CONCLUSION

Victorian social cohesion depended to a significant degree on drink. Those who held power, within Norwich and elsewhere, were able to use working-class dependence on the consumption of beer to maintain social order and control. In Norwich and other urban centres, one consequence of urban growth in the nineteenth century was the expansion in the supply of alcoholic drink to satisfy the needs of this enlarged population. The drinking place was a social necessity that became ever more important. If the Victorian period can be seen as a time of consolidation when a social order was developed appropriate to an urban, industrial, capitalist society, then this process was itself dependent, to some degree, on the addiction of the majority of the population to society's legal drug, alcohol.

The working classes needed their public houses and beerhouses. They made their meaning in life in response to poverty, lack of education, and unhealthy living and working conditions. Inadequate sanitation and water supply problems meant that beer answered a dietary need for a liquid that was safe to drink in a society where an alternative such as tea only became affordable and acceptable to increasing numbers later in the century. Depressant comfort came directly from their consumption of alcoholic drink. The ambience of their drinking places brought further social comforts. In Norwich, as in Bradford, Portsmouth, London and other urban centres, most social and political functions were connected with the public house. It served as a recreation centre, a meeting place, and sometimes as a transport centre. Its social role remained significant throughout the late-Victorian period even as changes in transport and diversification of leisure-interests began to broaden working-class horizons.

The ‘local’ was a key social institution. Most public houses in Norwich experienced sufficiently long periods of publican stability to have played an important role in the development of working-class communities.

The drinking place remained the main leisure-time location for the working classes in part because the rate of urban growth in industrial Britain produced a complex nineteenth century housing problem that remained intractable. The public houses and beerhouses provided both public spaces when these were unavailable elsewhere, and relief from the squalor of rented accommodation. In these circumstances, Victorian social cohesion depended perhaps as much on the supply and consumption of beer as the legislative measures passed at Westminster or agreed within city councils.

Social cohesion was also helped by the key political role that drink and the drinking place played for much of the period. In Norwich, as elsewhere, sections of the urban elite used the working-class dependence on drink to their own political advantage at election time through bribery, treating, and the control of organised gangs of ‘roughs’. These traditional practices appeared corrupt to those seeking reform but they were difficult to eradicate as is indicated by the two Royal Commissioners’ Reports on electoral malpractice in Norwich in the 1870s.

Social cohesion depended on effective interfaces between the urban elite and the working-class majority, and the drinking place and its regulation served a vital role in this respect. Such an overview of drink, drinking, and drinkers by the elite citizens of Norwich was an exercise in social control. In fact, there was little overt interference with the infrastructure of drinking. Although Norwich had the highest density of drinking places to population in England, the urban elite in the 1870s was proud that the city could boast the lowest rate of

drunkenness. Those who held power could congratulate themselves on their increasing control over the drinking habits of both the working-class majority and the working-class members of the police that the elite had set up as an agency of social control.

The infrastructure of drinking in Norwich was effective not least because brewers were key members of the urban elite and had influential roles within the Watch Committee, the employer of the Police Force, and other local government committees. Members of particular brewing families felt called by a sense of duty and business acumen to involve themselves in the polity of Norwich. Their insistence on the values of deference and conservatism reinforced the social control exercised by the elite and so further deepened the social cohesion that had been in part developed by the consumption of the beer they brewed and the attractions of the drinking houses they supplied and owned.

Yet there were splits within the elite over the issue of drink. Commanded to show love and compassion for their neighbour by the teachings of the Christian faith and yet concerned to increase their own and the nation's wealth, those who had wealth and power argued and divided. The Temperance Movement developed as a consequence of the challenge to traditional Christian ethics presented by the excessive consumption of drink in this new industrial and urban context. For many supporters of Temperance, the sin of excessive drinking provided the explanation for the poverty and lack of virtue they identified within the working class. By 1901, Norwich - like other urban areas - was becoming a more sober, compassionate and just society. But this was not due to the victory of Temperance but rather to a shift in the 'structure of feeling' that saw a wider sense of social responsibility, shaped by the traditional Christian ethic of care for those in need, becoming more acceptable within the ranks of the elite. Solutions to poverty and disease were now seen in terms of municipal and

state schemes for improvements in living conditions and health. A measure of redistribution of wealth was regarded as appropriate.

These are the conclusions of this historical study that has been concerned to incorporate an important lesson of the 'new cultural history': the need to keep the focus on how people actually put together and made sense of what they were experiencing. I have avoided explanations that depend on conceptual structures that are too rigid and therefore lacking in subtlety and depth. The use of sources such as the local press, the surviving minutes books of local government committees, licensed victuallers' registers and decennial census returns, has helped develop insights into understanding the role of drink in Victorian Norwich in particular and the process of social transformation in the Victorian world in general.

Asa Briggs, in the 1950s, argued that English Victorian cities 'responded differently to the urban problems which they shared in common'. Further research centred on the role of drink in urban centres will help establish whether, and in what circumstances and to what degree, Norwich was different from - or similar to - other urban centres in its response to the issue of drink. The argument of this thesis is that drink was a means of developing and maintaining social cohesion not only in Norwich but also in other cities and towns. Whatever the differences between municipalities in their responses to urban growth and the development of working-class communities, the drinking habits of the working class provided an opportunity for social control and policing that was common to all urban elites. More research can establish the extent to which advantage was taken of this opening. It can also help answer such questions as how typical was either the involvement of Norwich brewers in urban politics or the mutual Christian respect of some Norwich Temperance leaders and brewers for each other. In Liverpool, the antagonism between temperance and drink interests was more

marked but it seems unlikely to have affected the role of drink as an agency for social cohesion and therefore as a vital element in the process of social transformation in the Victorian world.