

A Home or a Gaol?

Scandal, Secrecy, and the St. James's Inebriate Home for Women

Abstract

In the 1880s and 1890s the operations of the St. James's Home for Female Inebriates in Kennington, London, attracted the attention of both the Charity Organisation Society and the popular press when the proprietors of the Home were accused of mistreating women in their care. Such mistreatment, it was suggested, had been allowed to continue for many years due to the cloak of secrecy that surrounded the Home. Both medical and popular conceptions of the inebriate had functioned to legitimise institutionalisation as necessary for cure and – by implying a degree of moral culpability that aligned inebriate women with 'fallen women' more generally – to sanction the secrecy of such treatment. This article discusses the St. James's case in detail in order to consider how the institutional culture of the private inebriate home could also be a culture of harm.

Keywords: alcoholism, Charity Organisation Society, inebriate homes, Victorian philanthropy, women.

In 1893 a London courtroom listened intently as Mrs Wilhelmina Zierenberg took the witness stand to describe how she had seen her husband strike a woman at their private inebriate home. Far from condemning his action, she said she approved of it. Mrs Zierenberg had been running St. James's Home for Female Inebriates with husband Charles since 1876. After an investigation by the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and a damning exposé in popular periodical *Truth*, the couple found themselves at the centre of a trial that detailed overcrowding, physical abuse, and overwork in their institution. Called to account for themselves, they and some of their staff argued that the harsh treatment of women in their care was justified. In making this argument, they couched their treatment of residents in the language of contemporary medical and legal opinion, emphasising the need for discipline and seclusion to combat inebriety. Whilst the supposed guilt of the Zierenbergs must be weighed against other factors including – as this article will discuss – an anti-Semitic periodical editor and the COS's penchant for pursuing the 'outsiders' of London charitable circles, the case highlighted how contemporary conceptions of inebriety and its treatment may have allowed a culture of harm to go unchecked.

Institutional treatment for inebriates in the nineteenth century

The nineteenth century is often characterised as an age of philanthropy, from ladies donating the bounties of their gardens to ‘flower missions’, to voluntary dispensaries providing medicines to the poor. Such philanthropic ventures served a variety of purposes. They could be viewed positively: a genuine desire to help those worse off than oneself, a way of ‘giving back’ to society, or providing a necessary safety net to those beyond the reach of costly medical care. A case can also be made for more cynical philanthropic motives: charity as a means of social advance, subtly exercising power over others, or securing spiritual salvation. That Victorian philanthropic relationships were shaped by considerations other than material need is demonstrated in Seth Koven’s *Slumming*.¹ In differentiating between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ recipients, charitable giving involved judgements about individual’s socio-economic position, but also their morality and respectability. In the second half of the century, personal morality took on greater weight in light of a renewed temperance movement and the growth of social purity organisations. An ‘obsession with sin’ ran through many charities, transforming philanthropic efforts into moral rescue missions.² Apart from individual salvation, many groups were concerned with broader *societal* improvement: the subduing or removal of potentially ‘corrupting’ influences within the social body.³ The period was marked by a network of ‘technologies of power’ that sought to control and contain deviant members of society.⁴ Many of these – from Lock Hospitals to Magdalene asylums – focused on the control of women, policing and containing female ‘bad behaviour’. By 1900 there were over 70 female refuges throughout the United Kingdom, catering to a variety of ‘problem’ populations including drunkards.⁵

Particularly towards the end of the century, the drunkard was an individual considered to pose a threat to wider society as well as to themselves – a perspective bolstered by degeneration theory. Popularised by the work of French psychiatrist Benedict Augustin Morel, degeneration theory posited excessive drinking as one link in the chain of criminality, insanity, and – ultimately – the decline of the race. Of course, crime and alcoholism had long been associated with one another. As COS Secretary Charles Loch put it, ‘It is generally allowed that intemperance is the cause of the larger part of the crime and pauperism of this country.’⁶ But degeneration theory gave scientific backing to existing morally- and religiously-inflected desires to segregate and reform the drunkard.

¹ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

² F.K. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 42.

³ See for example Heidi Rimke and Alan Hunt, ‘From Sinners to Degenerates: The Medicalization of Morality in the 19th Century’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 2002, 15, 59–88.

⁴ Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ Charles S. Loch, ‘Introduction’, in *The Charities Register and Digest* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1890), i–xcix: xli.

In the medical and popular press, calls to control drinking often aligned it with 'low' or primitive behaviour, as in this comparison made by the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*:

[W]hen ... there was a scare resulting from the possibility of the Colorado beetle obtaining a foothold in this country, the Government went at once to work and passed stringent laws as to ... the means of suppressing the destructive insect; and yet here was a destroyer [excessive drinking] in comparison with which as to the means of producing desolation these things were simply as nothing, but the law-makers stood still.⁷

In minimising the 'destructive' potential of the problem drinker, the Habitual Drunkards Act of 1879 and Inebriates Act of 1898 were key, providing for 'a series of institutions ... somewhere between the care-home, asylum and prison'.⁸ The Habitual Drunkards Act depended upon the inebriate entering an institution voluntarily, with the supporting declaration of two other people, and did not provide any legal means for compulsion. Neither did it require any specifically medical testimony for committal. The time spent in such an institution was not, the 1879 Act stipulated, to exceed 12 months. A check on the running of such institutions was provided in the ability of a judge to authorise the examination and discharge of residents if necessary.

Such institutions performed an important social function. In removing repeat offenders from the streets and out of the way of liquid temptation, inebriate homes were perceived to be doing a public duty. The 'civic project' of the second half of the nineteenth century placed new emphasis on public behaviour, with drunkenness – particularly that of women – marked out as an unwelcome feature of public space and sign of personal immorality.⁹ Together, the broader socio-cultural trends of civic-mindedness and anxiety about degeneration could exert significant influence on charitable provision. For women, alcoholic excess was linked to promiscuity, the breakdown of families, and – if one subscribed to degeneration theory – the transmission of alcoholism and insanity to future generations. Women perceived to have a problem with alcohol were prime candidates for institutions that isolated them from wider society whilst curbing their drinking.

Many such homes or 'retreats' relied on an increasingly medical model of excessive drinking that emphasised 'inebriety' as a disease marked by lack of willpower. From the 1870s and 1880s, in

⁷ Anon., 'A Home for Women Drunkards', *British Medical Journal* (hereafter *BMJ*), 3 Nov. 1877, 2, 639–40: 640.

⁸ David Beckingham, 'An Historical Geography of Liberty: Lancashire and the Inebriates Acts', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2010, 36, 388–401: 388.

⁹ See Andy Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c.1870–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 64; Rimke and Hunt, 'From Sinners to Degenerates': 71.

Britain and America specialist journals and societies developed and disseminated a ‘disease model’ of inebriety, emphasising the physiological effects of alcohol.¹⁰ This model drew upon psychological theories that imagined an evolutionary model of the senses in which willpower was the most evolved sense one could possess. A lack of willpower among women inebriates was especially concerning. In this model alcohol, gradually lessening self-control, transformed the inebriate into an object to be governed by external authority. The process of committal to an inebriate home, however, could contradict this model of diminished willpower: the Habitual Drunkards Act relied on the voluntary committal of individuals apparently lacking in self-control.¹¹ Once committed to an institution lack of willpower was an important rationale for the institution’s containing capacity: the issue of detaining individuals ‘against their will’ was excusable when that person needed to be contained for their own – and society’s – good. As Manchester physician John Haddon put it, ‘Nothing short of restraint need be prescribed.’¹² With willpower ‘a distinct moral faculty ... incorporated into the general practice of psychological medicine’, behaviours previously considered moral questions – like excessive drinking – could be reframed as medical issues.¹³

In the years immediately following the Habitual Drunkards Act, not all local authorities could offer a licensed home for inebriates. By 1890 only seven retreats had been licensed under the Act.¹⁴ Many female (and male) inebriates were held in prisons or asylums: the annual report of the Inspector of Retreats for 1893 estimated that around 6,000 women were housed in prisons rather than undergoing specialist treatment.¹⁵ Since the late 1870s a number of private homes for women inebriates were founded, including Tower House in Leicester and Page Green in Tottenham.¹⁶ As homes did not have to be licensed many operated independently to reduce their running costs. Under the Habitual Drunkards Act licences were ‘impressed with a stamp of five pounds and ten

¹⁰ See James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 59–72.

¹¹ Mariana Valverde, ‘Slavery from within’: The Invention of Alcoholism and the Question of Free Will’, *Social History*, 1997, 22, 251–68: 258.

¹² John Haddon, ‘On Intemperance in Women, with Special Reference to its Effects on the Reproductive System’, *BMJ*, 17 Jun. 1876, 1, 748–50: 749.

¹³ Rimke and Hunt, ‘From Sinners to Degenerates’: 72.

¹⁴ Wyatt Paine, *The Law of Inebriate Reformatories and Retreats, comprising the Inebriate Acts, 1879 to 1898, with copious notes and an appendix, containing acts, forms, rules, and regulations* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1899), 115; Anon., ‘Retreats under the Inebriates Acts’, *Journal of Mental Science*, 1890, 36, 239–41: 239.

¹⁵ Anon., ‘English Inebriate Hospitals’, *Quarterly Journal of Inebriety* (hereafter *QJI*), 1895, 17, 176–79: 178.

¹⁶ Anon., ‘Inebriate Asylums in Great Britain’, *QJI*, 1877, 1, 235.

shillings for every patient', a significant outlay for independent homes who might admit over 100 women per year.¹⁷

The difficulty of placing inebriate women under treatment was demonstrated by the case of Jane Elliott, charged with being drunk and disorderly by a Westminster court in 1880. The borough found itself facing a dilemma upon finding that it had no inebriate home to which Jane could be sent, a course of action urged by her husband. Instead, she was sent to the (unlicensed) St. James's Home for Female Inebriates in Kennington, where she was to stay for six months.¹⁸ With low cost inebriate homes for women in short supply, St. James's served a clear need: in 1883 the *BMJ* noted that the only 'cheap Homes' were Spelthorpe Sanatorium in Middlesex and St. James's.¹⁹ The latter was set up in 1876 by Charles and Wilhelmina Zierenberg, who had arrived in England from Germany in 1864. Looking out over Kennington Park, the Home aimed to reform women, removing them from the influence of drink and training them in domestic tasks. St. James's was not licensed because such 'an added expense would render [its] continuance impossible'.²⁰ Admission was via magistrates and missionaries or, for paying patients, by applying directly to the Zierenbergs with a recommendation from a clergyman or doctor. Like the Grove Retreat set up by the Manchester Women's Christian Temperance Association, St. James's boosted its finances via subscriptions and donations: adverts were placed in newspapers and a magazine sent to subscribers.²¹ This magazine, *Rescue the Perishing*, reveals a range of activities common to contemporary charitable ventures. These included a Temperance Thrift Loan Society, a Mission Labour Agency, and the sale of jewellery through the magazine's pages.²² The Zierenbergs, then, provided a range of services to people in the local area.

Women entering the Home were told they would not be allowed to leave or see visitors without the permission of the 'Lady Superior' (Mrs Zierenberg), and that the shortest time many could expect to remain was 12 months. St. James's came highly recommended, enjoying the support of the Earl of (later Lord) Shaftesbury, a noted philanthropist with interests in lunacy law and factory reform. By

¹⁷ For example Anon., 'Meetings of Charities. St. James's Home for Female Inebriates, Kennington Park', *Charity Organisation Reporter*, 1881, 10, 145–46: 145.

¹⁸ Anon., 'Homes for Inebriates', *The Lancet*, 11 Dec. 1880, 116, 951.

¹⁹ 'Member', 'A Female Inebriate', *BMJ*, 21 Jul. 1883, 2, 149.

²⁰ London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA) A/FWA/C/D70/2 St. James's Home for Female Inebriates and St. James's Mission Hall and Temperance Company (case 2786) (Hereafter 'St. James's Home.')

Vol. 2 1886–90. Letter from F.S. May to the COS, 25 Jan. 1887.

²¹ For example 'Charitable Appeals', *London Daily News*, 23 Dec. 1880, 6.

²² *Rules of the St. James's Temperance Thrift Loan Society, held at the St. James's Temperance Hall, Royal Road, Kennington Park, Lambeth, S.E.* (London, 1887); Untitled item, *Rescue the Perishing*, 1891, 49, 226; 'For Sale', *Rescue the Perishing*, 1889, 30, 71–72.

the early 1880s the Home encompassed four houses, two cottages, and an adjacent laundry.²³ ‘Better class’ private patients passed their time producing fine needlework, but most women worked in the St. James’s Sanitary Steam Laundry.²⁴ A visitor to the Home in 1878 reported that, although the premises could be larger, the women appeared contented, the bedrooms were airy and cheerful, and there was a small chapel where services were held twice daily.²⁵

As well as the Home, the Zierenbergs ran the nearby St. James’s Temperance Mission Hall, which provided meals and church services to the homeless, served as a men’s lodging house, and offered music-hall type entertainments.²⁶ The Hall was notorious with locals for the nuisance these entertainments apparently generated. Local residents claimed ‘that the behaviour outside the hall on Saturday nights was simply disgraceful’ on account of the ‘disorderly crowd of lads’ who gathered there.²⁷ A member of a local temperance committee ‘ridiculed the idea that [it] was carried on from philanthropic motives’.²⁸ That Mrs Zierenberg sold ginger beer and programmes at events suggested to the Chairman of the Licensing Committee that the enterprise was motivated by commercial rather than philanthropic feeling.²⁹ The Hall, closely linked to the Home and situated not far from it, also subverted models of the ideal inebriate retreat. This should be secluded, staffed by people who would act as moral exemplars, and ‘a strictly teetotal and Christian institution’.³⁰ The sing-a-longs at the Hall were far from ‘Christian’ according to complainants; Mrs Zierenberg was reported to have mockingly asked one man whether he ‘was too much of a saint’ to enjoy such entertainments.³¹

As this article will show, it was not only the Hall that attracted adverse attention. From the 1870s both it and the Home became subject to the scrutiny of the COS. Claudia Soares has documented the key features of St. James’s alongside Manchester’s Grove Retreat and Surrey’s St. Veronica’s.³² Soares’ concern is with how reformatory discipline and treatment were adapted to the inebriate

²³ *Hope for the Hopeless. An Account of St. James’s Home for Female Inebriates, Kennington Park, S.E.* (London, c.1880), 3–4.

²⁴ ‘Sanitary Steam Laundry’, *Rescue the Perishing*, 1890, 36, 117–18.

²⁵ W.E. Hubbard, Jun., ‘Home for Female Inebriates’, *The Woman’s Gazette; or, News about Work*, 1878, 3, 92.

²⁶ ‘Mission Work in Kennington. What is being done at St. James’s Hall’, *South London Record*, 20 Sept. 1890, 1; LMA A/FWA/C/D70/3 St. James’s Home Vol. 3 1890–91. Text of a speech delivered by Charles Carthew on 28 Jan. 1891.

²⁷ ‘Music and Dancing Licences’, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 Oct. 1892, 3; ‘County Council Licensing Committee’, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 Oct. 1893, 3.

²⁸ Anon., ‘Music, Dancing, and Theatre Licenses’, *The Temperance Chronicle: The Journal of the Church of England Temperance Society*, 20 Oct. 1893, 497–98: 497.

²⁹ ‘County Council Licensing Committee’.

³⁰ Norman Kerr, ‘The Treatment of Female Inebriety’, *QJ*, 1888, 10, 68–74: 72.

³¹ ‘The Zierenberg Libel Case’, *London Evening Standard*, 6 Dec. 1893, 3.

³² Claudia Soares, ‘The Path to Reform? Problematic Treatments and Patient Experience in Nineteenth-Century Female Inebriate Institutions’, *Cultural & Social History*, 2015, 12, 411–29.

home, particularly how these were differentiated on grounds of class and gender. The concern of the present article, however, is to examine St. James's Home specifically, in regard to medical ideas about inebriety but also in light of the COS investigation. In COS correspondence and the subsequent trial, the Zierenbergs and their staff drew upon contemporary medical perceptions of inebriety treatment to justify their practices, especially the need for seclusion. Given the scarcity of surviving records from inebriate homes, the article also demonstrates how archival material like that of the COS, together with press coverage, may provide a useful window onto the operations and contemporary perceptions of these institutions.

'I am not altogether satisfied with the Home': The COS investigates

The later nineteenth century was marked by growing unease about the operations of charities in London, as various organisations – secular and religious – clashed over who should oversee charitable apparatus.³³ In 1891 Walter Austin, whose East End 'Cottage Mission' regularly advertised for donations, was taken to court by the East London Waterworks Company to recover £40. It was suggested that Austin had more than adequate funds to pay his bill considering the generous donations his Mission attracted, and that he was merely profiteering under the guise of charity.³⁴ The periodical *Truth* had previously published a sceptical account of Austin's work, asking why he was living in fashionable Finsbury Square yet desperately appealing for funds in the press.³⁵ Writing in *The Contemporary Review* in 1896, economist and social scientist John Hobson argued that 'virtue ha[d] passed out of [charity] and left it a prey to those abuses which modern rational philanthropy [sought] to remedy'. Hobson expressed his disdain for 'a moneyed class, whose moral status [sought] to reconcile the sentiment of pity for vaguely known distress with a sensitive shrinking from closer personal contact with concrete cases of suffering'. It was these people, he said, who 'devitalised' charity, leaving it dangerously independent and open to abuse.³⁶ The COS, set up in 1869 under the direction of Helen Bosanquet and Octavia Hill, aimed to streamline charitable provision by preventing the overlapping of charitable organisations and the Poor Law, but also to detect the kind of activity that so concerned Hobson. The children's homes of Dr Barnardo were investigated by them in the 1870s, with concerns expressed about Barnardo's financial practices, medical qualifications, and practice of taking in children indiscriminately.³⁷ It was this sort of indiscriminate charity the COS particularly railed against: it threatened rational philanthropy,

³³ Koven, *Slumming*, 92–93.

³⁴ 'The London Cottage Mission', *The Times*, 14 Jan. 1891, 6.

³⁵ 'Mr. Walter Austin and his "Charities"', *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 5 Oct. 1890, 9.

³⁶ John A. Hobson, 'The Social Philosophy of Charity Organisation', *The Contemporary Review*, 1896, 70, 710–27: 710–11.

³⁷ See Gillian Wagner, 'Dr. Barnardo and the Charity Organisation Society: A Re-Assessment of the Arbitration Case of 1877' (unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1977).

ignored distinctions between the deserving and undeserving, and diverted scarce resources from those in genuine need. The COS also, however, had a growing reputation for ‘crush[ing] individuals or organisations of which they did not approve’, and by the 1880s was a notably conservative body in contrast to its more progressive origins.³⁸

In the mid 1870s the COS became interested in St. James’s, scrutinising its financial arrangements and treatment of residents. This was prompted by members of the public contacting the Society to express their concerns, and given further impetus by an article in the *St. James Gazette* of November 1885, ‘A Home for Female Inebriates’. This article was the first public, explicit, claim of a sustained culture of harm within the Home. The author said her experience there ‘recalled what [she] had read of prison procedure’, that the windows were painted over, and that ‘[i]n such an establishment any person ... might be readily hidden away’.³⁹ Although the Home was not named, it was clear to many readers which institution was being referred to; as one noted, ‘On looking at the Charities Register it seems evident that the Home described is that at St. James’s House Kennington Park’.⁴⁰

Many allegations noted overcrowding: the 1881 census lists 82 residents, aged 14 to 59, and the 1891 census 74.⁴¹ In 1882 the local police magistrate reported that there was insufficient space for the number of women living there, also noting that the bedroom doors had been removed.⁴² The COS received further information from former staff. The Society’s Chelsea branch had evidence from a woman who had ceased working at the Home ‘owing to the way in which it [was] managed’. She also alleged that donations were unnecessary, as the laundry covered all running costs.⁴³ Similar allegations surfaced in the local press. The Secretary of the Southwark Girls’ Rescue Society wrote to the *Daily Chronicle* to criticise them covering, in one column, the swindles of Austin, and in another advocating the work of the Zierenbergs. In no uncertain terms they said that St. James’s was nothing more than ‘a place where [Mr Zierenberg] gets poor girls in & makes them slave at laundry work without payment for months & years’.⁴⁴

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 179, 164.

³⁹ ‘A Home for Female Inebriates’, *St. James’s Gazette*, 2 Nov. 1885. Cutting in LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. The *Gazette* was not related to the Home.

⁴⁰ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. Letter from J.V. Holmes to the COS, 5 Nov. 1885.

⁴¹ Census (1881) RG11/551, 20–23; Census (1891) RG12/364, 3–5.

⁴² LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. Extract from a report collating the content of letters from local police magistrate George Chance, dated 20 Nov. 1882, cited in untitled COS document (8 Dec. 1882).

⁴³ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/4 St. James’s Home. Vol. 4 1890–91. Letter from M.C. McCallum to C.S. Loch, Feb. 1891. A report of the Home’s finances in 1881–1882 noted that the workroom and laundry netted the Home £869.16s.3d, a touch more than the income from residents’ fees (£833.15s.7d). See Anon., ‘Meetings of Charities’, *Charity Organisation Reporter*, 1882, 11, 166.

⁴⁴ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/2 St. James’s Home. Vol. 2. Letter from W.J. Stobart to the Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, 2 Oct. 1890.

More concerning were allegations of physical abuse. Mrs May Ann Leaf sent her servant to the Home, who told her that some inmates were kept on bread and water, there was insufficient food, and on one occasion she had been given 'such a strong dose of medicine ... that she fainted after taking it'.⁴⁵ One correspondent reported that the front door was kept locked and a man stationed in the hall to permit people in and out.⁴⁶ Some of the most damning evidence came from a woman who had been a paying resident. She described a gruelling day of work with few breaks and a meagre amount of food. Her bedroom housed eight women, with some free cases two to a bed. She also made allegations of physical abuse: 'I have seen blows struck and heard screams, and they would abuse one very much.'⁴⁷ Others reported that parts of the Home functioned as refractory rooms, including one measuring 17ft. by 4ft.⁴⁸ That there was a tension in the Home between what was considered appropriate discipline and what constituted abuse was suggested by an incident in 1883, when a woman was arrested for destruction of property within it. In custody she claimed she had been locked in a 'cell' for three days. The magistrate had seen this space, saying that

if she had been locked up in it for a short time only he could see no reason for the complaint. It would be too long, perhaps, to keep a person there for the time mentioned. It was, however, requisite, to carry out the discipline so necessary in such an establishment, to resort to some such punishment where parties misconducted themselves.⁴⁹

This need for a combination of care and discipline could be seen in the 1898 *General Regulations for the Management and Discipline of Certified Inebriate Reformatories*: 'It shall be the duty of all officers to treat inmates with kindness and humanity, to listen patiently to and report their complaints or grievances, and at the same time to be firm in maintaining order and discipline'.⁵⁰ The treatment of inebriety necessitated a degree of compulsion to check the drinker's cravings. As Soares notes, the operations of St. James's resembled reformatory discipline in many ways: strict daily timetables, significant workloads, and religious instruction.⁵¹ But it is important to note that *medical* conceptions of inebriety, as well as reformatory models, were also appealed to in order to

⁴⁵ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/2 St. James's Home. Vol. 2. Letter from Mrs May Ann Leaf to the COS, 13 Nov. 1889.

⁴⁶ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James's Home. Vol. 1 1876–85. Report of S.S. Harris, 1 Jun. 1881.

⁴⁷ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/4 St. James's Home. Vol. 4. Letter from S. Matthews to May F. Smith, May 1891.

⁴⁸ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 15 Jul. 1893, 16.

⁴⁹ 'St. James's Home for Inebriates. – Accusation against the Police', *South London Press*, 3 Mar. 1883. Cutting in LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James's Home. Vol. 1.

⁵⁰ Appendix in Paine, *Law of Inebriate Reformatories*, 170–71.

⁵¹ Soares, 'Path to Reform?': 419.

justify treatment within such institutions. Separating the inebriate patient from their usual environment and acquaintances was vital, as their ‘fractured brain ... requir[ed] the splint and bandage of an institution’.⁵² Yet – as the case of St. James’s shows – the same secrecy deemed vital for cure could also conceal an institutional culture of harm.

Segregative treatment was not of grave concern to those who felt minimal sympathy for drinkers. In an 1875 piece for British journal *The Sanitary Record*, ‘Inebriate Asylums or Hospitals’, American physician Henry Bowditch called for drunkards to be deprived of their basic civil rights. Scoffing at what he called ‘a very sickly sentimentalism about the drunkard’, Bowditch argued that confinement was the only successful course of action in many cases.⁵³ The need for the patient to ‘be under control’ was also stressed by William Wynn Westcott who asked whether there was ‘any remedy, other than seclusion and absolute prohibition from alcohol?’⁵⁴ Westcott conceded that seclusion should be employed in combination with medical treatment to manage withdrawal from alcohol. The ideal treatment facility, to Westcott, was one under the Superintendency of a physician and removed from the temptations of the city.⁵⁵ St. James’s was doubly problematic, then: it was run by a couple lacking any medical training and located in London close to a somewhat notorious Hall run by the same proprietors.

Medical ideas about inebriety did not preclude concern for patient’s morality – indeed the two were often bound together. President of the Society for the Study of Inebriety Norman Kerr – who had attended some St. James’s committee meetings⁵⁶ – wrote to the COS to express his concerns:

I formerly gave you a *very guarded approval* of the Home in question. The article referred [in the *St. James’s Gazette*] is, I am sure, exaggerated, & it must be remembered that one of the characteristics of dipsomania is *lying*. But I am not altogether satisfied with the Home. There is an obscurity about its conduct I don’t like, & it is overcrowded. Its claim to cure *nearly all* the cases is simply preposterous.⁵⁷

⁵² T.D. Crothers, *Inebriety: A Clinical Treatise on the Etiology, Symptomatology, Neurosis, Psychosis and Treatment and the Medico-Legal Relations* (Cincinnati: Harvey Publishing Company, 1911), 258.

⁵³ Henry I. Bowditch, ‘Inebriate Asylums or Hospitals’, *The Sanitary Record*, 28 Aug. 1874, 3, 141–46: 141.

⁵⁴ William Wynn Westcott, ‘Inebriety, its Causes and Cure’, *Journal of Mental Science*, 1900, 46, 653–73: 660.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 668.

⁵⁶ For example ‘Meetings of Charities’ (1881).

⁵⁷ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. Letter from Norman Kerr to C.S. Loch, 18 Dec. 1885. Emphases in original.

Like the tension between attentive care and repressive discipline, ideas about the moral characteristics of inebriates allowed Kerr to view them with a mixture of sympathy – as ill individuals in need of cure – and suspicion, as inexorable liars. Elsewhere, Kerr declared there was ‘no liar so unblushing as a female alcoholic liar. The very perception of truth, as it were, seemed to vanish.’⁵⁸ Kerr’s descriptions of women drinkers as slovenly – subtle changes to their appearance being perceptible to the doctor’s trained eye – betrayed a degree of moral judgement and affirmed the doctor’s role as expert detective.⁵⁹ For physician Samuel Wilks, drunkenness weakened the brain, rendering it easily ‘disturbed by any fresh excitant’.⁶⁰ J. Milner Fothergill was even more explicit in aligning change in ‘character’ with drinking: ‘The deceptiveness, the utter untrustworthiness, the subtle craft, the falsehood, which women of culture even, will develop under the influence of alcoholic cravings, have shocked many persons.’⁶¹ This individual moral failing could be a useful response to criticisms that inebriates were not cured by treatment, as the failure was articulated as one of personal control.⁶² In the case of St. James’s, worries about the Home’s curative potential were expressed by George Nelson of the Church of England Temperance Society, who said he had ‘never had the slightest faith in [the Home], or in the Corpulent Lady & Gentleman at the head of it’.⁶³ A local resident said that the inmates were ‘crowded together like pigs in a sty’, but that it was very difficult to get any firm evidence to back this up as the Zierenbergs had ‘won over to their side’ a number of local dignitaries.⁶⁴

Though it was impossible to say if it was an intentional move by the Zierenbergs, in many respects the Home resembled the previously-established St. James’s Diocesan Home for Penitent Women in Hammersmith, a home for ‘fallen women’ run by a Lady Superior and Sisterhood, and including a laundry.⁶⁵ Mrs Zierenberg adopted the title of Lady Superior, dressing in a ‘sort of conventual garb with hood and frill etc., and with rather a profusion of chains to which were hanging keys, a large Cross etc.’⁶⁶ Thus, the Zierenbergs gave their institution the semblance of a religious refuge, a move

⁵⁸ Norman S. Kerr, *Female Intemperance* (London: National Temperance Publications Depot, 1880), 8.

⁵⁹ Norman Kerr, ‘Female Intemperance’, in *Religious and Educational Aspects of Temperance* (London: National Temperance Publication Depot, 1884), 33. Cited in Julia Skelly, *Addiction and British Visual Culture, 1751–1919: Wasted Looks* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 7.

⁶⁰ Samuel Wilks, ‘Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System. Delirium Tremens’, *Medical Times and Gazette*, 1868, 2, 327–28: 327.

⁶¹ J. Milner Fothergill, ‘The Effect of Alcoholic Excess upon Character’, *The Sanitary Record*, 27 Jan. 1877, 6, 49–51: 49.

⁶² Virginia Berridge, ‘Morality and Medical Science: Concepts of Narcotic Addiction in Britain, 1820–1926’, *Annals of Science*, 1979, 36, 67–85.

⁶³ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/2 St. James’s Home. Vol. 2. Letter from George Nelson to C.S. Loch, 23 Jan. 1886.

⁶⁴ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. Letter from Rev. B. Dover to the COS, Dec. 1885.

⁶⁵ Anon., ‘The Hammersmith Home’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 1868, 26, 123–24.

⁶⁶ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James’s Home. Vol. 1. Report of S.S. Harris, 1 Jun. 1881.

that may have deterred suspicions of economic motive or too close an enquiry into the condition of the residents. Nevertheless, the volume of correspondence sent to the COS strengthened their resolve to conduct an investigation and after a round of interviews and correspondence with ex-staff, ex-residents, neighbours, and local officials, the Society completed their report in August 1891. The basic findings were distributed to relevant bodies including the British Women's Temperance Association, but the Society also placed small adverts in newspapers calling for 'persons receiving APPEALS on behalf of this Institution' to contact them.⁶⁷ Respondents received a copy of the report. In addition, the COS circulated the name of the Home on 'cautionary cards' listing suspect charities. Both the adverts and cards prompted more people to write to the Society, reporting regular requests for money from the Zierenbergs or asking for further details because they were in the habit of making donations. The COS's tactics might have netted them more evidence, but they relied on individuals contacting the Society directly. Neither the cautionary card nor the adverts seemed to worry the Zierenbergs, who had been aware for some time that they were the objects of the Society's watchful gaze. In 1885 Mrs Zierenberg wrote to Loch protesting that there was not, as the COS suspected, a financial connection between Home and Hall.⁶⁸ Upon completing their report, the COS received a letter from Home Treasurer Richard Cotton labelling their claims 'incorrect and impertinent', but not threatening further action.⁶⁹ In 1892, however, the Zierenbergs were moved to take action when allegations about St. James's were printed in a more public manner.

'A Home or a Gaol?' The *Truth* exposé and trial

Truth was a periodical run by journalist and Liberal MP Henry Labouchère that prided itself on exposing charlatans and swindlers, placing these exposés alongside Society gossip and political commentary. *Truth's* 'Scrutator' column set its sights on the Zierenbergs in December 1892, when it printed the first of a two-part piece, 'Is Zierenberg's a Home or a Gaol?' Noting the newspaper adverts, Scrutator launched into a vicious indictment of the Home, calling it a 'commercial undertaking', 'a prison', and 'a sweating den'.⁷⁰ In later pieces, Scrutator took a more personal line of attack, describing the Zierenbergs as 'two Germans, apparently of Jewish extraction', 'charity swindlers' cast in the same mould as Austin who knew 'all the tricks of the trade'.⁷¹ I have found no clear evidence that the Zierenbergs were Jewish, but it should be noted here that Labouchère was

⁶⁷ For example 'St James's Home', *The Times*, 10 Nov. 1892, 1.

⁶⁸ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/1 St. James's Home. Vol. 1. Letter from Wilhelmina Zierenberg to C.S. Loch, 4 Mar. 1885.

⁶⁹ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/5 St. James Home. Vol. 5 1891–92. Letter from Richard Cotton to the COS, 19 Aug. 1891.

⁷⁰ Scrutator, 'Is Zierenberg's a Home or a Gaol?', *Truth*, 8 Dec. 1892, 32, 1234–36.

⁷¹ Scrutator, 'Is the Zierenberg's Right Place a Home or a Jail?', *Truth*, 21 Dec. 1893, 34, 1337–40: 1337.

known to hold anti-Semitic views.⁷² This calls for caution in our assessment of the case: in Labouchère's indictments of the couple they closely conform to racist stereotypes of the money-hungry and untrustworthy Jew. The COS was at this time engaged in efforts to set the boundaries of 'true' rational philanthropy, and the similarities between the Zierenberg and Barnardo cases give us pause when considering accusations against St. James's. Koven theorises that Barnardo attracted the COS's attention due to his 'outsider' status within London philanthropic circles and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that a similar dynamic was present in the Zierenberg case.⁷³ With Jewish immigration to Britain increasing in the 1880s, it was perhaps unsurprising that *Truth* seized upon this timely case of a German immigrant couple to further Labouchère's anti-Semitic agenda. And, as in the Barnardo case, it was beneficial for the COS not to be directly involved in a legal battle, but to have the fruits of their investigatory labour revealed in *Truth's* pages.

Much of the information that *Scrutator* imparted was not novel, being drawn from the COS report, but *Truth* cast them in the register of new journalism. *Scrutator* claimed to have interviewed several 'ex-"Female Inebriates"' who told them that the Home was akin to a House of Correction. The piece concluded that the Home functioned as 'a sort of private casual ward, where any female waif who applies is received ... [but is] liable to find herself converted into a prisoner if she shows herself a useful worker'.⁷⁴ Although *Truth* recognised that St. James's likely served *some* recuperative purpose, it suggested this was a typical ruse of swindlers: 'do[ing] some work and mak[ing] some show' to make themselves credible.⁷⁵ *Truth* promised to fully expose the Zierenberg's operations in their second article. This never materialised, however – at least not in the form Labouchère had planned. A week later, *Scrutator* reported that a summons had been served on the Zierenbergs regarding the detention of a girl against her will. Less happily, the Zierenberg's solicitor, Cotton (also Treasurer), was commencing proceedings for libel against Labouchère. As the editor of a periodical renowned for scandal, Labouchère was no stranger to libel actions and presented this latest development as something of a triumph vindicating his journalistic methods.⁷⁶ Other sections of the press defended the Zierenbergs: the *Illustrated Police News* quoted Mr Zierenberg saying that he and his wife were the victims of 'wicked slanders and lies'.⁷⁷ *The Star* noted that *Truth* had a reputation for 'going for' institutions, while the *Evening News & Post* said that their representative

⁷² Claire Hirshfield, 'Labouchère, *Truth* and the Uses of Antisemitism', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 1993, 26, 134–42.

⁷³ Koven, *Slumming*, 113.

⁷⁴ *Scrutator*, 'Is Zierenberg's a Home or a Gaol?': 1235.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Scrutator*, 'Zierenberg', *Truth*, 15 Dec. 1892, 32, 1299.

⁷⁷ 'The St. James's Home for Female Inebriates', *Illustrated Police News*, 17 Dec. 1892, 3.

had found the Home in good order when calling unannounced.⁷⁸ One imagines that the Zierenbergs soon regretted their decision to proceed with the case as the ensuing trial brought a succession of witnesses to the stand who offered damning testimony. The trial began in July 1893 and lasted until December. It was covered extensively in *The Times* where readers were given intricate details about the Zierenberg's financial affairs as well as the state of women under their care.

One of the issues at the heart of the trial was the proper identification of inebriates. The cause célèbre of Scrutator's column was an incident suggesting the Home would take in anyone capable of work, inebriate or not. Two girls from Brighton had gone to London in search of work. Having run out of money and occupied themselves wandering in a park, they were directed to the Home by a policeman. Not realising that it was a home for inebriates, they entered for 12 months on the understanding that they would both receive a box of clothes and a good position at the end of their stay. Neither of the girls appeared to have a problem with alcohol. The fact that the girls were found in a park was not insignificant – the Habitual Drunkards Acts were expressly concerned with the riotous *public* behaviour that drunkenness could precipitate – but the girl's experience can also be seen in light of the directed attempts at 'rescue' that social purity organisations undertook with suspected prostitutes. Both inebriety and prostitution were rather malleable definitions in this period.⁷⁹ As Mariana Valverde has shown, many homes set up under the Habitual Drunkards and Inebriates Acts took a broad view of what constituted 'drunkenness', as legislation provided no concrete definition.⁸⁰ The homes, though housing some alcoholics, positioned themselves in a way that also allowed them to tackle immorality and insanity. Women's refuges had long 'provided a place for women lacking clearcut statuses and identities – women who were temporarily or permanently unclassifiable as honorable or dishonorable'.⁸¹ The muddying of the moral and the medical in discussions surrounding inebriety, positioning it as both disease and vice, put inebriate women on a par with other 'fallen' women, lacking in self-control and in need of reform. Working-class women, less able to conceal their drinking, were readily construed as drunken 'pests' who disrupted public space.⁸² The Zierenbergs were said to 'prowl around police-courts' looking for

⁷⁸ "'Home" or "Gaol"?', *The Star*, 8 Dec. 1892; 'Home or Prison?', *Evening News & Post*, 3 Dec. 1893, page nos unavailable. Cuttings in LMA A/FWA/C/D70/7 St. James's Home. Vol. 7 1892–93.

⁷⁹ For example David Taylor, 'Cass, Coverdale, and Consent: The Metropolitan Police and Working-Class Women in Late-Victorian London', *Cultural & Social History*, 2015, 12, 113–36.

⁸⁰ Valverde, "Slavery from within": 256.

⁸¹ Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), 102.

⁸² Thora Hands, 'Sobering Up the Magdalenes' Drunken Sisters: The Institutional Treatment of "Female Drunken Pests" in Scotland, 1900–15', *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 2013, 27, 62–81: 65.

women who could be argued to benefit from a stay at St. James's.⁸³ That the Home was rather loose in its definition of 'inebriate' was admitted at trial by attending doctor George Milson. When asked whether it was 'a home for inebriates' he responded, 'Yes, but of a particular class – fluctuating between the streets and the gaols'.⁸⁴ The two girls in a park fitted into broad categorisations of inebriety, undergirded by a suspicion of young single women in urban space who risked becoming involved in petty criminality or worse. Indeed, the connection between morality and marital status seemed implicit in the Home's organisation. During the trial, the judge asked Matron Annie Wigham what they called 'the better class' of patient, to which she replied 'Wives'. 'Whether drunk or sober?' joked the judge. 'Yes.'⁸⁵

As William Cohen notes in *Sex Scandal*, and Roger Smith shows in regard to nineteenth-century lunacy trials, criminal cases were a means by which specialist knowledge could be more widely circulated and the status of experts affirmed or contested.⁸⁶ During the trial the fact that Mrs Zierenberg did not have the requisite medical skills to identify an inebriate was directly addressed. When asked how she determined that a woman needed treatment she said that she did so 'by questioning them, and by a glance at their eyes and their whole aspect and appearance'.⁸⁷ The judge quipped, 'If you see a woman then you jump to the conclusion that she is an inebriate?'⁸⁸ The flexibility of the inebriate definition meant it could be appealed to regardless of medical skill; though the judge was unimpressed, Mrs Zierenberg's 'glance' was perhaps little different to Kerr's assessment of women's 'slovenly' appearance.

Certainly there were women in the Home with a history of intemperance, including Maggie Murphy whose repeated arrests appear to have been a regular diversion in local newspapers.⁸⁹ Newspapers were important elements of civic apparatus, acting to shame individuals and institutions and identifying certain public spaces as disorderly.⁹⁰ If the papers highlighted the individual 'bad behaviour' of women like Murphy, they also drew attention to misgivings about the Zierenberg's Hall and Home. The media coverage, content of the trial, *Truth* accusations, and COS report echoed

⁸³ 'Homes of Prisons' [sic], *The Star*, 21 Dec. 1893, 1.

⁸⁴ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 15 Jul. 1893, 16.

⁸⁵ 'Law Intelligence', *Morning Post*, 18 Jul. 1893, 3.

⁸⁶ William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Roger Smith, *Trial by Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

⁸⁷ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 12 Jul. 1893, 3.

⁸⁸ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 19 Jul. 1893, 13.

⁸⁹ 'The "Truth" Libel Action', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 Jul. 1893, 7; for example 'Maggie Murphy in the Dock', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 Apr. 1892, 3.

⁹⁰ Croll, *Civilizing the Urban*.

complaints that had been made against the Barnardo's homes and reported in the press: misappropriation of funds, abuse of residents, ignorance of medical and dietary requirements, and the adoption of false personas (in Barnardo's case a medical man, in Mrs Zierenberg's a religious figure and pseudo-medical authority).⁹¹ Labouchère had also mounted a campaign against Barnardo.⁹²

One of the clearest conclusions the COS came to in their report was that the Zierenbergs were 'under the guise of charity, conducting a remunerative business'.⁹³ The Zierenberg's story that they established the Home using personal funds and donations from banker Viscount David de Stern, was repeatedly ridiculed.⁹⁴ It was a running joke throughout the trial that anyone the Zierenbergs claimed had donated money was, alas, dead, and could not corroborate their story. The accounts had been burned or sold to the paper mill, and their accountant was censured for relying upon the word of Mr Zierenberg as to the accuracy of his ledgers.⁹⁵ Such lack of accounting transparency militated against efficient charity, as subscribers wishing to give to worthy causes were unable to make educated decisions.⁹⁶ It did not help their case that the Zierenbergs had a colourful business history: an unsuccessful wool shop in Pimlico, and a 'Fancy Needlework' business in Newgate Street that had burned down, the insurers refusing to pay out.⁹⁷ *Truth* constructed the Zierenberg's charitable zeal as simply another economically-motivated venture:

Mr. Viney [an accountant who had business with the Zierenbergs] inquired ... what they were going to do next. The reply of the lady was that she thought of starting a home for female inebriates. The last resource! Everything else having failed ... these two pauper aliens now embraced the sacred cause of philanthropy.⁹⁸

⁹¹ See Koven, *Slumming*.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹³ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/4 St. James's Home. Vol. 4. 'St. James's Home for Inebriate Women, Kennington Park, London, S.E.'

⁹⁴ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 1 Dec. 1893, 14; 'The Zierenberg Case – Charge of Perjury', *The Times*, 11 Jan. 1894, 5.

⁹⁵ 'Miscellaneous. Queen's Bench Division', *The Accountant Law Reports*, 26 Aug. 1893, 19, 131–36: 131.

⁹⁶ Anon., 'Weekly Notes. The Zierenberg Libel Case – Auditing', *The Accountant*, 1893, 19, 1072–73. Also see Anon., 'Weekly Notes. Dr. Barnardo's Homes', *The Accountant*, 1892, 18, 963–64.

⁹⁷ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/4 St. James's Home. Vol. 4. 'Draft report for Mr Prosser. St James's Home for Female Inebriates. Kennington Park, London, S.E.', undated.

⁹⁸ Scrutator, 'Zierenberg's Right Place': 1338.

In press coverage, references to Mrs Zierenberg's ample proportions provided a powerful visual representation of the two fattening themselves on the work of enslaved women who, it was said, they had no intention of helping either morally or medically.⁹⁹

Patrick McLaughlin and Valverde have argued that inebriate homes for women can be viewed as extensions of Magdalene homes for prostitutes, both aiming to seclude and transform women.¹⁰⁰ The presence of a laundry at St. James's makes this comparison explicit, and was a feature of the Home that was scrutinised during the trial. Work was recast as moral good in the Magdalene laundries – a means of rehabilitation and spiritual restoration.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the malleability of the inebriety definition allowed it to be adapted to changing economic needs while also having medical authority. In discussing inebriate homes Kerr positioned work as, on the one hand, a vital prop to recovery ('industry is the bulwark of temperance'), and on the other a practical necessity for homes that were financially self-supporting.¹⁰² In this respect the work of residents functioned like that of asylum inmates: rehabilitative therapy and a means of supplementing institutional resources. The Zierenberg trial took place as Magdalene laundries were coming in for criticism: reformers such as the Convent Enquiry Society, founded in 1889, asked why laundries attached to religious institutions were not covered by the Factory Acts and lobbied for their inspection.¹⁰³ Attempts to regulate these laundries were blocked by Irish MPs who judged that nuns – as representatives of Christ – could be trusted to do the right thing. Although some provisions of the Factory and Workshop Acts were extended to commercial laundries, those attached to institutions like St. James's remained exempt. During a 1901 parliamentary debate about regulating such laundries, the Zierenbergs were invoked as a cautionary example by MP John Burns:

Mr. Zierenberg posed as a philanthropist, and claimed to be a religious benefactor. He had a laundry in connection with his home, and how did he run that laundry? There was no inspection. He got seventy or eighty girls there, and some of them were working from eighteen to twenty hours, and in some cases even thirty hours, continuously. He

⁹⁹ For example 'Zierenbergs charged with Perjury', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 Jan. 1894, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick M. McLaughlin, 'Inebriate Reformatories in Scotland: An Institutional History', in S. Barrows and R. Room, eds, *Drinking Behaviour and Belief in Modern History* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 287–313; Valverde, "Slavery from within".

¹⁰¹ Mahood, *Magdalenes*, 87.

¹⁰² Kerr, 'Treatment of Female Inebriety': 71, 72.

¹⁰³ Rene Kollar Osb, *A Foreign and Wicked Institution? The Campaign against Convents in Victorian England* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 157.

actually got girls to stoke the boilers and look after the engines ... and they were kept in a shocking and disgraceful condition.¹⁰⁴

Burns' warning that charity may hide 'a multitude of industrial sins' would have resonated with those worried about the authenticity of charitable ventures.¹⁰⁵ In presenting itself as a religious institution, and avoiding systematic inspection under the Acts, St. James's managed to deter too much outside investigation into its affairs.

The laundry had symbolic significance, of course. Like Magdalene laundries that contained female sexuality, St. James's contained female inebriates whose sins were cleansed by domestic work. The clean laundry symbolised spiritual and moral reform, and was proof of a useful contribution to society (albeit one from which women were temporarily excluded). Carried out properly, work helped women recover their self-control and cultivate skills for a new start. The Zierenbergs, though, were accused of allowing women to languish in their 'diseased' state for their own monetary benefit; one ex-inmate said she received no help in finding a position upon leaving as they 'would give her nothing to start with'.¹⁰⁶ The Zierenberg's apparent hypocrisy was made manifest in the running of the laundry and house. It was noted at the trial that Mrs Zierenberg kept pigs in the yard where laundry was done, and – in contrast to the freshly laundered linen they spent their days producing – the residents had to keep clean using one bath in the basement and a limited number of towels shared between them (including women suffering from infectious diseases).¹⁰⁷

During the trial there were several instances in which medical expertise was used to justify disciplinary measures, or when medical attendance itself acted as a form of disciplinary apparatus. The Home had a medical attendant, who did not live on the premises but close enough to be called in at short notice and make regular visits. The lack of clinical records at many inebriate homes militates against understanding them as explicitly medical institutions, and indeed evidence from the Zierenberg trial suggests that the primary purpose of medical attendance at St. James's was to maintain order. Medical attendant Milson admitted he had threatened to send a patient to an asylum if she made herself 'unmanageable', testifying to the Home as one of several 'technologies of power' seeking to shape women's behaviour.¹⁰⁸ Another medical attendant, Charles Blades, gave testimony that betrayed limited sympathy with residents. Discussing the restriction of women's diets

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb 17 Jun. 1901 vol. 95 c655.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, c657.

¹⁰⁶ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/7 St. James's Home. Vol. 7. Letter from G. Paddon to the COS, 15 Dec. 1892.

¹⁰⁷ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1893, 13.

¹⁰⁸ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 21 Jul. 1893, 9. On technologies of power, see n.4.

to bread and water he said it would 'do them good in the state in which their lives are'.¹⁰⁹ The lack of bedroom doors and persistently open windows were, testified Milson, vital for women suffering from consumption – a not unreasonable assertion from a contemporary medical standpoint but one which also conveniently allowed for surveillance.¹¹⁰ A former porter said he had seen a woman held down in a chair while Blades 'slapped her face and forced an injector [for force-feeding] down her throat'.¹¹¹ Mrs Zierenberg admitted that women were sometimes physically struck: she had 'boxed the ears' of women, and her husband had hit women in the presence of herself and the Home's Chaplain who, she said, 'quite approved of it'.¹¹² Confinement could have serious health consequences for some residents. One woman had apparently broken a leg during an escape attempt, while others were said to have gone 'out of their minds' after long periods in a 'cupboard' employed as punishment.¹¹³ The power wielded by medical attendants in a closed institution was worrying, as was the apparent lack of concern for correctly identifying inebriates. In this sense, the Home operated much like other refuges for 'fallen women'. The supposed link between drinking and prostitution, and concern for moral contagion, were paramount at St. James's, operating alongside – but often coming to overshadow – medical definitions, as the final part of this article discusses.

The 'common good' and cultures of harm

The resemblance between St. James's and the Magdalene laundries is an instructive one. As Thora Hands shows in her study of female drinkers in twentieth-century Scotland, there is a long-standing tendency to group together women who prove troublesome in some way – drinking, stealing, begging, prostitution – on account of their perceived degradation and lack of self-control.¹¹⁴ Like the identification of prostitutes under the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, there was no clear legal definition of who constituted a 'drunkard' or 'inebriate', rather a sense that they would be instinctively identifiable. In this way, Mrs Zierenberg was not working on a vastly different basis than contemporary legal and medical authorities in her assessment of women's appearances. She may also have been working upon the basis that she was *preventing* harm. In the work of William Acton, prostitution was positioned as a sanitary issue to be dealt with via state regulation and medical intervention such as Contagious Diseases legislation. Acton had no hesitation in linking 'vice' in drink

¹⁰⁹ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1893, 14.

¹¹⁰ 'Action against Mr. Labouchere', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 23 Jul. 1893, 5.

¹¹¹ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1893, 13. Also see 'Law Intelligence', where it was noted that a woman had been 'threatened' with the stomach pump.

¹¹² 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 12 Jul. 1893, 3.

¹¹³ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1893, 14; 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1893, 13.

It is important to note that some former patients at the trial gave positive testimony of the Home. See 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 19 Jul. 1893, 13; 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 22 Jul. 1893, 12.

¹¹⁴ Hands, 'Sobering Up the Magdalenes' Drunken Sisters': 65.

to more serious moral failings; discussing the causes of prostitution, he cited 'love of drink, love of dress, [and] love of amusement'.¹¹⁵ That one could identify and 'save' at-risk women was the rationale of many social purity organisations who presented 'rescue' in broad terms, including preventing harm that had not yet occurred.¹¹⁶

The Zierenbergs and their staff made a clear connection between drinking and prostitution, invoking a slippery slope argument in the vein of Acton by insinuating that drinking could lead women to be mistaken for prostitutes. In 1889 *Rescue the Perishing* suggested that the latest Whitechapel murder was a consequence of the victim – 'over-fond of the drink' – venturing out at night to '[indulge] her appetite'.¹¹⁷ The Home's chaplain Rev. Dr Gatchell was particularly forthright, saying that any women who found themselves in an inebriate home were – if not completely lost – well on the road to moral and spiritual ruin. When asked if he was aware that some of the inmates were prostitutes, Gatchell declared that he 'regarded them all as prostitutes. Habitual drinking always leads to impurity'.¹¹⁸ Justifying the confinement of women in refractory rooms, he stated: 'Considering that we have to deal with the scum of the earth, we cannot act on ordinary rules'.¹¹⁹ Evidence from inebriate homes elsewhere suggests that the connection between inebriety and prostitution was often overblown; in a sample from Farmfield Reformatory in Surrey less than a quarter of women had convictions for prostitution noted in their records.¹²⁰

Though Acton may have agreed with her selection policy, Mrs Zierenberg's lack of rigor in determining women's status was worrying to the COS: 'In three instances within the knowledge of the Society young girls who were not inebriates, were admitted'.¹²¹ This careless admissions policy was concerning not simply from the perspective of medical expertise or the girls' liberty, but touched upon broader anxieties about moral contagion. The sense that 'immoral' women could be corrupting influences can be glimpsed throughout the late nineteenth century, as institutions from workhouses to reformatories sought to separate respectable and unrespectable.¹²² Although the

¹¹⁵ William Acton, *Prostitution considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects, in London and other large cities and garrison towns: with proposals for the control and prevention of attendant evils* (London: J. Churchill, 1870), 165.

¹¹⁶ Mahood, *Magdalenes*, 159–60.

¹¹⁷ 'A Warning from Whitechapel', *Rescue the Perishing*, 1889, 29, 57–58: 57.

¹¹⁸ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1893, 14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ G. Hunt, C. Mellor, and J. Turner, 'Wretched, Hatless and Miserably Clad: Women and the Inebriate Reformatories from 1900–1913', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1989, 40, 244–70: 262.

¹²¹ 'Draft report for Mr Prosser.'

¹²² For example Maria Luddy, "'Abandoned Women and Bad Characters": Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Women's History Review*, 1997, 6, 485–504: 492; Teresa Ploszajska, 'Moral Landscapes and

Matron of St. James's claimed women were grouped by age and class, stories of prostitutes being accommodated alongside young girls – sometimes in the same bed – caused consternation.¹²³ This indiscriminate social mixing created, said *The Star*, 'an atmosphere fatal to morality'.¹²⁴ Besides being corrupting influences, inebriates and prostitutes were viewed to some extent as irredeemable: the 'fall' of the prostitute was proof of the impossibility of her redemption, and the grip of alcohol addiction signalled a defective willpower that would require lifelong vigilance.¹²⁵ The latter speaks to contemporary gendered ideas about inebriety; Patricia Prestwich notes that in late nineteenth-century French psychiatry alcoholism was not recognised as a 'disease' among women as it was among men.¹²⁶ We might expect this differential outlook to be reflected in treatment options that grouped together women drinkers with other manifestations of 'disruptive' femininity. At St. James's the 'inebriate home' became a site where inebriate women, but also single unemployed women and prostitutes, could be contained.

Women who found themselves in such an institution due to their personal behaviour were both at risk and a risk to others. The recovery of women, a duty to society as well as the individual, was a transformative process that had to be carried out with a degree of secrecy in order to be effective. The need to isolate inebriates was implicit in Habitual Drunkards legislation: it was necessary to contain the individual due to their inability to manage their own affairs. In theory, homes like St. James's were voluntary, but in practice residents could find it difficult to leave if they wished; as the Lambeth magistrate put it during the trial, 'It was partly voluntary and partly not'.¹²⁷ Visitors were admitted to the Home on the second Wednesday of every month, but some friends and relatives claimed even this meagre right had been denied.¹²⁸ On leaving her 14 year old daughter there on the understanding that she could see her every visiting day, Mrs Mary Ann Jones testified that she had never had a letter from her, though by the time of the trial her daughter was 19 years old.¹²⁹ The idea that women were more at risk from drinking, and posed risk to others, justified such long periods of incarceration; indeed the inspector of retreats and former Superintendent of Dalrymple Home, R.W. Branthwaite, claimed there was 'little good' to be had from treatment of less than 18

Manipulated Spaces: Gender, Class and Space in Victorian Reformatory Schools', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1994, 20, 413–29: 424–25.

¹²³ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 19 Jul. 1893, 13. Several of the Home's Matrons were ex-patients.

¹²⁴ 'Homes of Prisons' [sic].

¹²⁵ For example Anon., 'Curability of Women Inebriates', *QJ*, 1903, 25, 182–83.

¹²⁶ Patricia E. Prestwich, 'Female Alcoholism in Paris, 1870–1920: The Response of Psychiatrists and of Families', *History of Psychiatry*, 2003, 14, 321–36: 334.

¹²⁷ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 15 Jul. 1893, 16.

¹²⁸ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1893, 14.

¹²⁹ 'Queen's Bench Division', *The Times*, 2 Dec. 1893, 3; "'Truth" Libel Case', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 3 Dec. 1893, 2.

months.¹³⁰ The inebriate reformatories set up under the 1898 Act, by isolating women, 'sought to reclaim them as the future wives and mothers of a healthier Imperial race'.¹³¹ Degeneration theory had promoted the idea of alcoholism as one step on the road to national decline, fuelling anxieties about the occasional vice of drunkenness developing into the fatal disease of inebriety and thereby justifying heavy-handed seclusion measures.¹³² The influence of degenerationist thinking – or segregative solutions aligned with a disease model of inebriety – should not be over-emphasised, however. Anxieties about inebriate women were heavily indebted to more general beliefs about morality and liberty in the period. This encompassed concerns about the moral and physical state of inebriate women, and their disruptive potential. Linda Mahood argues that a function of Magdalene home secrecy was not simply to shield women from the corrupting influences of the world, but to spare others the inconvenience of 'experiencing' the women's presence.¹³³ The locked doors and fenced-in yard of St. James's could be beneficial to those outside the institution, as well as those within it.

Ideas of liberty, like concepts of addiction, were gendered but also classed. Working-class women's movements, for instance, were shaped and curtailed by the reforming efforts of middle-class women philanthropists.¹³⁴ As Valverde notes in regard to treatment for alcoholism in the late nineteenth century: 'The differential treatment programmes provided for different classes and genders in the UK both reflected and reproduced certain highly political assumptions about the unequal distribution of the preconditions of liberal subjectivity among the population.'¹³⁵ In depriving inebriates of their liberty, institutions like St. James's were believed to be securing the liberty of the population at large. The inebriate, in contrast, 'abuse[d] their liberty' and was 'a menace to society'.¹³⁶ From the 1870s a great deal of charitable work was predicated on the notion of the 'common good'.¹³⁷ Yet it was a notion that coincided with increasing unease about the practices of charitable bodies. Whilst the detention of inebriates was accepted by many medical men as a necessary part of treatment, the Zierenberg's indiscriminate taking-in of any woman or girl who came their way subverted the aims of charitable provision as articulated by the COS, and cheapened

¹³⁰ Anon, 'Inebriate Retreats and Reformatories in England', *QJ*, 1904, 26, 1–16: 2.

¹³¹ Hunt et al, 'Wretched, Hatless and Miserably Clad': 253.

¹³² For example Edward M. Brown, "'What shall we do with the Inebriate?'" Asylum Treatment and the Disease Concept of Alcoholism in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 1985, 21, 48–59.

¹³³ Mahood, *Magdalenes*, 80–83.

¹³⁴ Helen Rogers, 'Women and Liberty', in Peter Mandler, ed., *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 125–55: 126–28.

¹³⁵ Valverde, "Slavery from within": 262.

¹³⁶ Anon., 'Inebriate Retreats and Reformatories': 7.

¹³⁷ Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 1.

the value of medical treatment for inebriety. In the Zierenberg's lax approach to admission, anxieties were raised about 'innocent' women being admitted to an institution that could prove fatal to their morality – recalling concerns surrounding wrongful asylum confinement earlier in the century.¹³⁸ The relative freedom from official inspection that inebriate homes enjoyed contrasted with the situation of asylums and prisons (a point also made about convents).¹³⁹ In part, this freedom of operation was sanctioned by ideas about inebriety as a moral failing and socially-facilitated condition: it required an extended period away from society, alcohol, and one's usual acquaintances. Prying into the affairs of St. James's was further deterred by the sense of shame surrounding women's alcoholism. Once the Home attracted press attention, the inevitable public scandal likely deterred families and residents from coming forward; a letter to the COS from a man whose wife had been in St. James's made clear that he would not allow the Society to interview her.¹⁴⁰

In their summing up, the jury in the Zierenberg case (who took 20 minutes to decide in Labouchère's favour) urged that all homes should be licensed under the Habitual Drunkards Act. The Zierenberg case should not be used to suggest that any unlicensed inebriate home was a cover for abuse and profiteering, and we should bear in mind the serious possibility that the Zierenbergs were innocent of many of the charges made against them. Nevertheless, the case highlights how late nineteenth-century legislation – encouraging the provision of institutions that were not subject to regular inspection and which relied on the seclusion of inmates for their efficacy – may have facilitated a culture of harm. Historical evidence shows that such legislation could have a disproportionate impact on women. The 1898 Inebriates Act allowed local authorities to set up reformatories for habitual drunkards that could be used in place of a prison stay. A significant proportion detained under this Act were women.¹⁴¹ The limited spread of these reformatories, though – just 14 established by World War One¹⁴² – was due to many of the same issues that lay behind the introduction of the Act, namely an unwillingness on the part of local authorities to pay for inebriate treatment. By this point, objections to inebriate reformatories also indicate growing concerns about the deprivation of personal liberty – a prominent issue in the Zierenberg case. As knowledge of life inside such institutions spread in press and published accounts, the transformative impact of the

¹³⁸ For instance Peter McCandless, 'Dangerous to themselves and others': The Victorian Debate over the Prevention of Wrongful Confinement', *Journal of British Studies*, 1983, 23, 84–104.

¹³⁹ Osb, *Foreign and Wicked Institution?*: 159. Also see Anon., 'Occasional Notes of the Quarter: The Zierenberg Case', *Journal of Mental Science*, 1894, 40, 251–52.

¹⁴⁰ LMA A/FWA/C/D70/3 St. James's Home. Vol. 3. Letter from Walter Billson to the COS, 6 Apr. 1891. Also see Mark Edward Lender, 'A Special Stigma: Women and Alcoholism in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries', in David L. Strug, S. Priyadarsini and Merron M. Hyman, eds, *Alcohol Interventions: Historical and Sociocultural Approaches* (New York: Haworth, 1986), 41–57.

¹⁴¹ Hunt et al, 'Wretched, Hatless and Miserably Clad'.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*: 245.

inebriate home came to be doubted. It was difficult to justify them as specialist medical facilities when many operated on similar principles to prisons and reformatories: refractory rooms, diets of bread and water, and minimal medical treatment.

At the end of 1893, with the trial over, the front page of *Rescue the Perishing* made a plea for donations, stating that St. James's had been 'cruelly and undeservedly attacked by the Charity Organisation Society'.¹⁴³ It would be the last issue of the magazine as the Home closed soon after. In a Commons sitting of 19 December, members discussed whether anything was being done to secure the liberty of those women still in the Home. The Home Secretary Herbert Henry Asquith noted that none of the women were being held there against their will and that they may 'come out when they please[d]'.¹⁴⁴ What Asquith failed to appreciate was the lack of provision for these women. Around 30 of the inmates had left by early January 1894, with another 40 yet to depart. Although some were offered work in the laundry, which was taken over by a commercial company, others would have found themselves on the streets, possibly with no friends or family to assist them after spending months or years in the Home.¹⁴⁵ The trial had done little to provoke any serious discussion about inebriety among women. Frances Finnegan notes, in relation to the female penitentiary movement, that '[f]ew questioned the morality of consigning "fallen" women ... to penitentiaries; and there was no public outcry or parliamentary debate about [these women] spending years, or sometimes even lifetimes, in unregulated and supposedly "short-term" homes'.¹⁴⁶ Like the female penitentiary or Magdalene home, St. James's functioned as a site of concealment. Upon its closure the women within it remained almost as invisible as they had been within its walls. With the trial concluded and the Zierenbergs publicly vilified, the women's plight swiftly disappeared from the newspapers, while the Zierenbergs remained figures of ridicule.¹⁴⁷ The conclusion of Rachel Ginnis Fuchs comes to mind here, from her work on unmarried pregnant women in nineteenth-century Paris: 'The women are illuminated only when on stage with people who ran these institutions'.¹⁴⁸ During the trial ex-residents took the stand to offer testimony that repeatedly cast the spotlight back on the Zierenbergs, a phenomenon that – considering the shame surrounding alcoholism – might have had

¹⁴³ *Rescue the Perishing*, 1892, 61, 315–16.

¹⁴⁴ HC Deb 19 Dec. 1893 vol. 19 c1763–64.

¹⁴⁵ 'Closing of the Zierenberg Home', *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 6 Jan. 1894, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalen Asylums in Ireland* (Piltown: Congrave Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁴⁷ For example, a satirical concert programme in *Fun*: 'Home, Sweet Home' was to be sung by Mr. Zierenberg, accompanied by his wife. 'Grand Cosmopolitan Concert', *Fun*, 1894, 59, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 5.

benefits for the embarrassed witnesses, but that nevertheless served to eclipse the physical and emotional suffering of residents.

Conclusions

Examining the Zierenberg case, it is possible to identify two cultures of harm: one in regard to charity in general, another in regard to the Home specifically. The fact of the Zierenberg case that elicited most concern among the press and COS was the possibility that charity was not always sincere. The *Daily Telegraph* reminded readers that ‘professions of philanthropy and religious zeal do not necessarily imply the presence of all the cardinal virtues’.¹⁴⁹ In supporting charities and philanthropic efforts, they said, ‘the pains and trouble involved in finding out whether a particular object is worthy of support are too often shirked’ and it was for this reason that journalists like Labouchère were of such inestimable value.¹⁵⁰ The central concern was to alleviate the worries of the charitable donor and ensure that donations reached genuinely needy cases. Charitable giving was, for many, something done at a distance. As Koven puts it, ‘the desire to love the poor and to discipline their disruptive power: these seemingly opposed impulses were tightly and disconcertingly bound to one another.’¹⁵¹ Secrecy was desirable in the management of inebriety – subscribers did not necessarily wish to ‘experience’ these women directly – but it was less desirable when those subscribers wanted to know how their money was spent. In cloaking the Home in a shroud of secrecy – restricting visitors and locking doors – the Zierenbergs were acting in line with medical guidance on inebriety treatment, but at the same time potentially doing harm to other charities as they planted a seed of doubt in donor’s minds that philanthropic enterprises were not always what they seemed.

Within the Home, a more explicit culture of harm was identified. This was partly moral, on account of indiscriminate social mixing: ‘innocent’ young girls accommodated alongside prostitutes, and the admission of women who had never struggled with alcohol. This potential for moral harm did not on its own discredit the work of the Zierenbergs, who could argue that such problems were due to the fact that they were working with limited space; indeed, overcrowding could be a convincing appeal for further donations. More concerning was the physical harm that many claimed to have undergone or witnessed, often justified by the presence of medical authority in the figures of Blades, Milson, or the pseudo-medical authority of Mrs Zierenberg. Accounts of women being struck, force-fed, subsisting on meagre rations, working gruelling shifts in the laundry, and sharing baths and beds

¹⁴⁹ Editorial, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Dec. 1893, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Koven, *Slumming*, 284.

suggested that the Zierenberg's presentation of the Home as a treatment facility was mere pretence, a cover for an exploitative commercial concern. As a place for the recovery of inebriate women, St. James's drew upon long-established ideas about 'fallen' women as well as contemporary medical theories about alcoholism to justify its secretive operations. Although it was an anomaly in the attention given to it by the COS and *Truth* – and we should, again, bear in mind the possibility of the Zierenberg's innocence – the case of St. James's demonstrates how a culture of harm may have been sustained both by contemporary ideas about propriety and immorality, but also medical advice that emphasised seclusion as a necessary part of inebriety treatment.

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