by referring to their strongest wines as "robust", "hefty" and even "full throttle".

One thing you won't hear from many drinkers or drinks marketers is a serious discussion of what alcohol actually does to us. When the death of celebrity chef Keith Floyd was announced in 2009, Andrew Brown at the Daily Telegraph reminisced about his "jocular bibulousness" and quipped that he would be "remembered for his drinking almost as much as for his cooking". Floyd himself saw things very differently. Having experienced the damage heavy drinking had done to his health, his work, and a succession of marriages, he described alcohol with remarkable clarity as "*an unwelcome ingredient I had not foreseen in our recipe*".

Alcohol Concern is in no sense a campaign against alcohol itself. We don't promote abstinence, but we do urge caution when partaking of a chemical that is so normal and popular but also toxic and addictive. We want to move forward from the evasive jocularly of "liquid lunches" and "wine o'clock", and get more people thinking about when alcohol, or too much of it too often, might be an "unwelcome ingredient".

Are there Quaker discourses on alcohol? How do we contribute to the discussions Andrew describes? What's it like for younger Quakers? Advice 40 is relevant here:

"In view of the harm done by the use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider whether you should limit your use of them or refrain from using them altogether. Remember that any use of alcohol or drugs may impair judgment and put both the user and others in danger."

Reflections from readers would be welcomed.



‘Non-attachment with love’

A participant at the most recent QAADNET meeting describes a day of sharing

The QAADNET meeting on 28th February at Westminster Meeting House grew out of last July’s QAAD Woodbrooke conference on the theme of ‘Hurt and Healing’ which looked at how people with alcohol and drug problems find their way to recovery.

A small group of people who are ‘close others’ of addicts continued a dialogue after the conference to support each other by exchanging experiences of what was happening to them and their loved ones and how it felt to try and help them recover from their addictions.

It was agreed that it would be valuable to extend this more widely in the form of an open QAADNET meeting to benefit more ‘close others’ who so often feel isolated, despairing and lacking in guidance and support.

The meeting was held in an unprogrammed, exploratory format within the ethos of strict confidentiality.

A tentative exchange of experiences, hopes and fears in a Quakerly idiom filled out during the day into an increasingly open and honest dialogue that participants appeared to find helpful.

There was discussion about knowing when and how much to try to ‘rescue’ the loved one from the addiction with practical and financial support and whether or not rescuing is ever the best thing for the addict. One person extolled the benefit to themselves of the practice of

mindfulness and taking one day at a time. There was also the question of fear, both in the ‘close other’ for the welfare and even the survival of their loved one and also the fear that is a major driver of addiction. A book called ‘The Courage to Be’ by Paul Tillich was mentioned by a QAAD trustee in connection with this aspect. Also, the aspect of control in a relationship may feed into an addiction even though the intention is to help and support a chaotic existence.

Tough love is often cited as being needed in these situations, but one participant had found the words ‘non – attachment with love’ more helpful in enabling a moving towards letting go rather than rescuing, albeit still supporting with love.

What stood out from the gathering was the remarkable resilience and calmness of a group of Quakers who have been forced to cope with chaos in the lives of their loved ones, and who continue to search within themselves for that grace to be found in the ‘still centre’.

The day was an unfinished dialogue in the sense that it had to end at an appointed time when it could well have continued with great benefit. There was also a feeling that it should be continued at other times and in other places to offer this strongly perceived webbing of support to other Friends who are the parents, spouses, partners or friends of those in the grip of addictions. QAAD hopes to be able to facilitate further such QAADNET meetings in regional areas and welcomes approaches from anyone interested via its Director, Helena Chambers.



Stepping stones ‘close others’ have found...

One of the participants in the QAADNET day has drawn QAAD’s attention to ideas that developed from research that looked into how ‘close others’ cope with addiction. A group of academics conducted studies in several different parts of the world, and found that there were remarkable similarities.

The authors systematised these into three main types:

- engaged – which they call ‘standing up to it’ (e.g. confronting the person, throwing away alcohol);
- tolerate, which they call ‘putting up with it’ (e.g. ignoring or ‘covering’ the consequences - by, for example, ringing into work to say the person is ill);
- withdrawal - which was characterised by ‘withdrawing and gaining independence’

The authors (Capello, Templeton, Orford, and Velleman) came up with a model that is aimed at helping medical and other professionals give supportive assistance to ‘close others.’ Formal services (and perhaps awareness among professionals) ‘can both be less well-developed than they are for those with addiction problems.

Their model stresses the difficulties of the bewildering and stressful position a person is in when a loved one develops an addiction, rather than the ‘pathology’ of the individual involved. The authors say: *‘the model upon which the method is based conceives of family members as ordinary people facing highly stressful circumstances.’*

They suggest that it is helpful for the close others to identify their current ‘coping’ style, and to explore the pros and cons of it. The person

can then look at specific situations in detail, and consider alternative ways of dealing with them. Bringing all this to the conscious mind can help increase the feeling of choice and weaken the sense of ‘having’ to respond in certain ways because of the high levels of anxiety that can be experienced, or the emotional pull to do so. The aim is to increase advantages and decrease disadvantages – so, for example, to remain supportive without ‘covering’.

Their research also found that although close others can often identify people who might be supportive, they can feel emotional barriers or practical difficulties when it comes to reaching out. An important part of the model is broadening out and accessing the kind of support that feels right, whether from individuals or groups. Sources of help for the family member who is experiencing the addiction problem are also identified.

Much of this research will strike chords with members of Al Anon or Families Anonymous or any of the sister ‘mutual self-help’ groups that work from the 12 Step spiritual programme. At our last Woodbrooke conference we explored some of the common themes between approaches that seem to be very different on the surface – the spiritual programme of AA, the ‘rational emotive behaviour therapy’ of SMART recovery, and mindfulness based on Buddhist approaches. An exploration for close others could be a similarly fruitful area to consider.

More information can be obtained at the website of ‘Addiction and the family network’ at <http://www.afinetwork.info/> The 5-Step Method: Principles and practice Alex Copello, Lorna Templeton, Jim Orford and Richard Velleman



Election report

Helena Chambers, QAAD's Director, suggests key issues for candidates

Alcohol, illicit drugs and gambling may not play a central part in the election campaign, but it does provide an opportunity to engage with candidates – and at best, to influence them.

In the case of alcohol, there's a particularly strong need to do this, at least in relation to the Westminster government. The situation is more optimistic in the rest of the UK, with Scottish powers providing a strong example of what can be achieved if there is a will to act. Although the implementation has been held up by a legal challenge, Scotland adopted 'Minimum Unit Pricing' (MUP) for alcohol in 2012; in December 2014 it reduced the blood alcohol level permitted for driving to 50 mg; and it has also put extra resources into treatment for those with alcohol problems. Similarly, there is progress on Minimum Unit Pricing in Northern Ireland, where a consultation on MUP has been announced, while the Welsh Assembly seems to be moving in that direction after having commissioned a study that scoped the benefits.

The Westminster government continues to lag behind. Both the last Labour administration and the current coalition government gave serious consideration to MUP. However, unlike in Scotland, both governments backed off actually adopting it - and the challenge is to get it back on the political agenda.

There is a large consensus of research evidence and medical opinion that MUP would reduce harm as regards hospital-related admissions, many health

conditions, mortality and crime. The British Medical Association has consistently campaigned for MUP, while the Royal College of Physicians is also strongly in favour. In January 2015 twenty people, including prominent medical leaders, wrote to The Telegraph to point out that MUP would help reduce the pressures on Accident and Emergency Units, because a significant percentage of visits at the weekend are the result of excessive drinking.

Other measures that target price are welcome, but tend to be more piecemeal and therefore less effective. For example, after deciding not to proceed with MUP, the current government brought in a ban on 'below cost selling' - but the effects are likely to be much more limited. A recent paper published in the British Medical Journal concluded:

The ban on below cost selling, implemented in England in May 2014, is estimated to have small effects on consumption and health harm. The previously announced policy of a minimum unit price, if set at expected levels between 40p and 50p per unit, is estimated to have an approximately 40-50 times greater effect. (Brennan Alan, Meng Yang, Holmes John, Hill-McManus Daniel, Meier Petra S, BMJ 2014;349: g5452)

The benefits of MUP are accepted by Public Health England, which has adopted 'Reducing harmful drinking and alcohol-related hospital admissions' as one of its seven priority areas. They make the critical point that this would be of particular benefit to the most disadvantaged groups in society (who drink less on average, but experience more problems when they do): their report says *'the most deprived fifth of the population of the country suffers two to*



*three times greater loss of life attributable to alcohol.*¹ Public Health England states that it will: *continue to set out the evidence base for the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol.*

There are people in all the major political parties who would like to see change. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Alcohol Misuse issued a manifesto supporting Minimum Unit Pricing, a reduction in the blood alcohol level for driving, and increased resources for treatment. Raising these issues with candidates would show that these issues are not going away, and that effective action would have backing.

Another important area - which alcohol shares with gambling - is that of advertising. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Alcohol Misuse recommendations include one to: *Strengthen regulation of alcohol marketing to protect children and young people.* They point particularly to sponsorship and the density of alcohol advertising that surrounds sports events. This is also the case with advertising for gambling, which has become increasingly pervasive in the media coverage of sports events. In both cases there are bodies calling for a 9 p.m. watershed to protect children from being so heavily exposed.

The All Party Group noted that *'Viewers of top-flight football are exposed to two alcohol references every minute'* and stated: *Children can't make responsible decisions about their drinking if they grow up bombarded by excessive alcohol marketing.* They call for independent regulation with the power of *'meaningful sanctions.'*

Asking candidates whether they are aware of the work of the All-Party group on Alcohol Misuse, and whether they agree

with its recommendations could be a helpful way to engage.

The other issue as regards gambling that QAAD is highlighting is the Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) in betting shops, which will accept single stakes of £100. We continue to argue that Local Authorities should be able to refuse bookmakers licences on the grounds that they already have too many or that their populations are vulnerable - and that the stakes should be drastically reduced.

Recent research shows that 23% of those gambling on FOBTs were problem gamblers, and a further 24% were moderate risk gamblers, with only 29% showing no problem gambling signs at all. People on the lowest incomes (below £10,400 per annum) had the highest rates of problems. There is a higher concentration of bookmakers in areas of disadvantage, and candidates in these areas may be particularly open to discussion about solutions. This issue is likely to come back into focus after the election, so the more awareness there is among policy-makers, the better.

As regards illicit drugs, QAAD has supported the recommendation made by the Parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee of 2012/13 for a Royal Commission, and our drugs briefing paper is on our website. There is also briefing on minimum unit pricing for alcohol, and one on gambling issues will soon be added.

Individual Friends or Meetings are very welcome indeed to contact me to discuss local issues.

1. [From evidence into action: opportunities to protect and improve the nation's health \(Public Health England, October 2014\)](#)



Making a difference

The vastness of the problems of addiction seems overwhelming, but QAAD makes a difference by being an effective pressure group for tackling those problems.

We speak up on behalf of concerned Friends.

We support Friends working in the field of addiction, and local meetings who have members with related problems.

We depend for financial support on the giving of present and past members.

Your donation please should be made payable to QAAD and sent to: Ron Barden, Treasurer, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 6JQ.

Giving by individuals by cheque or cash can be enhanced by signing and enclosing the form below.

Gift Aid Declaration

I confirm that I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for this tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for the current tax year. (Other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify). I understand that the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Address _____

QAAD website

www.qaad.org

Visit www.qaad.org for all the information described in this edition of QAADRANT. We are currently updating the website, but if you would like information relating to our earlier work on any subject, please contact Helena Chambers.

Join us at Yearly Meeting Gathering!

QAAD Special Interest Meeting

Saturday 2nd May. 12:30 - 13:30

Drayton House Room BO 19

Pour encourager les autres: How can we encourage all parties to take seriously the problems of alcohol and gambling?

Join QAAD to discuss engaging with candidates on alcohol and problem gambling, and to share your own perspectives and experience. What issues do you notice at local or national level? Do they relate to other concerns such as equality and criminal justice? All Friends are welcome to share perspectives.

We will also be at the Groups Fair, and hope to meet Friends old and new there.

Letters and articles for QAADRANT are very welcome, and should be sent to Helena Chambers, 21 Church Street, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 5PD. t: 01684 299247 e: helenaqaad@hotmail.com