



E-NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2023

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EDITOR'S WELCOME



Well, I must begin by apologising for my dreadful lack of promptness this month! I have a few explanations – read excuses – for being a week late. The first is that the schools broke up so late this year that I feel a week behind in all things; I can't ever remember breaking up on 23rd before, although at least it gave us 12 Days of Christmas at home! The second, which is rather a stretch – is that I caught the ubiquitous cold in time for New Year, and lost a few days buried under tissues.

The picture this month is in honour of the delightful Victorian waterfall soon to be ripped from Roath Park. Goths, vandals and barbarians seem to be in charge of safeguarding our heritage, and when one sees the pig's breakfast they have made elsewhere in Cardiff it's hard to be optimistic about their 'in keeping' replacement!

Anyway, belated though it may be, I wish you all a very happy 2023, and greatly look forward to seeing you all at St Edward's or on my screen!

Felicitations,

Geraint Denison-Kurg
Honorary Secretary

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

ROATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Wednesday, 11th January, 2023

MASTER MARINER, SHIP OWNER & PHILANTHROPIST

A talk from

Dr David Jenkins

on the life of Sir William Reardon Smith, 1856 - 1935



St. Edward's Music & Arts Centre

7.30pm start with access from 7.00pm

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For link to live stream, please apply to Geraint
no later than Monday, 9th January on:

denison-kurg@outlook.com

ALL WELCOME! GUESTS £2.00 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP £10.00

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Cardiff Bach Choir
Côr Bach Caerdydd

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

Soprano: Paula Greenwood
Alto: Olivia Jane Gomez,
Tenor: Huw Llywelyn
Bass: Philip Lloyd-Evans
Conductor: Stephen Moore

14th January 2023 7pm
St Andrew's URC, Roath

Tickets £17.50 (under 16s free)
Students £8

Tickets available from members, on the door or
www.ticketsource.co.uk/cardiff-bach-choir



THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CARDIFF SHEBEENS

Jon Roberts

shebeen, *n.*

Etymology: Originally Anglo-Irish; of obscure origin. .

1. Chiefly in Ireland and Scotland: a shop or house where excisable liquors are sold without a licence (see quot. 1903); any low wayside public-house.

Members of the Society will recall Mike Crocker's fascinating talk on 12 October 2022 of the history of the Irish in Cardiff and Newtown. Mike mentioned the prevalence of illegal drinking dens known as "shebeens" in Newtown, and I was aware of them elsewhere in Cardiff and was intrigued enough to want to delve into them a bit further.

The catalysing agent for the growth of shebeens, for which Cardiff became nationally infamous, seems to have been the passing of the Sunday Closing (Wales) Act 1881, which prohibited the opening of public houses on Sundays, the first piece of legislation ever to apply solely to Wales. The Act was in response to the growing Nonconformist movement in Wales, and the espousing of teetotalism. It was not met with universal approval, and shebeens sprang up in an attempt to circumvent the law.

A.D. 1881] **44 and 45 Victoria, c. 61.**

**AN ACT TO PROHIBIT THE SALE OF INTOXICATING LIQUORS ON
SUNDAY IN WALES.**

Whereas the provisions in force against the sale of fermented and distilled liquors during certain hours of Sunday have been found to be attended with great public benefits, and it is expedient and the people of Wales are desirous that in the principality of WALES those provisions be extended to the other hours of Sunday :

Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :

1. In the principality of WALES all premises in which intoxicating liquors are sold or exposed for sale by retail shall be closed during the whole of Sunday.

The rise of illegal drinking establishments and the divided opinions about the need and efficacy of the Sunday closing legislation prompted the establishment of a Government Commission to look into the workings of the Act. In 1891 the Commission sat in South Wales and *The Brewers Guardian* of 29 October of that year contained a detailed report into the proceedings which provided lots of information about shebeens in Cardiff.

One witness to appear before the Commission was the Irish-born Catholic, Alderman Patrick Carey, later to be Mayor and Chief Magistrate. He was a wine merchant in Cardiff and he made no bones about not being in favour of the “grandmotherly” legislation that forced respectable working men to frequent premises on a Sunday that they would not frequent on a weekday.



Alderman Patrick William Carey (1850-1910)

Source: Contemporary Portraits 1896

He said *“If the gentlemen who advocated the Sunday Closing Act would give up the keys to their [wine] cellars, and abstain from*

drinking from Saturday night to Sunday morning, then they might have a great deal more sympathy with the working classes."

One illustrious name to give evidence was that of Samuel Brain, who at that time had been a brewer in Cardiff for 26 years. He was of the opinion that the Welsh Sunday Closing Act had prompted a number of smaller licensed premises to close [presumably because of the financial hit of losing their valuable Sunday trade], and that it prompted the widespread opening of shebeens in private houses. He held the view that there were no illegal shebeens before the Sunday Closing Act, but that they were now widespread. He railed against the "small cask trade", the practice of brewers selling 4 ½ gallon casks (pins) and 9-gallon casks (firkins), which went almost exclusively to shebeens and illegal clubs, often within sight of his licensed premises. He also pointed out that some men stayed the whole of Sunday in such premises and on into Monday morning, spending all of their wages, something that was not possible in licensed public houses.

Hancock Brewery told the Commission that they sold 54 pins in 1882, which increased to 4, 944 in 1884, and then to 17,092 in 1888, (615,312 pints) a huge increase, almost all of which was attributable to illegal shebeens. Other brewers told of customers carrying away casks in perambulators and under shawls.

The police admitted that the problem was too great for them to cope with and that as soon as one shebeen closed, another would spring up in its place. One of the powers available to them was to confiscate the illicit beer, but wily shebeen proprietors quickly learnt to keep only one small cask on their premises at any one time, others being stored by helpful neighbours and passed over garden walls as and when required.

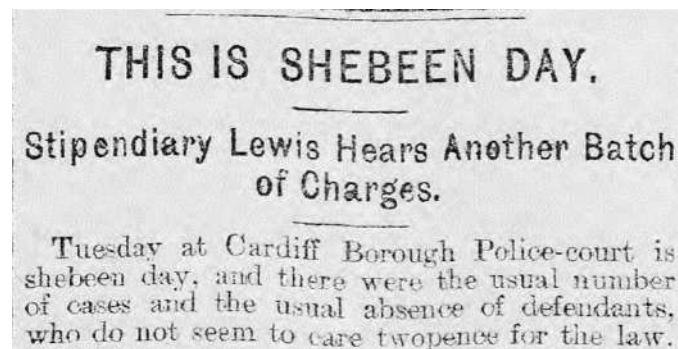
The Western Mail carried out its own investigations to aid the Commission, and its agents swore out statutory declarations to attest to the truth of their findings. They found 612 shebeens operating in Cardiff, which by no means included all of them,

serving 3844 customers. The numbers of shebeens and customers in each district was found to be as follows:

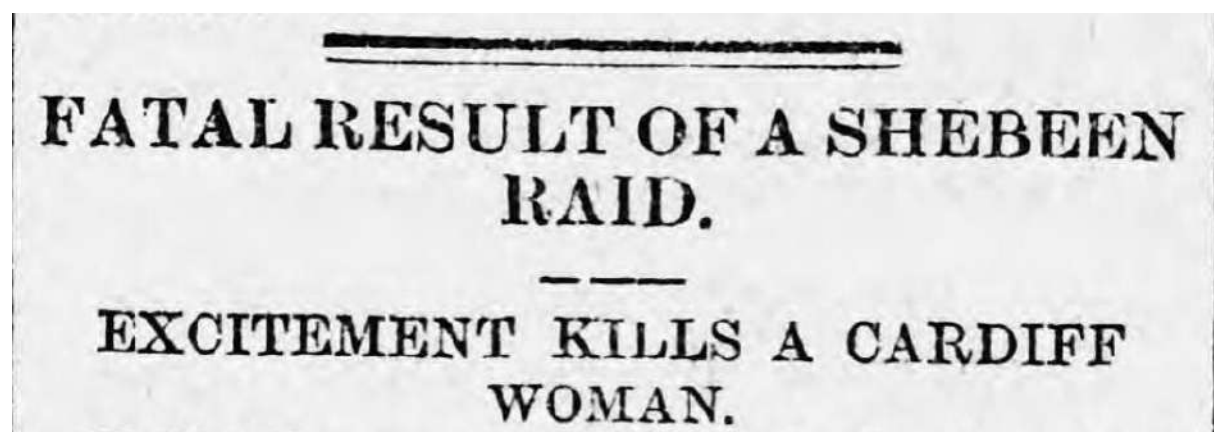
Area	No shebeens	No customers
Canton	38	325
Cathays	97	539
Docks	57	964
Grangetown	40	173
Newtown	45	416
Roath	91	544
Town Centre	137	916

Certain streets were notorious – the names Mary Ann Street, Stanley Street and Buzzard Street cropped up time and again in the newspaper reports of “shebeening” convictions. The Western Mail’s report was met with incredulity by Teetotallers, and the Cardiff Watch Committee came under pressure to act. The Police effectively launched a crusade against shebeens, and up to 50 police officers were required to raid premises on Sunday evenings. Between September 1891 and October 1892 there had been over 500 convictions in Cardiff for shebeening. The Evening Express carried a story almost every day about the “Crusade Against Shebeens”, keeping a running tally of convictions. Sentences were usually a fine or imprisonment in default. Between 1888 and 1892, 300 people (almost half of them women) had been committed to gaol in default of the payment of fines for shebeening.

The local press was alert to the injustice of the position of women caught shebeening, with the South Wales Daily News asking in an editorial in 1896, *“The Shebeen Trade – Why Is it Always the Women Who Suffer?”* It highlighted the case of a woman convicted for the fourth time for shebeening, who was asked why she did it, replying *“I am bound to do it or my husband will beat me”*. The paper concluded the article saying: *“The case provokes the query, “Why is it that the woman always has to bear the penalty?”*.



In the same month, The Cardiff Times wrote an excoriating editorial criticising the failure of the Cardiff authorities to invoke powers under the Sunday Closing Act to prosecute customers as well as proprietors of shebeens, alleging that no customers had been prosecuted in Cardiff, whereas other South Wales authorities had done so.



Roath had the third largest number of shebeens. Court reports from the time showed that shebeens occurred in particular streets in particular, unsurprisingly in the poorer parts of the parish.

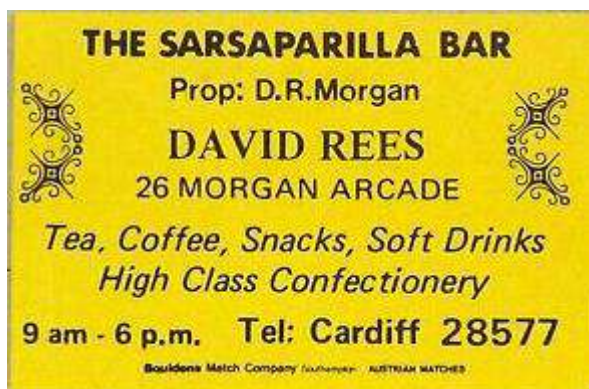
Ye ar	Address	Ye ar	Addre ss
1889	7 Helen Street	1892	Habershon Street
1889	Tyndall Street	1892	Janet Street
1889	2 Augusta Street	1892	57 Norah Street

189	13	Fishguard	189	
0		Street	2	24 Milton Street
189	1	Railway	189	
1		Street	3	42 Milton Street
189	30	Milton	189	
1		Street	3	50 Helen Street
189	15	Seymour	189	
1		Street	4	28 Milton Street
	35			
189		Habershon	189	
1		Street	5	34 Ordell Street
189	47	Emerald	189	
1		Street	6	37 Milton Street
189	53	Ordell	189	
2		Street	8	24 Helen St
189	42	Milton	189	
2		Street	8	15 Ivor Street
189	21	Leasom	190	
2		Terrace	4	24 Helen Street

From the early 1900s, the slew of prosecutions seemed to drop dramatically. There was no change in the legislation – mandatory Sunday closing continued in Wales until 1966, when it became optional, with the last “dry” area (in Dwyfor, Gwynedd) going “wet” in 1996. So, what changed? One of the changes was a response to loopholes in the legislation. Private members clubs could provide alcohol to members so long as it wasn’t sold – members found ways to achieve this. Hotels could sell alcohol to residents and travellers, and many pubs were converted to hotels with separate entrances and lounges for residents and the public. Nearer to home, it could be questioned how many customers in The Claude Hotel ever stayed there.

At the same time, there were social changes taking place across South Wales. Teetotalism was heavily favoured by the Nonconformist Churches, and was adopted as policy by the Liberal

Party, and it was especially prevalent in Wales, albeit that it had passed its heyday by this point. Even so, the message of the danger to health and the moral turpitude associated with excessive drinking was being heard. At the same time, less damaging alternatives were being offered. Italian immigrants set up cafes, coffee houses and ice cream parlours, novel and more respectable venues compared with the shebeen. There were also Temperance Bars, which (supposedly) sold non-alcoholic drinks like sarsaparilla, dandelion and burdock and Vimto.



One example in Roath was Tuck's Temperance Bar at 41 Clifton Street, which went out of business in 1896, perhaps coincidentally when authorities began to question whether the 2% alcohol limit was being adhered to. Another was Nardini's Sweet Shop and Temperance Bar at 69 Carlisle Street. Other recreational facilities were provided, such as the Luciana Billiard Saloon at 52-54 City Road (later Riley's Snooker Club), which also described itself as a Temperance institution. This period also saw the rise of the Working Men's Institutes, Reading Rooms, Libraries and Political Clubs which also provided a more wholesome way of spending a Sunday.

Emergency legislation during the First World War saw greater restrictions on pub opening hours and on the strength of beer permitted to be sold, and with many young men killed, injured or otherwise embroiled in the war and the war effort, I daresay the mood for illegal Sunday drinking was dampened. Thus, the age of the Cardiff Shebeens passed. What our Victorian City Fathers would have thought of today's liberal licensing laws and the shenanigans to be witnessed at 3:00 on a Sunday morning in St Mary Street is perhaps best left unknown.

GET IN TOUCH



For general society enquiries, newsletter submissions and to request loans from the R.L.H.S. Archive, contact:

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