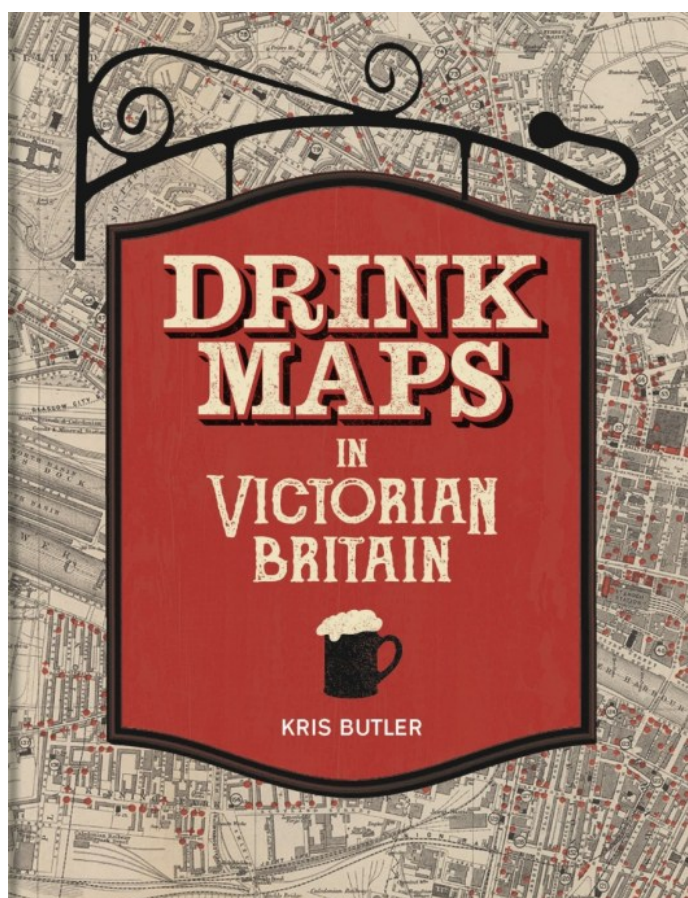




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Book review: Drink Maps in Victorian Britain

reviewed by Amy Swanson



Butler, Kris. Drink Maps in Victorian Britain. Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2024. 182 p. \$40.00. ISBN: 9781851245789.

In this book, author Kris Butler presents a fascinating exploration on the little researched topic of drink maps and how they were used during the Victorian Era in the United Kingdom to fight increasing alcohol consumption. Despite their name, it is made clear within the first few sentences of this book that drink maps were created and used by the Temperance Movement not to encourage, but to deter



drinking. The idea was to show people visually the location and density of places where alcohol was sold and consumed in hopes that they would be so shocked they would embrace the movement and use the maps to demand that lawmakers no longer grant or renew liquor licenses.

It is evident that Butler engaged in extensive research for this book. There are over 115 maps referenced in the appendix, despite her noting that there are only about 25 drink maps known to still be in existence today (p. 161) due to their limited circulation and ephemeral nature. Butler instead pieces together a history of drink maps largely using newspaper articles, letters, minutes of temperance organizations, and other primary sources.

Butler has no formal introduction to this story, which makes for a bit of an abrupt start. However, the text soon finds its footing. Butler begins by laying out the reasons why alcohol consumption was so rampant in the United Kingdom during this time, not least of which were the ramifications of the passage of the Beerhouse Act of 1830. The Act's purpose was to stop people from drinking hard liquor by loosening restrictions on the beer trade so they would choose beer instead (p. 36). Not surprisingly, this drastically increased beer consumption in the decades following. The Temperance Movement also grew as a result of such laws.

The term "drink map" first appeared on an 1877 map of Birmingham and the next year on maps of Southampton and Norwich, but these maps didn't truly gain popularity until after their use in successfully stopping the renewal of multiple licenses to sell beer off-premises in the notable 1882 Over Darwen case. Magistrates concluded that even without these renewals there would be a large enough number of establishments within close proximity where beer could be purchased.

In the next few chapters, the book discusses drink laws in detail. Butler, a lawyer herself, makes the legal aspect of this story easy to follow, and absorbing. The reader learns that in 1869 magistrates were given the power to grant, as well as refuse to renew existing liquor licenses. As a result, by the late 1870s, temperance organizations like the United Kingdom Alliance mobilized to produce drink maps of various cities and towns throughout the United Kingdom. They then distributed them to both the public and magistrates themselves, hoping to influence magistrate opinion in their favor. Brewster sessions, where liquor licenses were issued and renewed, provided the perfect opportunity for the public to then use the drink maps to reinforce these opinions and make their voices heard.



The colorful, often full-page maps and images scattered throughout this text enhance the narrative. Since many of the drink maps Butler discusses are no longer extant, she supplements the map images she does have with advertisements and promotional materials for the Temperance Movement. The images of drink maps make clear why they were impactful; with bright colors, graphs, and sparse text, they were both visually captivating and easy to understand. Unlike a pamphlet with pages of text, maps could be consumed quickly. These maps often made use of the color red to mark establishments where alcohol was bought and sold, a color the Temperance Movement wanted to make synonymous with the poverty, sickness, and crime they believed alcohol consumption wrought.

Drink maps were once so popular that in 1882, solicitor John Hayward gave step-by-step instructions in *Alliance News* on how to make a convincing drink map (p. 50). However, by 1900, with heavy alcohol consumption on the decline, the production of drink maps in Britain was few and far between. In Butler's final chapter, it becomes clear that there is not enough evidence for her to definitively draw a conclusion as to whether drink maps were successful in curbing alcohol consumption. Regardless, Butler provides a fascinating sociological, legal, and historical look at nineteenth century Britain.

Overall, this is an interesting, quick, and accessible read on a topic that has not often been written on. Since this book does discuss such a specific topic/location, it would not necessarily fit within the confines of some library collection development policies. However, I do think it would be a good addition to a general academic library collection. It offers great source materials and would be useful for researchers in cartography, as well as a multitude of other disciplines (including the modern beer connoisseur).

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