

**THE HISTORY OF LIQUOR  
LICENSING IN  
ENGLAND, PRINCIPALLY  
FROM 1700 TO 1830**

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The History of Liquor Licensing in England, Principally from 1700 to 1830 by Sidney Webb & Beatrice Webb

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BY

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## PREFACE

IT is needful to preface this little book with an explanation. Four years ago we began an elaborate investigation into English Local Government during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Our task quickly divided itself into two parts. We had first to discover the structure of local government, to unravel and describe the exact constitution and working all over the country of the Open and Select Vestries, the Manorial Courts, the Commissioners of Sewers, the various kinds of statutory bodies established under special Acts, the County Justices in Petty and Quarter Sessions, and the Municipal Corporations. We had then to classify local government according to function, and to treat, one by one, such different public services as the Relief of Destitution, the Prevention of Crime, the Cleaning and Paving of Streets, the



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Regulation of Trade, the Maintenance of Churches, Harbours, Docks, Roads, and Bridges, and the raising of a municipal revenue by duties and tolls, rates and assessments. The results of this investigation into both structure and function, for the period up to the reforms of 1832-35, we hope to publish in the course of 1904. Meanwhile it has been suggested to us that our chapter on the Regulation of the Liquor Traffic, especially its hitherto unknown episode of 1786-87, with the dramatic suppression of licensed houses without compensation, might be specially instructive at this juncture, and that it may interest readers who would not care to study the whole range of English Local Government. The drawbacks of separate publication are considerable. In the course of our narrative we have constantly referred to contemporary facts dealt with in other chapters, such, for instance, as the diversity in character and procedure of the different benches of Justices of the Peace in urban and rural districts, in London and the municipal corporations. These facts will not necessarily be known to the general reader. Moreover, for students mainly interested in the

modern controversy, a mere shred of history cut out of its context, beginning at 1700, and ending abruptly at 1830, cannot provide satisfactory reading. The first of these drawbacks we have sought to meet by appending many footnotes to the text. The second we have tried to diminish, by prefixing a short historical introduction, and appending a summary of licensing legislation since 1830, drawn from obvious sources.

With this explanation of some of its imperfections, we offer the following sketch of what did happen between 1700 and 1830, as possibly contributing towards an understanding of the present problem. We carefully abstain from pointing any moral or drawing any conclusions as to present day policy.

We must add that we are indebted for the fulness of detail and richness of variety in our work to our two zealous and able assistants and colleagues, Mr. F. H. Spencer, and Miss Amy Harrison, B.A., D.Sc. (now Mrs. Spencer). Nor would the work have been possible but for the treasures of the British Museum, and, in particular, its invaluable col-

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lection of old provincial newspapers, which it was, at one time, actually proposed to disperse! We venture to express our strongest hopes that whatever else is sent away, these files of old provincial newspapers—without which the social history of England cannot possibly be written—will be kept at Bloomsbury, where they are accessible to the historical student, and where (as it is privately admitted) there is ample accommodation for them.

SIDNEY AND BEATRICE WEBB.

41 GROSVENOR ROAD, WESTMINSTER,  
*September 1903.*