

“Apostle of Temperance”: John Saunders and the Early History of the Temperance Movement in New South Wales

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Abstract

Existing histories of the early temperance movement in New South Wales all adopt broad, structural approaches, constructing explanatory narratives that focus variously on issues of class, social status and secularisation to explain the rise of the movement in the early 1830s and its turn toward total abstinence in the final years of that decade. This thesis examines the writings and reported actions of a key leader in the movement, John Saunders, in order to complement and, where necessary, complicate the already-existing histories. What emerges is a case study in the complex interaction between class, status and religious belief within the understandings and motivations that drove the movement, with broader implications for our understanding of religion and secularism in nineteenth-century Australia. While issues of class and social status were undeniably prominent within the rationale and rhetoric of the movement, neither of these factors on its own is sufficient to explain the motivations and behaviour of those involved. Nor does the theory that the early temperance movement was driven by a fundamentally secular ideology of “moral enlightenment” allow sufficient room for the multi-layered and carefully-articulated combination of enlightenment ideals and evangelical convictions within the thinking of leaders such as Saunders.

Declaration of originality

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Introduction

The 1830s in New South Wales saw the emergence of a burgeoning new temperance movement,¹ formed in response to social problems that were perceived by many as being the consequence of excessive consumption of distilled spirits. The original temperance societies encouraged their members to abstain from spirits and advocated moderation in relation to other forms of alcohol. By the mid 1840s, however, there had been a rapid and emphatic shift towards a position of total abstinence from all alcohol; a second wave of “total abstinence” groups was formed, and the membership and influence of the original Temperance Society declined sharply.

Historians who have examined the early history of the temperance movement in New South Wales have offered various explanations for these two developments. One approach, the most influential example of which can be seen in the work of Michael Roe, adopts a history-of-ideas perspective, and seeks to explain the rise of the temperance societies and the shift toward total abstinence within a larger secularisation narrative; a second, exemplified by the work of Elizabeth Windschuttle, analyses the developments through the lens of class conflict; and a third shifts the focus away from class struggle toward status politics. In this thesis, I will be examining the evidence of the writings and reported actions of one of the key leaders of the movement during this period, John Saunders, to explore the extent to which each of the above explanations fits with the way in which he understood his own actions, and the ways in which they were understood by his contemporaries.

The beginnings of the temperance movement in New South Wales

The temperance movement that emerged in New South Wales in the 1830s was an offshoot of the groups that had been forming in America and the United Kingdom in the early nineteenth century.² Attitudes towards alcohol (in particular, spirits) and

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, “temperance” with a lower case “t” will refer to the movement in general, including both “spirits only” and “teetotaler” societies.

² See Brian Howard Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872*, 2nd ed. (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1994) for a comprehensive account of the English movement, as well as M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chap. 4; Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up:*

drunkenness were changing and more people saw alcohol as an inherently addictive substance, responsible for a myriad of social problems.³ By the 1820s, news of the temperance societies in England and America had reached New South Wales and agitation to start local groups began.⁴ Newspapers reported favourably on activities of the temperance movement overseas,⁵ and in some cases made direct appeals to their readers to start similar groups.⁶

In New South Wales the first preliminary meeting occurred in October 1833, soon after the first groups had been formed in Tasmania.⁷ William Pascoe Crook chaired the meeting and sixty members signed up immediately.⁸ At the first official meeting, the following May, there were already more than two hundred members.⁹ Within a year a number of auxiliary societies had also been established,¹⁰ and the membership had grown to over four hundred.¹¹

The composition of the original Temperance Society was similar to that of the societies that were initially established in the United Kingdom and America. The leaders and patrons of the movement included prominent members of colonial society.¹² The chief justice, Francis Forbes was a strong supporter and became the president of the society,¹³

From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860 (Westport: Greenwood, 1979) for the United States.

³ Dr Benjamin Rush was one of the first to articulate this view in Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind, with an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies for Curing Them* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1812). An example of publication of his ideas in the Australian context can be found in: "A moral and physical thermometer: A scale of the progress of temperance and intemperance," *Hobart Town Gazette*, February 27, 1824, 3. On the development of opinions about alcohol up to this point see: Joel Bernard, "From Fasting to Abstinence: The Origins of the American Temperance Movement," in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Harry Gene Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America," *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 2, no. 1 (1985).

⁴ "To the Editor," *Sydney Gazette*, December 15, 1829, 3.

⁵ "Drunkenness," *Sydney Gazette*, August 31, 1830, 3.

⁶ "Advance Australia," *Sydney Gazette*, August 31, 1830, 2; "Advance Australia," *Sydney Gazette*, August 17, 1830, 2; "To my readers," *Hobart Town Courier*, December 26, 1829, 2.

⁷ "Temperance Society," *Launceston Advertiser*, April 25, 1832, 131; "Advertising," *Launceston Advertiser*, July 25, 1833, 1. See also: "The Rise and Progress of Temperance Societies," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.1, 1837, 1-4.

⁸ "Advance Australia," *Sydney Gazette*, October 26, 1833, 2.

⁹ "Temperance Societies," *Sydney Monitor*, May 17, 1834, 2; "Original Correspondence," *Sydney Herald*, May 8, 1834, 3.

¹⁰ Including Port Stephens, Liverpool, Cowpastures and O'Connell Plains. "Temperance Society," *Sydney Monitor*, May 20, 1835, 2.

¹¹ "New South Wales Temperance Society," *The Colonist*, May 21, 1835, 5.

¹² "N.S.W. Temperance Society," *Sydney Gazette*, November 20, 1834, 2.

¹³ "Temperance Societies," *Sydney Monitor*, May 17, 1834, 2; "N.S.W. Temperance Society," *Sydney Gazette*, November 20, 1834, 2.

prominent clergy were members from the start,¹⁴ and “gentlemen of rank” also joined.¹⁵ Reports of the early meetings stated that those present were “respectable persons.”¹⁶ The group received an extra boost in 1838, when Governor Gipps chaired the June meeting. He signed the pledge and declared his support, saying that “a great portion of the vice and crime that prevails in the colony are traceable to the intemperate use of ardent spirits.”¹⁷

Another similarity to the larger, international movement was seen in the strategies adopted. Members of the Temperance Society were required to take a pledge to “abstain from the use of ardent spirits.”¹⁸ One of the main activities of the society (in addition to the regular meetings for the members) was to organise public lectures, designed to educate the populace about the dangers of spirits.¹⁹ Another was to publish tracts and magazines advocating temperance. In 1837, the first issue of the monthly *Australian Temperance Magazine* was published with a circulation of four thousand copies.²⁰

By 1838, there was a growing push from within the membership for the pledge to go even further than a promise to refrain from spirits. At the January meeting, Rev. William Jarrett proposed that the society become a total abstinence society.²¹ The result was that a separate group, the Total Abstinence society, was formed.²² The pledge they adopted was directly copied from the English teetotal pledge and involved abstaining from all intoxicating drinks. This group differed from the Temperance Society in its leadership and membership, including more people from the working class of Sydney, and fewer members of the elite. The meetings took a different form, too. There were more speakers from the floor, many of whom shared their testimony of how they had been reformed

¹⁴ For example: Rev. William Cowper (St. Philip’s Church, Sydney; Anglican), Rev. John McEncroe (Roman Catholic chaplain) and Rev. Richard Hill (St James’ Church, Sydney; Anglican): “N.S.W. Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, November 20, 1834, 2.

¹⁵ “Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 17, 1834, 2.

¹⁶ “Original Correspondence,” *Sydney Herald*, May 8, 1834, 3.

¹⁷ “Temperance Society,” *Colonist*, June 13, 1838, 2.

¹⁸ “Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 17, 1834, 2. Even before the first official temperance societies were formed, there were examples of people pledging that they would refrain from spirits; e.g. a pledge made in 1831 by Dunmore Lang and 21 others while on board the *Stirling Castle*: J. D. Lang, “Declaration made by Lang and others on board Stirling Castle ...,” 13th Oct, 1831, MLD0C 1477.

¹⁹ “First Public Meeting, of the N.S.W. Temperance Society,” *Sydney Monitor*, November 19, 1834, 2.

²⁰ According to Michael Roe, this was the highest of any contemporary magazine at the time: Michael Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia, 1835-1851* (Parkville: Melbourne University Press 1965), 165.

²¹ “New South Wales Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, January 25, 1838, 2; “Half-and-half-ism, and Teetotalism,” *Australian*, February 6, 1838, 2.

²² The first meeting appears to have been held in February 1839. “Domestic Intelligence: Total Abstinence,” *Sydney Gazette*, February 19, 1839, 2.

from their “habitual drunkenness” through following the “principles of total abstinence.”²³ By 1841, almost two thousand had signed the pledge.²⁴

As the abstinence societies grew, the Temperance Society decreased in number and eventually stopped meeting in 1844 after declaring bankruptcy.²⁵ In Michael Roe’s words: “total abstinence, the rebellious but legitimate child of moderate Temperance, ruled the household.”²⁶ Within the Total Abstinence Society, however, a split occurred in 1843, resulting in the formation of a rival group, the Sydney Total Abstinence Society.²⁷ Towards the end of the 1840s, membership of all societies (with the exception of some Catholic groups) had begun to decline, before strengthening their base again in the late 1850s.²⁸

Historians and the Temperance Movement

Historians of colonial-era New South Wales have paid considerable attention to the disputes over attempts to regulate the sale of alcohol that culminated in the “rum rebellion” at the start of the nineteenth century, and the activities of the temperance societies of the 1880s and 1890s, at the century’s end. Little attention, however, has been paid to the role played by temperance advocates and abstinence societies in the intervening decades,²⁹ aside from the histories produced and published by the temperance societies themselves.³⁰

²³ “Queen’s Birth-day,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 25, 1839, 2.

²⁴ “The Annual Report,” *Teetotaler*, October 26, 1842, 2.

²⁵ Matthew Allen, “Sectarianism, Respectability and Cultural Identity: The St Patrick’s Total Abstinence Society and Irish Catholic Temperance in Mid-Nineteenth Century Sydney,” *Journal of Religious History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 378. It was also illustrated in the decline of the *Temperance Advocate*, which was replaced by the *Teetotaler* in 1842.

²⁶ Roe, *Quest for Authority*, 166.

²⁷ Allen, “Sectarianism,” 378.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ E.g. Alan Atkinson first mentions the temperance movement in relation to events in the 1850s: Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: Volume Two - Democracy* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2016), 327. Manning Clark mentions the movement only in passing, to illustrate the interference of the “moral improvers” in the lives of others: C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia 3: The Beginning of an Australian Civilization 1824-1851* (Burwood: Melbourne University Press, 1973), 80, 408.

³⁰ E.g. J. W. Meaden, *Temperance in Australia: The Memorial Volume of the International Temperance Convention* (Melbourne: Temperance Book Depot, 1889) and Gar Dillon, *A Delusion of the Australian Culture: A Brief History of the Clash with Alcohol in New South Wales 1788-1983* (Sydney: N.S.W. Temperance Alliance, 1985). Several works on the history of alcohol production and consumption in Australia consider the early temperance movement, but discuss it only briefly: e.g. Ross Fitzgerald and Trevor L. Jordan, *Under the Influence: A History of Alcohol in Australia* (Sydney: ABC, 2009); Keith Powell, *Drinking and Alcohol in Colonial Australia 1788-1901 for the Eastern Colonies*, National Campaign against Drug Abuse (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988). Similarly, the early temperance movement merits just one page in Milton James Lewis, *A Rum State: Alcohol and State Policy in Australia, 1788-1988* (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1992) and is barely mentioned in Robin Room, “An Intoxicated Society?,” in *The World Alcohol Industry with Special Reference to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*, ed. John Cavanagh, et al. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1985). There is a brief overview of the

There are a few exceptions to this pattern of neglect. The approaches of those historians who have devoted attention to the emergence and early history of the temperance movement can be broadly categorised into three main subgroups. The first approach looks at the movement through the lens of class conflict, arguing that it was a vehicle through which the middle class (assisted by some members of the upper echelons of the working class) attempted to exert control over the working poor, in order to further their own economic interests.³¹ The second argues that the rise of the temperance societies and the social function that they served can best be explained through an analysis of the dynamics of status politics, within a society that was still preoccupied with the task of expelling the residual shame of its history as a penal colony.³² A third approach attempts to explain the emergence of the temperance and abstinence societies by placing these developments within a larger secularisation narrative, arguing that the temperance movement was a manifestation and consequence of the rise of a new set of secular ideals and strategies for social transformation.³³

Agency, structure and the new biography

All three approaches provide helpful perspectives on the temperance movement at the level of social structure and (in Roe's case) ideology. What has been almost entirely absent until this point has been a close examination of the self-understanding and conscious motives of the individual agents who participated within the movement. While broad-brush, history-of-ideas approaches such as Roe's, and sociologically-oriented studies such as those of Windschuttle, Sturma and Allen, play an indispensable role in offering large-scale explanatory hypotheses for social phenomena such as the early temperance movement, they can give rise to an inevitable risk of reductionism if we attempt to reconstruct the mentality of individuals solely by interpolating from their larger, explanatory narratives.

While the biographical method declined in popularity among historians after the Second World War in favour of broad structural analyses, and in the 1960s a "new social history" evolved under the combined influences of Marxist historiography and the

early temperance movement in Quentin Beresford, "Drinkers and the Anti-Drink Movement in Sydney, 1870-1930" (PhD diss., UNE, 1984).

³¹ Elizabeth Windschuttle, "Women, Class and Temperance: Moral Reform in Eastern Australia 1832-1857," *Push From the Bush* 3 (1979).

³² Michael Sturma, *Vice in a Vicious Society: Crime and Convicts in Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983); Allen, "Sectarianism," 374-92.

³³ Roe, *Quest for Authority*.

Annales School,³⁴ in more recent decades a growing number of historians have reacted against the dominance of sociological and quantitative approaches to social history, arguing for the need to “bring the human actors back on stage.”³⁵ Through close examination of the recorded words and actions of particular human subjects, an historian can gain a valuable perspective on the complex interaction between multiple social and ideological factors, and reopen the narratives of social history to include space for the conscious agency and self-understanding of individuals.³⁶

The chastened, modest approach taken by the biographically-oriented historians of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is not simply a reversion to the assumptions and methods of the “great man theory” that was influential among historians of the nineteenth century. The adoption of a biographical method need not imply the assumption that broad social and historical developments can be explained solely as the consequence of the genius and charisma of influential individuals. But it does offer a corrective to the overly smooth and determinist assumptions that drive some structural and history-of-ideas approaches, allowing more room for the contingency and complexity of individual experience, without implying that the experience of one person was representative of the experiences of all, or that the ideas and aims of thinkers and activists were simply written on the pages of history by sheer power of intellect or force of will. Nor does the rehabilitation of biographical methods in social history that has taken place in recent decades imply a return to the “history from above” approach that was criticised and repudiated by the Annales and Marxist schools. The new biography has absorbed the historical debates of the last few decades rather than heralding a return to the “era before structural history.”³⁷

The great Annales-school historian, Bernard Guenée, writing in 1987, reflected insightfully on this (re)turn toward biography in his own work:

Structuralist history illuminated the past with a wonderfully coherent light, but it also made things too simple, and biography offered one way of exploring the overwhelming complexity of things.... Seen from a lofty

³⁴ See Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3, and Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, “Struggling for Recognition: Reading the Individual in Labour History,” *Labour History* 87 (2004), 6.

³⁵ David Kaiser, “Bringing the Human Actors Back on Stage: The Personal Context of the Einstein-Bohr Debate,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 27 (1994).

³⁶ Cf. the groundbreaking arguments in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Gollancz, 1963).

³⁷ Simone Lèassig, “Introduction,” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, ed. Volker R. Berghahn (New York: Berghahn, 2008), 3.

elevation and in retrospect, the history of the world may well look coherent and necessary.... Biography, it seemed to me, should make it possible to play closer attention to chance, to events, to chronological sequence.³⁸

As Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles argue, biography can (helpfully) “collapse the barrier between the history of the individual and the history of society.”³⁹ Biography can also allow for observation of “microhistory,” allowing for an examination of factors previously unobserved: “phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation.”⁴⁰

One critical contribution that biographies and other microhistories make to our understanding of the past is as reminders of the irreducibly interpreted nature of all experience, and of the evidence upon which historians draw in reconstructing and imagining the past. The scale on which biographers work and the kinds of sources upon which they draw leave no room for the illusions of objectivity or totality of explanation that can sometimes be harboured by historians working on a larger scale and with more quantitative or sociological methods.⁴¹

Not only do biographical methods in social history play a complementary role alongside structural, quantitative, sociological and history-of-ideas approaches as part of the explanatory work of social history; they also play a vital role, as I have argued elsewhere, in engaging the empathy and imagination of readers, contributing to our ability to appreciate and connect with the humanity of the remembered and reconstructed past.⁴² Barbara Tuchman famously employed an approach of this sort in her examination of early twentieth-century Germany through the lens of a biographical

³⁸ Bernard Guenée, *Between Church and State: The Lives of Four French Prelates in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 7. See also Jacques Le Goff, “Writing Historical Biography Today,” *Current Sociology* 43 (1995) and the comments in *Saint Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); Lèassig, “Introduction,” 3.

³⁹ Hearn and Knowles, “Struggling for Recognition,” 9.

⁴⁰ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

⁴¹ Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991); Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴² Cf. Nicole Starling, “‘Only Connect’: E. M. Forster, the Bloomsbury Group and the Two Marianne Thorntons,” *Fides Et Historia* 49 (2017): forthcoming.

study of the life of Richard Strauss.⁴³ Commenting on the biographical method, Tuchman has helpfully described biography as a “prism of history.”⁴⁴

Finally, quite apart from the various ways in which biographical approaches complement and extend the work of larger-scale social histories, historians such as Richard Broome argue strongly that biography has a legitimate place of its own amongst the historical sub-disciplines; there is just as great a need to have a history of individuals as there is to have a history of social structures.⁴⁵

John Saunders

With those discussions and developments in mind, this thesis will focus on John Saunders as an individual, with the aim of complementing and (where necessary) complicating the more sociologically-oriented approaches taken by earlier studies. Without seeking to dismiss the validity of larger-scale, quantitative and structural approaches to social history, or the usefulness of sociological models as heuristic devices, it will show the importance of paying careful attention to the voices and actions of individual participants in the historical process, as a corrective against the reductionist and anachronistic tendencies to which one-dimensionally structural and theory-driven approaches can be prone.

Saunders has left behind a significant quantity of primary source material, and his activities and speeches were the subject of numerous reports during the relevant time period. Focussing on sources from a key member of the early temperance movement in New South Wales provides an opportunity to fill in the gaps of the more sociologically-focussed studies and explore the extent to which the dynamics of ideology, class and status politics which they describe were reflected in the conscious self-understanding and motivations of one of the key participants in the movement.⁴⁶

⁴³ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World before the War 1890-1914* (London: Papermac, 1997).

⁴⁴ “Biography as a Prism of History,” in *Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art*, ed. Stephen B. Oates (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 93.

⁴⁵ Richard Broome, “Introduction,” in *Tracing Past Lives: The Writing of Historical Biography*, ed. Richard Broome (Melbourne: The History Institute, 1995), ix.

⁴⁶ Harrison acknowledges that he was strongly influenced by the 1960s “fashion for social science”: cf. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 13; Gusfield is also clear in his introduction that his work is not a history at all, but instead a sociological approach which “picks up where the historian closes” and “delves into the assumptions with which the historian begins.” Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 7.

Why John Saunders?

John Saunders was a key figure within temperance circles in Sydney in the 1830s and 1840s, labelled by his contemporaries as “the Apostle of Temperance” because of the prominent and influential role that he played.⁴⁷

Saunders arrived in New South Wales in December 1834, soon after the first temperance society had been formed in Sydney.⁴⁸ He had been born in London in 1806 and before his departure for Sydney had trained and worked as an articled clerk and solicitor. In 1833 he approached the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) to offer himself for missionary service.⁴⁹ When some Baptists in Sydney approached the BMS, asking them to send a minister, it was decided that Saunders should travel to New South Wales for a “visit.”⁵⁰ While the BMS did not officially send him and did not pay for his passage (as they sent missionaries only to “heathen lands”), he was farewelled by them at their meeting in July after being ordained as a Baptist minister for “foreign service.”⁵¹

Saunders established a Baptist congregation soon after his arrival and by 1836 the first Baptist chapel was opened.⁵² He was quick to become involved in public life, attending meetings of the School Society⁵³ and the New South Wales Temperance Society within the first month after his arrival.⁵⁴ By 1836 he was appointed secretary at the annual meeting.⁵⁵ Saunders gave a number of temperance lectures in 1835,⁵⁶ and in 1837 he launched the *Australian Temperance Magazine*, serving as the editor until its final edition in 1840.⁵⁷ As secretary of the Society that published the *Temperance Advocate*, which ran from 1840 to 1841, he undoubtedly influenced the content of that publication

⁴⁷ “New Zealand,” *Colonist*, April 6, 1839, 2.

⁴⁸ “Shipping Intelligence,” *Australian*, December 5, 1834, 2.

⁴⁹ Ken R. Manley and Barbara Coe, *“The Grace of Goodness”: John Saunders Baptist Pastor and Activist, Sydney 1834-1848* (Sydney: Greenwood, 2014), 2. Cf. B. G. Wright, “Saunders, John (1806–1859),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/saunders-john-2629/text3641>, accessed 18 September 2017.

⁵⁰ “Letter from John Saunders,” *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 26, 1834, 257. Reproduced in Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, 7.

⁵¹ Because he was not financially supported, Elizabeth Fry had organised for him to travel on the *George Hibbert*, with his wife Elizabeth, as chaplain to the female convicts on board. *Ibid.*, 3. “To the Editor of the *Colonist*,” *Colonist*, January 15, 1835, 2.

⁵² “Baptist Chapel,” *Commercial Journal*, October 5, 1836, 4. The Rev John McKaeg had previously led a congregation that had met in the Rose and Crown Inn from April 1831: “Domestic Intelligence,” *Sydney Herald*, August 22, 1831, 4.

⁵³ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, Letter from John Saunders to his brother James, January 20, 1835.

⁵⁴ “Domestic Intelligence,” *Colonist*, January 8, 1835, 3.

⁵⁵ “Domestic Intelligence,” *Sydney Herald*, September 29, 1836, 2.

⁵⁶ Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, chap. 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

as well.⁵⁸ His integral role in the movement was expressed by Governor Gipps in 1841: “[T]hough he is not the whole committee, he is as we all know, the life and soul of it.... He it is who pulls the labouring oar in the Committee; and where to find a substitute for him not one amongst us, I think, could tell.”⁵⁹

Saunders and the historians

The historians who have written about the temperance movement in the 1830s and 1840s in New South Wales all acknowledge Saunders’s pivotal role in the movement, appealing to him as an “illustration” or “symbol” of the various dynamics they are seeking to highlight. Windschuttle, for example, identifies Saunders as the key figure who encouraged women to become actively involved in the movement;⁶⁰ Roe points to him as the prime example of the “eminent and able citizens” who gave the movement their support, and as the key “conversion” in the shift from temperance to teetotalism;⁶¹ and Allen appeals to him as figure who best illustrates the tensions between the activists of the early temperance movement and their more conservative patrons.⁶²

While the pivotal role played by Saunders within the early history of the temperance movement has been widely recognised, up to this point there has not been a close and careful study of his own thoughts on temperance.⁶³ Tracing the development of his thinking during the time of his involvement as a leader in the temperance cause, from 1835 to 1848, would provide us with an invaluable perspective on the shifting attitudes within the movement during this period.⁶⁴

In relation to Windschuttle’s class-based analysis and Allen’s attempt to explain the temperance movement through the lens of status politics, there is useful insight to be gained from a close study of Saunders. As a non-conformist clergyman, he performed a social role that occupied an ambiguous place within the class system and gave him a

⁵⁸ Although Roe, Allen and Windschuttle all describe Saunders as the editor of the *Advocate*, the paper itself names its editor as John Fairfax. Cf. *Temperance Advocate*, October 7, 1840, 8.

⁵⁹ “The Public Meeting,” *Temperance Advocate*, April 21, 1841, 2.

⁶⁰ Windschuttle, “Women, Class and Temperance,” 9.

⁶¹ Roe, *Quest for Authority*, 167.

⁶² Matthew Allen, “The Temperance Shift - Drunkenness, Responsibility and the Regulation of Alcohol in New South Wales, 1788-1856” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2013), 168.

⁶³ For an annotated selection of some of the relevant primary sources, see Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, chap. 4.

⁶⁴ Within the existing literature on temperance, Harrison and Allen both show some awareness of the value of biography, using smaller case studies to illustrate particular aspects of the movement. Harrison devotes a chapter of his book to a prosopographical analysis of the movement’s leadership: Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, chap. 7. Allen focuses on the involvement of George Allen, on the understanding that as a leader of the movement he illustrated some of the key aspects of the movement’s evolution: see Allen, “Temperance Shift,” chap. 10.

certain degree of critical perspective on the dynamics of class and social status. And as one of the movement's main propagandists, the arguments that he made in favour of it are a vital window on the motivations of its members.

As an evangelical protestant clergyman at the very centre of the movement, he also provides a test-case for Roe's thesis that the main ideology driving it was the new, secular philosophy of moral enlightenment. His writings and reported actions will also provide a chance to bring the arguments of Roe into conversation with a newer wave of scholarship that has called into question simple, linear accounts of secularisation in favour of a much thicker, more complicated description of beliefs, behaviours and institutional arrangements.

Finally, and most importantly, a close study of the way in which Saunders understood and advocated for the temperance cause allows us to examine the ways in which these various threads of the historical process were knotted together within the consciousness of one individual, making room for some of the complexity that might otherwise be lost in larger-scale approaches.

“A Combination of Aristocrats and Religionists”? Saunders, class and respectability

In the governor’s drawing room

In 1839, Jane Franklin, the wife of the Tasmanian governor, Sir John Franklin, made an overland voyage from Van Diemen’s Land to New South Wales, staying in Sydney for some time as the guest of Sir George and Lady Gipps. While there she expressed her concern about the drinking habits of her servant, Snachall, and was referred to John Saunders, who was invited to pay her a visit at government house. Her description of the meeting gives an insight into the complexities of class relationships in colonial Sydney:

Had a call from Mr John Saunders, Baptist Minister, a person to whom Sir George had referred me as the best in the place for a Temperance Society as respects Snachall, & whom Sir George said he had the greatest regard for, as a high principled, conscientious, zealous, religious man full of enthusiasm—Sir George said Mr Saunders would stand on his head or do anything for him since he had signed the declaration of Temperance Society. Mr Saunders came with book in his hand—told him quickly what I wanted, for I found Bishop’s carriage was driving up—he begged Snachall to call next morning-- & begged me to use my influence with Lady Gipps, as female sanction much wanted. Bishop & Mrs were now in room & he abruptly left.⁶⁵

Clearly, in the eyes of the governor, Saunders was a respectable member of colonial society. Under exceptional circumstances, such as those created by Lady Franklin’s request for advice on the drinking habits of her servant, he might even be invited to pay a call at government house. But his visit was brief and businesslike, and (in both his own eyes and Lady Franklin’s, it seems) it would hardly have been proper for him to linger on in conversation after the bishop and his wife arrived.⁶⁶ As a Baptist clergyman, he did

⁶⁵ Quoted in Jane Franklin and Penny Russell, *This Errant Lady: Jane Franklin’s Overland Journey to Port Phillip and Sydney, 1839* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002), 118.

⁶⁶ His abrupt departure when Broughton arrives also gives another insight into the strained relationship between the two men in the aftermath of the discussions about funding for churches in the colony; see Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, 245.

not have the same standing as an Anglican one (let alone a bishop);⁶⁷ it is significant that Lady Franklin refers to him as “Mr John Saunders” rather than “Reverend John Saunders.”⁶⁸ The reported conversation also gives an insight into the deference with which he treated Sir George Gipps and Lady Franklin, the desire he had for Lady Gipps to support the Temperance Society and give it “female sanction,” and the difficulty he had experienced in securing the patronage of Lady Gipps and her peers.

The evidence of Saunders’s own writings suggests both that he was an astute observer of the colonial class system and that he occupied a somewhat ambiguous place within it. At times he was included in official events of the colony, among the ladies and gentlemen of the local elite. In 1838, for example, he was presented to Governor Gipps at his installation,⁶⁹ and in 1841 he was presented as a “gentleman” to the Governor on the Queen’s birthday.⁷⁰ But even on occasions such as these, the ambiguities of his situation were still evident.

A revealing example of those ambiguities, and of Saunders’s own perspective on them, can be seen in his first encounter with the colonial elite, in 1835. In May of that year, not long after his arrival in Sydney, Saunders was invited to Government House for the King’s birthday celebrations. He described the event in a letter to his sister-in-law Harriett. It was a large affair and Saunders was one of many who felt honoured to be invited, describing it as a “kind of Royal fealty.”⁷¹ He was seated among the clergy, but he and his “Methodist brethren” stood out visibly from the others, in “our simple but solemn black.” The newspaper report of the occasion suggests that Saunders was not presented to the governor with the other clergy, but as a private gentleman.⁷²

Saunders’s own description of his presentation to the governor suggests that he was keenly aware of his somewhat anomalous position in the social order:

After waiting for about ½ an hour ... my card was taken delivered over to the Aide de Camp who announced “Mr John Saunders” for you know I do not tack Revd to my name. There was the Govr standing between several officers. I

⁶⁷ According to Narelle Iliffe, Baptists in New South Wales were often from a lower class and subject to popular ridicule: Narelle Iliffe, “First Fruits: Baptists in New South Wales c. 1830-1856,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 1, no. 2 (1999): 45.

⁶⁸ It appears that Saunders did not attach this title to his name in his earlier years in the colony (see below), however, newspaper reports from the time suggest most people did refer to him as Rev. Saunders.

⁶⁹ “News of the Day,” *Sydney Monitor*, February 28, 1838, 2.

⁷⁰ “Domestic Intelligence,” *Temperance Advocate*, May 26, 1841, 11.

⁷¹ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister-in-law Harriett, 9 June 1835.

⁷² “His Majesty’s Birth-day,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 30, 1835, 2.

made my bow & passed on, The Govr graciously returning it & there was an end to the matter.⁷³

The reception was followed in the evening by a “grand ball and supper,” to which Saunders was “not affronted by not being invited,” despite the fact “some clerical friends attended considering it to be etiquette.” The lack of invitation, and his easy acceptance of it, reinforce the fact that he did not occupy the top tier of society.⁷⁴

Class and social status in 1830s Sydney

The 1830s were a time of significant social change in New South Wales. It was a time of increased immigration, with 78,000 people, mostly from labouring families, flooding in from Europe in the years between 1836 and 1845, to flee famine and poverty under schemes of assisted immigration.⁷⁵ The main aim of the emigrants was (according to one writer in 1835) to “better themselves from a pecuniary point of view.”⁷⁶ Saunders himself saw the financial possibilities in Sydney, writing home that, “were I to pursue secular pursuits I could soon be rich.”⁷⁷ The surge of immigrants in the 1830s led to a great deal of tension in New South Wales, with many believing that the programme was a means for England to send its criminal underclass to Australia.⁷⁸

The increased immigration also affected the ratio of free settlers to convicts. With this large-scale immigration, as well as colonial births, the proportion of convicts and ex-convicts in the population was diluted significantly from about two-thirds in 1828, to slightly over a third by 1841.⁷⁹ In an appeal for funds to build the Baptist Chapel in Sydney in 1835, Saunders estimated that there were upwards of 60,000 free settlers and 25,000 convicts.⁸⁰

⁷³ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister-in-law Harriett, 9 June 1835.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia: Democracy*, 137.

⁷⁶ *Van Diemen's Land Monthly Magazine*, no. 3, Nov 1835, 112. See also, “Appeal for support from England for the Baptist Chapel,” *Letterbook*, ML B1106.

⁷⁷ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister Sarah, 26 January, 1835.

⁷⁸ Robin Haines, “‘The Idle and the Drunken Won’t Do There’: Poverty, the New Poor Law and Nineteenth-Century Government-Assisted Emigration to Australia from the United Kingdom,” *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 108 (1997): 20; Babette Smith, “Legend and Reality: The Genius of Russel Ward,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 12 (2010). As Haines points out, however, recent research has suggested this was not the case and that it was more typically the “respectable poor” who were chosen for these assisted immigration schemes. See Robin Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831-60* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), and Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008).

⁷⁹ Sturma, *Vice*, 8.

⁸⁰ “Appeal for support from England for the Baptist Chapel,” *Letterbook*, ML B1106.

There were also important differences between the class structure in New South Wales and that which pertained in England. Russel Ward argued that those in the colonial upper class, while mostly not being people who would fit easily into the upper classes in England, were keen to emphasise class differences in the colony. On the other hand, the “lower orders” were “singularly unimpressed by the self-proclaimed superiority of the local ‘gentry’,” and “generally speaking, the Australian conditions had a levelling effect.”⁸¹

The possibilities for a new type of society with unique opportunities resonated with many working class men and women in New South Wales. Linked to this desire for improvement was the emergence of working class societies and public libraries in the 1830s.⁸² From the mid-1820s, the press had a radicalising impact on the poor within the colony, to an extent that was not seen in England.⁸³ For some of the working class, the possibility of owning land was a strong motivation and there were repeated attempts to make land ownership more accessible to the “small man,” as squatters gained more power.⁸⁴

The changing composition of society during this period included the emergence of an embryonic middle class.⁸⁵ Reminiscing in 1863, Sir Roger Therry recalled that “a good middle class society” was emerging by the mid-1830s. Therry describes this class as being drawn from the ranks of merchants, government officials and members of the learned professions at the upper end, as well as shopkeepers and clerks at the lower.⁸⁶ Admission to polite society (which involved balls, picnics, parties and public lectures) was open to all those who were invited to Government house.⁸⁷ This group, still

⁸¹ Russel Braddock Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958), 36-39. See also Alexander Harris, *Settlers and Convicts: Or Recollections of Sixteen Years' Labour in the Australian Backwoods. By an Emigrant Mechanic* (London: C. Cox, 1847) J. B. Hirst, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore: Australia's First Colony* (Melbourne: Black, 2008), 139-42; George Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture: Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia* (Sydney: Halstead, 1957). On the extent to which egalitarianism already existed in the early nineteenth century, see Graeme Davison, “Rethinking the Australian Legend,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012); and “Alexander Harris and the Australian Legend,” *Melbourne Historical Journal* 2 (1962). On the enduring legacy of Ward's work, see Frank Bongiorno and David Andrew Roberts, “Russel Ward: Reflections on a Legend: Introduction,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 10, no. 2 (2008); Smith, “Legend and Reality,” 171.

⁸² L. J. Hume, “Working Class Movements in Sydney and Melbourne before the Gold Rushes,” *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 9 (1960): 266; Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture*, chap. 3.

⁸³ See also Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia: Democracy*, 111.

⁸⁴ Hume, “Working Class Movements,” 266. See also Roe, *Quest for Authority*, chap. 3.

⁸⁵ Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788* (Melbourne: Longman, 1995), 100.

⁸⁶ Roger Therry, *Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Residence in New South Wales and Victoria; with a Supplementary Chapter on Transportation and the Ticket-of-Leave System* (London: Sampson Low, 1863), 60.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

somewhat controversially, included a number of people who had originally arrived in the colony as convicts, a fact that Saunders noted as he described the crowd of his fellow-guests at the 1835 King's birthday celebrations:

The scene was very interesting; it was a complete gathering of the clans. Gentlemen from all parts were assembled & it presented a very flattering specimen of what Australia now possesses. There were some there who had entered the Colony convicts, now entitled by the expiration of their time & a renovated character to appear to make their bow.⁸⁸

Respectability in 1830s Sydney

The presence of ex-convicts on the vice-regal guest-list, as noted by Saunders, is a telling example of the extent to which economic success could open the door for social advancement within the colonial hierarchy of the 1830s; the fact that "the expiration of ... time & a renovated character" were (in Saunders's eyes, at least) prerequisites for the realisation of that possibility is a reminder that social status, even in the colony, was not a matter of money alone.

Considerations of respectability were pervasively influential throughout the English-speaking world in the Victoria era, but they took on a particular importance in New South Wales, due to the colony's origins as a penal settlement.⁸⁹ Michael Roe has argued that it was the notion of respectability that gave the colonial gentry much of their cohesion as a class-group.⁹⁰ Because so many ex-convicts had been granted land, free settlers resisted the idea that political power and social prestige should be attached automatically to wealth and property ownership.⁹¹

As New South Wales attempted to establish representative institutions that would give it a degree of political autonomy from the executive government of Great Britain, the innate "criminality" of ex-convicts was pointed to by many as a reason to exclude them from participation in judicial and political institutions.⁹² Charles Wentworth, himself the son of a convict, argued that the freeborn members of the colonial elite attempted to represent the taint of criminality as "an hereditary deformity ... hand[ed] down from

⁸⁸ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister-in-law Harriett, 9 June 1835.

⁸⁹ Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia: Democracy*, 33. See Stephen Garton, "The Convict Origins Debate: Historians and the Problem of the 'Criminal Class'," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 24, no. 2 (1991): 66-82 for an explanation of the historiography regarding the "convict class" of New South Wales.

⁹⁰ Roe, *Quest for Authority*, 40.

⁹¹ Sturma, *Vice*, 25.

⁹² Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia: Democracy*, 84.

father to son,” so as to “raise an eternal barrier of separation between their offspring, and the offspring of the unfortunate convict.”⁹³

While Wentworth’s depiction of the extent and severity of anti-convict prejudice was probably an exaggeration, there were still many who proceeded on the assumption that criminal conviction left an indelible stain.⁹⁴ Saunders himself expressed the opinion that “this is a wicked place; much as we want Christians here, I hardly like to invite them & yet none but these I would allow if possible, for it is high time to stop the importation of British vice.”⁹⁵

The report of the Molesworth Committee in 1838 into transportation of convicts to Australia led to more fervent attempts to assert the colony’s respectability.⁹⁶ The report found that the system had not only failed to reform the convicts themselves, but had also led to a society “thoroughly depraved, as respects both the character and degree of vicious propensities.”⁹⁷ This assertion greatly offended many in New South Wales (particularly amongst the free settlers, who were affronted by the implication that they themselves might not be viewed as respectable) and “left a lasting scar on the community’s consciousness.”⁹⁸

Class, social status and the historians of temperance

Various aspects of this changing set of social circumstances have been singled out by historians as explanations for the rise of the temperance movement in the 1830s and its shift toward total abstinence in the following decade. While earlier approaches tended to limit their analysis to the economic dimensions of class interactions, more recent explorations of the issue have typically been based on a more nuanced understanding of social status and respectability.

⁹³ William Charles Wentworth, *Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales and Its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen’s Land* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1819), 345-51.

⁹⁴ Cf. Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia: Democracy*, 87. An example of this attitude can be seen in James Macarthur’s 1837 vision for the future prospects of the colony, which was centred on the hope that a scheme of sponsored immigration would have the effect of substituting a “virtuous population” for the “guilty outcasts” who had been transported to the colony as convicts. James Macarthur, *New South Wales; Its Present state and future prospects*, London, 1837, 54. See also *Camden: Farm and Village Life in Early New South Wales* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), 38-41, 123-24, 213-21.

⁹⁵ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his brother James, 12 May, 1835.

⁹⁶ Sturma, *Vice*, 28.

⁹⁷ Report from the Select Committee on Transportation, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1837-38, vol. 22, 22.

⁹⁸ Sturma, *Vice*, 28. See also Hirst, *Freedom*, 187-91. This also led to the anti-transportation campaigns in New South Wales in the 1840s and 1850s. Babette Smith argues that the shame felt as a result of the report lasted for generations. Babette Smith, *Australia’s Birthstain: The Startling Legacy of the Convict Era* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2008). For a critique of some of Smith’s assumptions regarding clergy motives in the anti-transportation debate, see Hilary M. Carey, “Clerics and the Beginning of the Anti-Transportation Debate,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2012).

Class

The most prominent representative of a class-focussed approach to the early history of the temperance movement is Elizabeth Windschuttle, whose investigation into the involvement of women in the temperance movement between 1832 and 1857 focuses on the role that class and economic self-interest played in determining who was involved and with what motivations. Windschuttle begins by pointing out the ways in which the temperance movement in that period functioned to introduce an early form of feminism into Australian society.⁹⁹ She goes on to argue, however, that the form of feminism which arose as a result of the temperance movement was ultimately incoherent and self-defeating, because it sought to emancipate one class at the expense of another.¹⁰⁰

As Windschuttle demonstrates, the temperance movement was never embraced by the women of the colonial ruling class, even though they had been actively involved in a wide variety of other philanthropic causes. This refusal to join was noticeable even in the initial stages, when some elite men were involved in the original temperance societies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, which stressed moderation and an "anti-spirits" approach.¹⁰¹

By the 1840s, within the total abstinence societies, women were a strong force, making up the majority of members and organising some of their activities.¹⁰² It was only women of a particular class, however, that were involved—women of the "socially mobile skilled working class, lower middle class, or middle class."¹⁰³ Accordingly, Windschuttle argues, the movement is best understood in terms of class, rather than gender.¹⁰⁴ She argues that the middle class women who became involved in the temperance movement formed a strong alliance with self-employed tradesmen, aimed at social control of the working class. Here, they had the same needs: middle class women wanted reliable servants in their households and assistants in their schools, shops and businesses. The businessmen wanted reliable and productive labourers to work for them.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Windschuttle, "Women, Class and Temperance," 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰² Many women, such as Isabella Dalgarno and Sarah Crouch, were prominent public speakers in support of the cause. *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. Windschuttle's analysis relies heavily on Harrison's account of the early temperance movement in England. Harrison notes a close tie between industrialisation and the emergence of

Consequently, Windschuttle characterises the type of feminism which emerged during this period as “distinctly middle class.” It was motivated by economic self-interest and was “interfering and presumptuous.” She describes it as a “contradictory movement” because of the way in which, according to her analysis, it liberated one class at the expense of another.¹⁰⁶

Status Politics

More recent scholarship on the rise of the temperance movement and its subsequent shift towards teetotalism has tended to move the focus of enquiry away from the economic dynamics of class struggle toward the role that the movement played within the status politics of the colony.

The main proponents of this theory in the New South Wales context are Michael Sturma and Matthew Allen. Their work draws heavily on Joseph Gusfield’s sociological study of the American temperance movement, in which he argues that the dynamics of social status were more significant than those of economic class within the function that the movement served for its members.¹⁰⁷ Whereas class groups revolve around economic concerns, status structure is more subjective and is related to the quest of individuals and social groupings to gain respect in the eyes of others. Status politics hinge on conflict over allocation of status, in contrast to class politics, which relate to conflict over allocation of material resources.¹⁰⁸ For Gusfield, the temperance movement was ultimately a “symbolic crusade,” which was more effective at improving the status of American Protestants than reducing drunkenness.¹⁰⁹

Sturma’s study on drunkenness in colonial society argued that the early temperance movement in Australia “frequently seemed less concerned with the reform of drunkards

teetotalism in the mid-1830s. Cities with large textile manufacturing industries experienced a flourishing of the temperance societies, with mill owners throwing their support behind them. He also pointed to the advantages that came to the middle class through the “improvement of the labouring classes” as a disciplined work force, and the increase in demand for consumer goods that their improvement would lead to. Prominent teetotaler Joseph Livesey, for example, urged businessmen to support the movement because “nearly all the money spent at public-houses ought to be, and if teetotalism prevailed, would be, spent at YOUR SHOPS” (emphasis original). See Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 92-94.

¹⁰⁶ Windschuttle, “Women, Class and Temperance,” 21.

¹⁰⁷ Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*, chap. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 18. Gusfield refined his concept of “status politics” in a later essay, preferring the concept of “cultural politics.” See “Benevolent Repression: Popular Culture, Social Structure, and the Control of Drinking,” in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susan Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 417-18.

¹⁰⁹ On this score, Gusfield’s analysis of the American movement differs sharply from Roe’s portrayal of the Australian movement as the product of secularising ideology of “moral enlightenment.” According to Gusfield, there was a tight relationship between religion and temperance: “Religion and individual perfectionism went hand in hand. To be saved was evidenced through a change in habits. The man of spiritual conviction could be known by the style of his living.” *Symbolic Crusade*, 45.

than with confirming the morality of its members.”¹¹⁰ He agreed that participation in the movement was an important indicator of social status, and hypothesised that it was through the appeal of respectability that the societies gained members.¹¹¹ A similar argument has been adopted by Allen, who argues that in the context of a former penal colony, emancipists and their descendants were seeking respectability as a result of the “convict stain” hanging over the society.¹¹²

Allen also argues that the desire for respectability explains the large representation of Roman Catholics within the temperance movement in New South Wales. In Sydney in particular, the movement developed in different ways from the path that it followed in the rest of the country. Most striking was the way in which the Catholic temperance societies continued to grow in the 1840s while there was a sharp decline in the membership of the protestant temperance societies.¹¹³ While Catholics in New South Wales were keen to assert their respectability amidst sectarian prejudice, the Protestants withdrew from the movement because it was perceived to be Catholic.¹¹⁴

Saunders on temperance, class and economic motivations

Class and the composition of the movement

Crucial to the theories of both Allen and Windschuttle are their claims about the class-composition of the temperance movement in its first and second waves. The fact that Saunders was actively involved in both the first-wave Temperance Society and the second-wave Total Abstinence Society makes his own experiences and observations particularly useful when examining claims about which classes were involved.

Allen and Windschuttle make different claims about the temperance movement’s membership. According to Allen’s account, the New South Wales Temperance Society was “elite” in its membership and (like the earliest temperance groups in Britain) “dominated by the benevolent paternalism of the upper classes and the established church.”¹¹⁵ The second wave, in contrast (exemplified by the Total Abstinence Society, founded in 1838), was strikingly populist in its approach, and drew members from all classes of society. Windschuttle on the other hand, pays little attention to the first wave

¹¹⁰ Sturma, *Vice*, 155.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 162. Sturma did acknowledge that teetotallers did place a higher value on the reform of drunkards than the temperance societies.

¹¹² Allen, “Temperance Shift,” 152. See also Smith, *Australia’s Birthstain*.

¹¹³ Allen, “Sectarianism,” 376.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of the movement, and represents the second as driven by the middle class (together with a sprinkling of upwardly-mobile members of the “working class aristocracy”).¹¹⁶ Both agree that the movement worked on the assumption that intemperance was a particular problem of the working class, but Allen argues that this was especially the case with the original Temperance Society.¹¹⁷

It is difficult to make precise statements about the class composition of the movement, given that membership records for the Total Abstinence Society were not kept or have not survived, and contemporary reports of the meetings of both groups frequently said little more than that people of “all classes” were in attendance.¹¹⁸ In line with these reports, Saunders often made the claim that there was diversity in the make-up of the two groups.¹¹⁹

Despite the frequency with which claims of this sort were made by Saunders and others (and the likelihood that there was at least some evidence of class-diversity within both groups that could have been offered in support of them), it is probably true to say that for Saunders, a genuinely broad-based membership was more a goal to be pursued than a fact to be reported.

As a member of the Total Abstinence Society, Saunders urged the importance of extending the range of the group’s membership and, in particular, strengthening the numbers of members from the upper echelons of colonial society:

[I]t was to be built up of the labouring classes, and they were then to have the shopkeepers, the merchants, professional men, and ministers of the gospel, they, must then have the Judges, and the members of the Legislative Council, and on the top of the pyramid they must place His Excellency Sir George Gipps; thus consolidated and extended, they would be able to rear [*sic*] a fabric which should never perish.¹²⁰

In the case of the original Temperance Society, whilst it is true that its membership ranks did include a number of high-profile members, an examination of its subscription records suggests that the group’s members tended to be drawn principally from the

¹¹⁶ To some of the conservatives who opposed the Whiggish policies of Gipps (and Bourke before him), the involvement of Gipps made it seem as if the temperance cause was a “further symptom of liberal reform and regarded therefore as much a political as it was a philanthropic movement.” Windschuttle, “Women, Class and Temperance,” 11.

¹¹⁷ Allen, “Temperance Shift,” 164-65.

¹¹⁸ E.g. “Domestic and Miscellaneous Intelligence,” *Australian*, May 22, 1835, 2.

¹¹⁹ E.g. “The Monitor,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.3, 1838, 36.

¹²⁰ “The Teetotal Festival,” *Teetotaller*, September 7, 1842, 2.

kind of people that Therry identified as the emerging middle class of the colony, rather than the “elite” *per se*.¹²¹ As Allen later acknowledged, although almost all of the initial subscribers were solidly respectable men and women, the majority were not “from the very highest rank of society.”¹²² As a dissenting minister with a middle-class background and a previous career in the law, Saunders fitted comfortably within the leadership caste of the first-wave movement.¹²³

Saunders’s dismay that there were not more members of the upper echelons of society supporting even the first wave of the movement lends weight to Windschuttle’s analysis. One of the most striking ways in which their absence was felt was in the lack of support from the women of the colonial elite.¹²⁴ In an advertisement for Saunders’s temperance lectures in 1835, the Society’s eagerness to attract the involvement of upper-class women was shown in the note that there would be “seats provided for the Ladies.”¹²⁵ In 1839, when Lady Gipps attended a meeting, Saunders was effusively delighted, reporting that “the presence of Lady Gipps, and a most respectable female audience, gave the meeting a truly British and benevolent character; for while ladies shrink from appearing at political meetings, it is their honor to grace assemblies gathered to promote either scientific, philanthropic, or religious objects.”¹²⁶

It was not only the female members of the colonial elite who were reluctant to throw their support behind the movement. Saunders’s exasperation with the lack of support from those who would normally have supported other philanthropic causes can be seen in an editorial that he wrote in May 1838, lamenting that “so many excellent men throughout the world are occupied in relieving the woes occasioned by drunkenness, who nevertheless take no interest in the Society which aims at the suppression of

¹²¹ Therry, *Reminiscences*, 60. See also Allen, “Temperance Shift,” 164.

¹²² “Temperance Shift,” 164. Allen also makes passing reference to the tensions between the middle-class activists within the Temperance Society’s leadership group and the elite patrons whose support they depended upon. *Ibid.*, 168.

¹²³ Other dissenting ministers included Rev. William Pascoe Crook, Rev. Ralph Mansfield and Rev. Jarrett. While there were some Anglican clergy involved, Bishop Broughton did not actively support the movement. Windschuttle partly explains the lack of interest from Anglicans as an extension of the lack of interest from the established church in England itself: Windschuttle, “Women, Class and Temperance,” 7.

¹²⁴ Cf. Saunders’s request to Lady Franklin (discussed above) to appeal for Lady Gipps’s support, as “female sanction” was “much wanted.”

¹²⁵ “Classified Advertising,” *Sydney Gazette*, July 2, 1835, 3.

¹²⁶ “Domestic Intelligence,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.11, 1839, 168. Saunders also made a public plea for “ladies” to become involved at a meeting in Parramatta in the same month: “Parramatta Temperance Meeting,” *Sydney Herald*, May 10, 1839, 2. For a discussion of the importance of the governor’s wife in charity work and philanthropic organisations, see: Elizabeth Windschuttle, “Feeding the Poor and Sapping Their Strength’: The Public Role of Ruling Class Women in Eastern Australia, 1788-1850,” in *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788-1978*, ed. Elizabeth Windschuttle (Melbourne: Fontana, 1980), 61-62.

drunkenness and every consequent calamity.”¹²⁷ When gentlemen joined, many did not keep the pledge, much to Saunders’s disappointment. His wife Elizabeth commented in a letter home that “some of the gentlemen have not been honourable enough to keep their word, neither have they sufficient courage to come forward and put the pen through their names, but if they do not mind their manners, I suppose the more honourable part of the Society must do this last favour for them.”¹²⁸

The surviving accounts of Saunders’s activities as a temperance advocate offer partial support to the view of Allen and Windschuttle that the movement was one of the upper or middle classes interfering and attempting to improve the lot of the lower classes. His efforts to establish a sailors’ home in Sydney, for example, were an attempt to “prevent them being enticed into public houses and so led astray.”¹²⁹ Saunders also gave lectures to sailors on ships; he and Rev. Jarrett spoke on the Brig *Brooklyn* in 1836, for example, on a topic “of interest to all classes of society.”¹³⁰ In 1835, Saunders gave a lecture “specially adapted” for many of the “labouring classes.”¹³¹ He described this meeting in a letter to his brother as including “a whole lot of Tag Rag and Bobtail, together with the respectable people & surrounded by several friends.”¹³²

Other measures, however, appear to have been genuine attempts to include the poor as active participants in the Society’s activities. In 1839, for example, Saunders announced that the proposed cost of a subscription to the Temperance Society’s newly-launched newspaper would be only 20 shillings, a “sum so small as to place it within the reach of the poor,” and also small enough that “wealthy settlers” could “take additional copies for their estates in the country.”¹³³

Saunders’s writing also sheds some light on Allen’s claim that the first Temperance Society was set up to suit the interests of the middle and upper classes, by framing its pledge only as a promise to abstain from the use of spirits (the “poor man’s drink”).¹³⁴ It was a criticism that had been frequently made in Saunders’s own time, and he had repeatedly defended the society against it. In July 1838, for example, an article in *The*

¹²⁷ “The Third Motive,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.11, May, 1838, 161.

¹²⁸ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, Elizabeth Saunders to her sister-in-law Jane, 8 June, 1835.

¹²⁹ “Sailors’ Home,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 30, 1839, 2.

¹³⁰ “News of the Day,” *Sydney Monitor*, October 12, 1836, 2.

¹³¹ “Hawkesbury Temperance Society,” *Colonist*, June 25, 1835, 4.

¹³² *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his brother Alexander, 19 June, 1835.

¹³³ “Prospectus,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, June 1839, ii. The amount of money outlaid for the magazine and other publications was a significant factor in the bankruptcy of the society in 1844: see “Australian Temperance Society,” *The Weekly Register of Politics, Facts and General Literature*, June 29, 1844, 660.

¹³⁴ Even Saunders’s friend, George Allen, had privately framed it in these terms: George Allen, “Journal, 1819-75,” Allen Papers, MLMSS 477, May 11, 1834.

Monitor argued that the Temperance society should not be trying to legislate on the issue or deprive the poor of their drink, as it “was unjust to the labourer.... The members of these societies discourage the use of spirits, because it is cheap, and consequently the drink of the poor. But the use of wine they allow, which the poor cannot afford to buy.”¹³⁵ A few days later they continued the campaign against the “barbarous attack” by “Governors, Judges, and Clergymen all combining to deprive the poor of his cheap vulgar drink.”¹³⁶

Saunders vigorously defended the Society against such claims. In 1838 he wrote a long article in the *Australian Temperance Magazine*, insisting that the Society was for all people:

The tendency of these articles is to produce the impression that the Temperance Society is a combination of Aristocrats and Religionists to place a restraint upon the vices of the poor and to intermeddle with the comforts of the humble ... but it will be hard to convince an enquiring public that the Temperance Society draws an invidious distinction between the rich and the poor, between patrician and plebeian vice, when the first supporters and most zealous advocates of this Society have been those who are emphatically termed the people.¹³⁷

In response to the argument that the limitation of the pledge to spirits discriminated against the poor, Saunders pointed out that the Society’s pledge did not prohibit beer, which was cheap, that in some countries (e.g. Scotland) the rich drank spirits, and that *all* people had been drinkers of spirits in New South Wales when the temperance society was originally formed.¹³⁸

But while Saunders strongly denied a bias towards the rich, Allen’s claim that the Temperance Society was failing to reach the poor as effectively as the other classes does hold some weight. In his own response to the criticisms in *The Monitor*, Saunders had to acknowledge that while the Temperance Society had aimed their campaign at everyone, they had largely managed to change the drinking habits of only the wealthier members of society.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ “Public Houses,” *Sydney Monitor*, July 27, 1838, 2.

¹³⁶ “Public Houses,” *Sydney Monitor*, July 30, 1838, 2.

¹³⁷ “The Monitor,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.3, 1838, 33.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

There are other indications from Saunders's work that the Temperance Society was less than effective at signing up working class members. In a letter directed to Saunders in 1838, a correspondent suggested that the communications from the society could be amended so that those who could not read could learn of their meetings.¹⁴⁰ At the beginning of a Temperance Society meeting in January 1838, Saunders, in his role as secretary admitted that "the Temperance cause has not advanced during the year, for while among the more respectable classes the Temperance cause is gaining advocates, among the lower classes drunkenness has increased."¹⁴¹

This admission led to the discussion about total abstinence that ultimately triggered the establishment of the Total Abstinence Society. Rev. Jarrett argued that he "considered the Society here, was following an erroneous course, in not imitating the Americans; that the cause of Temperance would not thrive when the poor man was debarred from spirits, and the rich man suffered the use of wine and ale in any quantity."¹⁴² The Rev. Ralph Mansfield also supported this course of action, arguing that they needed to go "go the whole hog and banish every intoxicating beverage," because they were depriving the "poor man of his rum and his whiskey, while they left to the rich man his luscious wines and sumptuous ales."¹⁴³

The Total Abstinence Society that eventuated was, as Allen asserts, more populist in its approach and the leadership of the movement was increasingly drawn from the "humbler classes."¹⁴⁴ Saunders himself pointed to the total abstinence pledge as proof that some at least from among the working class embraced temperance:

Let us call in the army of total abstainers, consisting of laborers, drovers, founders, sailors, and artizans of every craft,—wet or dry, cold or hot,—and ask whether Drink is the poor man's comfort, and they will answer no!¹⁴⁵

While there is evidence from John Saunders's writings to support the argument that the Total Abstinence Society included a higher proportion of working class members than the original Temperance Society, his activities as a leader within both groups suggest that the shift was not as dramatic as Allen implies. Matthew Allen argues that the

¹⁴⁰ "To the Editor," *Sydney Monitor*, 1836, January 16, 3.

¹⁴¹ "Temperance Society," *Sydney Herald*, January 25, 1838, 2.

¹⁴² "News of the Day," *Sydney Monitor*, January 24, 1838, 2.

¹⁴³ "New South Wales Temperance Society," *Sydney Gazette*, January 25, 1838, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Allen, "Temperance Shift," 166. An account of an early Abstinence Society meeting, for example, describes the majority of attendees as working class and "very zealous in support of the cause." "Total Abstinence Society," *Sydney Herald*, June 10, 1840, 5.

¹⁴⁵ "The Monitor," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.3, 1838, 36.

Abstinence Society differed from the Temperance Society in that it had less support from the established church and more from dissenting ministers.¹⁴⁶ But this account both overemphasises the extent to which the established church drove the Temperance Society and understates the continuities between the former group and the latter, owing in part to the leading role that dissenting ministers played in both. While Saunders originally opposed the suggestion to change the Temperance Society pledge to one of “total abstinence,” he was still supportive of the notion of a separate society.¹⁴⁷ He joined it from the beginning, while remaining a member of the Temperance Society, his main objective being unity in the movement.¹⁴⁸ Saunders was a strong supporter and a teetotaller himself and his involvement in both groups (along with numbers of other dissenting clergymen) is evidence of the strong degree of overlap between the two groups.¹⁴⁹ Among the other clergymen involved in both groups were Rev. Mansfield and Rev. Jarrett (who had both proposed the new group and played a key role in its establishment).¹⁵⁰

The evidence of cooperation between the various temperance groups also undermines the claim that the groups were completely separate entities. There was, rather, a continued sense that the various societies were in partnership and unified in the one cause.¹⁵¹ In a speech delivered to the Temperance Society in 1841, for example, Saunders rejoiced in the fact that it had in the Sydney Total Abstinence Society, “a most efficient coadjutor ... which had already upwards of one thousand members enrolled in the town, besides auxiliaries in other townships.”¹⁵²

The evidence of John Saunders’s writings and reported activities, therefore, along with the other surviving evidence from the period, is broadly consistent with Windschuttle’s characterisation of the movement as principally middle class in its composition, with a

¹⁴⁶ Allen, “Temperance Shift,” 166.

¹⁴⁷ “Temperance Society,” *Sydney Herald*, January 25, 1838, 2.

¹⁴⁸ “New Zealand,” *Colonist*, April 6, 1839, 3.

¹⁴⁹ “Public Meeting,” *Teetotaller*, March 1, 1843, 3. According to this article Saunders had been a teetotaller for years and resisted drinking wine even at doctor’s orders. Cf. “Annual Public Meeting,” *Teetotaller*, September 6, 1843, 2.

¹⁵⁰ It was reported at the time that Saunders was the only clergyman to sign the pledge but this was not correct: “New Zealand,” *Colonist*, April 6, 1839, 3.

¹⁵¹ The farewell for Governor Gipps organized by “various officers of the Temperance and Total Abstinence Societies” is a good example of the continued co-operation between the groups: “Temperance Meeting—Address to his Excellency Sir George Gipps,” *Morning Chronicle*, July 1, 1846, 2.

¹⁵² “Public meeting of Temperance Society,” *Sydney Herald*, July 17, 1841, 2. Saunders was also involved in establishing total abstinence societies: “Parramatta,” *Teetotaller*, May 10, 1843, 3. He encouraged the support of the *Teetotaller* (the newspaper published by the Abstinence Society) as a successor to the *Temperance Advocate* which was published by the New South Wales Temperance Society: “Temperance Meeting,” *Teetotaller*, July 2, 1842, 3. See also “Australian Total Abstinence Society,” *Teetotaller*, July 23 1842, 3.

sprinkling of members and patrons from the upper echelons of the colony in the first wave and increased representation of skilled, upwardly-mobile workers in the second. At several crucial points, however, it exposes the inadequacies in Allen's account, which over-emphasises the discontinuities between the movement's first wave and its second, mischaracterising the first wave as "upper class" and "established church" in its ethos, understating the role played by dissenting clergy in both waves, and overlooking the extent to which the two societies cooperated with each other as groups within a single, larger movement.

Class, economic interests, and the motivations of the movement

Questions of class arise not only within the accounts that historians have offered of the composition of the early temperance movement but also in their analysis of the motives which drove its members and to which it appealed in its propaganda. Given that Saunders was one of the main advocates for the movement in Sydney from 1835 to 1848, his writings are a valuable source of evidence for how the movement's leaders framed their persuasive rhetoric and the range of motives that they appealed to. This evidence is particularly useful in assessing Windschuttle's claim that the movement was, at its heart, driven by the economic self-interest of the middle class and the upwardly-mobile "working class aristocracy."

Saunders's writings suggest that he was typical of his era in the extent to which he was conscious of the distinctions of rank and social status. One consequence of this class-consciousness on Saunders's part is the way in which he frequently framed his communication to the public as a series of discrete messages addressed to the various classes of society. This feature of Saunders's writing can be seen most clearly in a series of articles for the *Australian Temperance Magazine* in 1840, singling out a different class of people for each instalment. Starting with the clergy,¹⁵³ he then moved on to the magistracy,¹⁵⁴ the military,¹⁵⁵ the gentry,¹⁵⁶ and the "commonalty,"¹⁵⁷ in each successive issue of the magazine. Saunders appeals to all groups to sign the pledge, but argues his case slightly differently for each. The clergy, for example, are addressed as the "professed leaders in social advancement, in morals, and in religion";¹⁵⁸ the magistracy are reminded of the fact that so many of the crimes on which they pass sentence are, in

¹⁵³ "The Clergy," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.8, 1840, 113.

¹⁵⁴ "The Magistracy," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.9, 1840, 129.

¹⁵⁵ "The Military," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.10, 1840, 145.

¹⁵⁶ "The Gentry," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.11, 1840, 161.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ "The Clergy," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.8, 1840, 113.

part at least, occasioned by the abuse of alcohol;¹⁵⁹ and the attention of the officer class in the military is directed toward the lack of discipline caused by drunkenness, both in the officers' mess and among the rank and file.¹⁶⁰ Another article, written in July 1838, structured its address to the public in a similar manner, focusing on the various classes of the colonial economy one at a time, outlining their possible involvements in the cause.¹⁶¹

The range of motives to which Saunders appealed certainly included the kind of middle-class economic self-interest that Windschuttle points to as the principal driver of the movement. In response to a question after a lecture at Parramatta, for example, he argued that "it has been found that a good customer to the publican, is a bad one to the butcher and baker — and vice versa."¹⁶² In 1840, he wrote a letter to the *Herald*, enclosing an extract from the *Leeds Mercury* which had reported that temperance had made a positive impact on manufacturing interests. His inference was that Australian wool would be required to meet the growing demand that would come from a large increase in customers from among those who once "plunged themselves in indigence by intemperance."¹⁶³

As a solidly middle-class person himself, Saunders would not have found it difficult to feel the persuasive force of arguments such as these. While not a businessman in his own right, he did have household servants and a first-hand stake in the benefits that would accrue from measures designed to foster a sober workforce. Evidence of his own frustrations with intemperate servants can be seen in a letter that he wrote to his sister Sarah in 1835, admitting that "we were obliged to send away one woman as an incorrigible drunkard & since then have done all things in a house with brooms & the kitchen ourselves. My Bessy is now engaged washing dishes & I am an accomplished Johnny."¹⁶⁴

But class-based appeals to the self-interest of the middle class were by no means the sole or predominant theme of Saunders's rhetoric. Where economic arguments were mounted, they frequently attempted to demonstrate the benefits of temperance for all classes of society. In twenty years of temperance, he informed his readers in an 1838 editorial, "the casual drinker will save £90; the regular drinker, £365; and the sot £1040,

¹⁵⁹ "The Magistracy," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.9, 1840, 129.

¹⁶⁰ "The Military," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.10, 1840, 145.

¹⁶¹ "A New Era," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.1, 1838, 2-3.

¹⁶² "Domestic Intelligence," *Temperance Advocate*, October 14, 1840, 5.

¹⁶³ "Wool and Temperance," *Sydney Herald*, May 4, 1840, 1.

¹⁶⁴ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister Sarah, 1 August, 1835.

£1300 or £1560. "The poor, ragged, wretched man, who squanders thirty shillings a week in drink, might live decently for twenty years, then leave off work entirely."¹⁶⁵ A similar argument was made to the "commonalty" when he suggested they give up spirits for their own sake. "It is," he argued, "a work of self-interest; it is a work of self-preservation."¹⁶⁶

Saunders's attempts to find ways of addressing his arguments directly to working class members of the public were informed in part by his conviction that they were the people on whom the negative consequences of a culture of intemperance fell most heavily: "[T]he heaviest weight of sorrow falls upon the *Commonalty*, the mass of the people, the humbler classes," he argued in an article addressed to working class readers, pointing out that it is the poor who are more likely to lose their property, fall ill, miss out on an education or starve as a result of intemperance.¹⁶⁷

Frequently, too, Saunders's economic arguments are framed not only as a pathway to economic advancement for the individual but also as a strategy for the improvement of society as a whole.¹⁶⁸ In an 1835 lecture he argued that the cost of intemperance to the colonial economy (taking into account the duty on foreign spirits, the cost of spirits themselves, and the loss of time, property and extra resources needed for the police and judiciary) amounted to over £200,000 a year. If these funds were spent on other goods and services, he argued, the consequence would be "wealth disseminated among different classes, useful to all, but especially cheering to the cottage of the poor."¹⁶⁹ In a later address, he "appealed to the different classes of society on social and relative grounds, and maintained that the general interests of trade and business would be promoted by the universal spread of temperance."¹⁷⁰

While Saunders did frequently appeal to the individual or collective self-interest of his readers, he could also be quite blunt in calling on them to act contrary to their economic interests. In an 1839 article directed at merchants, for example, he challenged them to see the way in which the profit motive caused them to suppress the philanthropic impulses they might otherwise feel. "The merchant," he argued, was "a benevolent man," yet still went on to "multiply and perpetuate these miseries because you find the gain

¹⁶⁵ "The First Motive: Part II," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.8, 1838, 115.

¹⁶⁶ "The Commonalty," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.12, 1849, 180.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 177. Emphasis original.

¹⁶⁸ "The First Motive," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.7, 1838, 101: "If ... our readers wish to advance their own interest and the general advantage of the colony, they will support ... the Temperance Society."

¹⁶⁹ "Colonial Statistics," *Colonist*, September 3, 1835, 3.

¹⁷⁰ "Total Abstinence Society," *Courier*, August 6, 1845, 2.

profitable.”¹⁷¹ In another article written in the same year, Saunders called on the masters of sheep washers to depart from the custom of allocating their workers a ration of spirits after they had completed their work. He acknowledged the possibility that some men may leave the employers who did not serve spirits, but called on them to implement the change nonetheless, as men who are “enlightened by the discussion.”¹⁷²

Appeals such as these to the conscience of his readers, asking them to act, where necessary, against their own private economic interests, underline the fact that in Saunders’s mind (to the extent that we can read his public rhetoric as evidence for his private opinions) arguments from self-interest were never the core motive that he wished to appeal to. “[W]e do not deem it a motive of the noblest order, but we believe that being presented first in order of time, it will gain for us a more candid hearing, and prepare the hearts of some to receive the motives which are to follow.”¹⁷³ Economic considerations and class-based appeals to the self-interest of his readers were an undeniable part of Saunders’s persuasive strategy, but they were by no means the totality or the essence of his argument.

Saunders on temperance, status and respectability

The prominent place that questions of respectability occupied within Saunders’s thinking and writing was in conformity with attitudes that were widely held in British and colonial society in his period, not only among the middle class but among working men and women as well.¹⁷⁴ In keeping with the popular opinion of the day, Saunders attached the language of temperance closely to the notion of respectability.¹⁷⁵

His initial impressions of Sydney give some indication of the dismay that he and his wife felt at the lack of respectable society that they encountered on their arrival, and of the contribution that public drunkenness made to that larger, negative impression. The people were, he wrote, “so thin, so sunburnt & many of them so drunk—not a lady to be seen, hardly a woman; it appeared as if we had landed among a set of the most degraded & uncomfortable beings we had ever thought of.”¹⁷⁶ Later he commented to his sister,

¹⁷¹ “The Merchant,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.10, 1839, 165.

¹⁷² “Sheep-washing,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.4, 1839, 49.

¹⁷³ “The First Motive,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.7, 1838, 97.

¹⁷⁴ Brian Howard Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 157; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 33-34.

¹⁷⁵ Sturma, *Vice*, 141-62.

¹⁷⁶ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister-in-law Harriett, 9 June 1835.

Sarah, that “it is a bad country for ladies. Rum destroys all good society. In the towns you may find something respectable among religious folk; but it is still below par.”¹⁷⁷

It seemed clear to Saunders that within the Sydney in which he arrived, “rum is the great agent of villainy.”¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth echoed these sentiments in a letter to her sister-in-law Jane, in which she linked the lack of good society with the effect of alcohol in the colony.

We often wish for you all over here, but we do not like to say to anyone “come”, for at present you would be quite lost, there being scarcely anyone is whose society you could feel pleasure. In fact it is a complete Exile. All here is Vice and Dissipation of every kind, wherever we turn our eyes, drunkenness & its evil effects visible and the number of drunken men & women who are to be seen on the Sabbath day is almost beyond calculation.¹⁷⁹

Whilst respectability was clearly connected to class in Saunders’s thinking,¹⁸⁰ he was also typical of his time in his belief that class alone did not determine respectability. Respectability could be achieved at all social levels,¹⁸¹ as evidenced in an 1841 description of a Temperance Society meeting, which described a crowd of “well-dressed and respectable persons of all classes of the community.”¹⁸² Conversely, a man with wealth, land and leisure who was an habitual drunkard could not call himself a gentlemen:

[I]f any who pride themselves upon their gentility get drunk, we must deal with them not among the class whose honor they usurp, but as those who have voluntarily placed themselves beyond the gentlemanly pale.¹⁸³

A similar argument was directed to the magistracy of the colony, whose members were energetically reminded of the hypocrisy involved in condemning convicts for crimes that were occasioned by the same vices that the magistrates themselves indulged in.¹⁸⁴

At one level, according to Saunders’s account of the strategy and aims of the temperance movement, it sought to enlist those who were not truly respectable and persuade them

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., John Saunders to his sister Sarah, 26 January, 1835.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., John Saunders to his sister-in-law Harriett, 9 June 1835.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Elizabeth Saunders to her sister-in-law Jane, 8 June, 1835. See also her comments on “the impropriety of spirit drinking” in another letter to her sister-in-law, written on 7 November in the same year.

¹⁸⁰ See for example, the way Saunders refers to “respectable classes” in opposition to the “lower classes” at a Temperance Society meeting in 1838: “Domestic Intelligence: Temperance Society meeting,” *Sydney Herald*, January 25, 1838, 2.

¹⁸¹ Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 157.

¹⁸² “Annual Meeting,” *Australasian Chronicle*, April 20, 1841, 2.

¹⁸³ “The Gentry,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.11, 1840, 161-162.

¹⁸⁴ “The Magistracy,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.9, 1840, 130.

to attain respectability by achieving sobriety. At the same time, however, he also made frequent appeals to men and women whose respectability was beyond question to support the movement for the sake of others. His report of a visit to Bathurst in 1837, for example, indicated that he viewed the support of the “respectable” and “Gentlemen” of that town as crucial for the Society’s success.¹⁸⁵

The responsibility of those who were already sober and respectable to take the pledge and offer an example to those who were not was a recurring theme in Saunders’s writings. In an address to the Hobart Total Abstinence Society in 1845, Saunders “urged the importance and necessity of pledged union with a society, not of drunkards nor of those only who have abandoned intemperance, but of those who have been temperate all their lives, and who, from a desire to encourage temperance in others, have voluntarily rejected what they might otherwise have used without danger.”¹⁸⁶

The evidence of Saunders’s writings and reported actions would, therefore, suggest that there are elements of truth in Allen and Sturma’s account of how the temperance movement in New South Wales functioned to assert and maintain respectability.¹⁸⁷ It raises questions, however, about their claim that the core function of the temperance movement in the 1830s and 1840s was to assist its members in confirming their own morality and publicly displaying their respectability.¹⁸⁸

While it is true that Saunders emphasised the contribution that sober and respectable people could make to the temperance cause, he also consistently expressed the hope that “drunkards” (who wished to reform themselves) would be members of the temperance groups alongside them. In 1837, for example, he highlighted the various groups the Temperance Society was designed to reach, defending it against the charge that it was “a drunkards’ Society”: “it was instituted for sober men, to keep them so; for

¹⁸⁵ *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.5, 1837, 68. Cf. Saunders’s comments after a visit to Pitt Town, in “Temperance Lecture at Pitt Town,” *Temperance Advocate*, January 20, 1841, 1. Governor Gipps expressed a similar opinion at the Temperance Society meeting in 1841: “Temperance Society,” *Sydney Herald*, April 19, 1841, 1.

¹⁸⁶ “Total Abstinence Society,” *Courier*, August 6, 1845, 2.

¹⁸⁷ While Allen draws on Sturma and Gusfield in his assertion that the temperance movement contained few “drunkards,” it should be noted that both scholars identified the initial stages of the total abstinence movement as being particularly open to people with genuine addictions. Gusfield (writing in the American context) argued that the period between 1830 and 1850 was in his opinion the only period in which “a large number of adherents were attempting to curb their own drinking propensities and become self-abstinent”: Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*, 61. In the Australian context, Sturma acknowledges that while the rest of the temperance movement (in his opinion) was more concerned with keeping the “sober men sober,” teetotallers “placed greater emphasis on reclaiming drunkards.” Sturma, *Vice*, 155, 162.

¹⁸⁸ Allen, “Sectarianism,” 391-92; “Temperance Shift,” 152; Sturma, *Vice*, 155.

moderate men, to place them on the safe ground of abstinence; and, if opportunity offered for drunkards, to reclaim them.”¹⁸⁹

Somewhat more strikingly, in an 1840 article addressed to the clergy, he bluntly reminded his readers that the appeal for their support was premised not on an assumption of their inviolate and unquestionable respectability but—quite the contrary—on the assumption that they were as vulnerable to temptation as the members of their congregations:

In addressing the clergy ... we are not addressing an immaculate body.... Every Christian sect has, to the shame of its own church and the pain of the church at large, had to surrender a minister, and some sects more than one, as victims of intemperance.¹⁹⁰

Saunders’s claim was not a mere rhetorical flourish but arose, in part, out of the painful experience of his own interactions with his immediate predecessor, John McKaeg (who had been the first Baptist minister in Sydney and continued to meet with a small congregation after Saunders’s arrival).¹⁹¹ McKaeg’s very public struggle with alcohol addiction had led in 1835 to the bankruptcy of his tobacco business and a spell of almost two years in debtors’ prison, where he attempted suicide, reportedly “in a state of intoxication.”¹⁹²

Saunders experienced episodic tensions with McKaeg, including a campaign that McKaeg ran against his attempt to build a Baptist Chapel in Bathurst Street. Nevertheless, John and Elizabeth Saunders played a leading role in the efforts of McKaeg’s friends to rehabilitate him, as evidenced, for example, by the presence of their names at the top of the list of subscribers to an appeal for McKaeg’s benefit in 1844.¹⁹³ From the very beginning of his time in the colony, experience had taught Saunders that sobriety and respectability were—for some at least—fragile possessions, attained with difficulty and easily lost.

The fact that Saunders needed to repeatedly assure the public that the Temperance Society was not a “drunkard’s society,” the difficulty he experienced in recruiting

¹⁸⁹ “Temperance Meeting,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 27, 1837, 2.

¹⁹⁰ “The Clergy,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.8, 1840, 113-15.

¹⁹¹ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his brother James, 20 January, 1835.

¹⁹² “Accidents, Offences, &c,” *Sydney Herald*, November 3, 1836, 2. The editor of the *Sydney Gazette* sharply criticised the prison for supplying the alcohol which effectively prevented him from repaying his debts and kept him imprisoned for that amount of time, “habitually addicted.” “Hobart Town Extracts,” *Sydney Gazette*, November 1, 1836.

¹⁹³ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister Jane, 7 April, 1835. See Barbara Coe, *John McKaeg: Baptist Minister in Sydney* (Macquarie Park: Greenwood Press, 2014), 56-57.

members of the colonial elite (especially ladies) to join it, and the assumption of universal vulnerability that he voiced loudly and bluntly in his appeals to potential members, including his fellow-clergy, all sit uncomfortably with Allen's claim that the early temperance movement's primary function for those who joined it was as a badge of their respectability. It was, rather, the kind of movement that respectable people could well feel inclined to *avoid* associating themselves with—hence the assurance offered to the ladies of the colony at a Hawkesbury meeting of the Temperance Society that “no one would suspect them of inebriety from the simple circumstance of their becoming members, for the Society was formed to associate the temperate in one sacred bond for the common good.”¹⁹⁴

In the case of the temperance movement's first wave, the tone of Saunders's response to concerns such as these suggests that the anxieties of those who shunned the Temperance Society for fear that they would be rubbing shoulders with drunkards were somewhat overblown. Saunders's hope that the ranks of the Society would, “if opportunity offered,” include “drunkards, to reclaim them,” is expressed somewhat tentatively and hypothetically, more as a theoretical aspiration than a thoroughly worked-out strategy.

In the case of the second wave of the movement, however, there is more evidence that aspirations of this sort were beginning to find a reflection in reality. The discussions surrounding the decision to start the Total Abstinence Society included pointed observations that the Temperance Society was still mainly attracting “respectable” members of society.¹⁹⁵ With the introduction of the Total Abstinence Society, meetings started to be conducted along lines which suggested that they included a significant proportion of reformed and reforming drinkers.¹⁹⁶

Saunders's own activities as a leader in the temperance movement's second wave reflect this heightened sense of confidence that the audiences addressed in the meetings included men and women for whom the path of abstinence was not a familiar or an easy one. His 1845 address to the Hobart Total Abstinence Society, for example, included a sharply-worded warning to reformed drunkards about the ever-present danger of

¹⁹⁴ “Hawkesbury Temperance Society,” *Colonist*, June 25, 1835, 4.

¹⁹⁵ “Domestic Intelligence – Temperance Society,” *Sydney Herald*, January 25, 1838, 2.

¹⁹⁶ There are many examples of reports of Total Abstinence Society meetings that appear to have been mostly made up of people sharing testimonies of their recovery. E.g.: “Total Abstinence Society”, *Commercial Journal and Advertiser*, June 1, 1839, 4. See also: Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 111. This view of the total abstinence movement is supported by Levine's arguments (Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 50) and Ian Tyrrell's interpretation of the teetotal movement's aims in America (Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 126).

relapse.¹⁹⁷ Warnings such as these were emphatically underlined by reformed drunkards such as McKaeg, who campaigned vigorously for the cause of total abstinence. Saunders was present at the Total Abstinence Society meeting in 1839, in which McKaeg explained that he “advocated the cause because he had derived great benefit from it, having acted upon the principles of the Society two years before the Society was formed; nothing but teetotalism he was confident would effect a change in the habits of thorough drunkards.” McKaeg’s conclusion was confident and emphatic: “If asked what teetotalism had ever done, he would say look around the room and see the reformed drunkards.”¹⁹⁸

Class, Status and the Improving Impulse

The evidence of John Saunders’s writings and reported activities offers partial support to the claims made by Windschuttle, Sturma and Allen about the composition and motivations of the early temperance movement, and throws key elements of the claims that each of them makes into question.

As far as the composition of the movement is concerned, a close study of Saunders’s writings and the history of his involvement in the Temperance and Total Abstinence Societies offers support for Windschuttle’s characterisation of the movement as principally middle-class and upwardly-mobile working-class in its composition (despite the frequently-stated desire of Saunders and others to broaden the membership base of both groups). In so doing, it challenges Allen’s picture of the movement’s first wave as “upper class” and “established church” in its ethos, and his exaggeration of the discontinuities between the first wave and the second.¹⁹⁹

The question of the motivations that drove the movement’s leaders (and the motives that they appealed to in their efforts to recruit members and influence the wider public) is a complex one. The evidence of Saunders’s writings suggests that he was aware of a wide range of motives that he could appeal to in his efforts to persuade the various classes of readers whom he addressed. Those motives certainly included the middle-class economic self-interest that Windschuttle focuses on as the movement’s central motive, and the desire to assert social respectability which Sturma and Allen both identify as central.

¹⁹⁷ “Total Abstinence Society,” *The Courier*, July 30, 1845, 3.

¹⁹⁸ “Domestic Intelligence: Teetotalism,” *Sydney Herald*, May 24, 1839, 2. See also “Total Abstinence Society,” *Commercial Journal and Advertiser*, June 1, 1839, 4. Cf. Saunders’s motion, moved at the at a Total Abstinence meeting in 1842: “Australian Total Abstinence Society,” *Teetotaller*, December 14, 1842, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Allen, “Sectarianism,” 377.

But neither of these motives is given the kind of prominence within Saunders's persuasive rhetoric that the respective arguments of Windschuttle, Sturma and Allen would lead us to expect. If there is a dominant theme in Saunders's writings it is neither the advancement of the private economic interests of one class nor the opportunity that the movement offered to the sober and respectable to demonstrate their respectability. It is, rather, the motif of "improvement," embracing both the self-improvement of the individual and the collective improvement of the society.²⁰⁰ Both the Temperance Society, and to a greater extent, the Total Abstinence Society, genuinely did focus their rhetoric and organise their activities toward the goal of creating a society within which sobriety and respectability were within reach of all, and all were encouraged to achieve and maintain them.²⁰¹ How that project of moral reformation and social improvement related to the religious convictions to which Saunders subscribed as a Baptist minister and an evangelical Protestant, and to the larger debates of his time about religious belief and secular moral enlightenment will be the subject of the following chapter.

²⁰⁰ See Ian Tyrrell's explanation of the link between improvement and middle class respectability in the temperance movement in the United States: Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 138-39.

²⁰¹ Cf. John Briggs's comments on the nineteenth-century non-conformist conscience more broadly: John H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 330.

“An auxiliary, not a usurper”: Saunders, temperance and secularisation

An apostle’s farewell

In late November 1847, a crowd of people gathered at the Royal Hotel in Sydney for the purpose of “presenting to the Rev. John Saunders (who is about to revisit his native country) ... some testimonial in acknowledgement of his exertions in the cause of Temperance and in the promotion of the moral and intellectual welfare of the community.” The meeting was chaired by the Attorney General, who referred to Saunders as the “father” of the temperance movement in Sydney and read numerous letters of gratitude from eminent colonial citizens including the Chief Justice and Speaker of the Legislative Council. Members of the clergy including a Catholic priest, Rev. Dean John McEncroe,²⁰² and a Methodist missionary, Rev. Ralph Mansfield,²⁰³ spoke at length about Saunders’s contribution to various philanthropic causes, and motions were moved and seconded which heaped praise on him for his efforts.

It is this occasion which Michael Roe highlights as an example of the way in which the temperance movement in the Australian colonies had, by the end of the 1840s, ushered in a “new faith” of moral enlightenment at the expense of traditional Christian beliefs and allegiances. At Saunders’s farewell, as Roe describes it, “the Baptist Creed received no mention, Temperance very much.”²⁰⁴ While Saunders was, for the full duration of his time in Sydney, a Baptist minister, he was ultimately remembered (Roe argues) not in that capacity, but for his role as “apostle of temperance.” If Saunders and others like him attempted to make the claim that the Christian could support temperance along with “the moralist, the optimist, the good-natured or the worldly wise man,” they were mired inextricably in a swamp of self-contradiction—the Christian God could not possibly be

²⁰² P. K. Phillips, “McEncroe, John (1794–1868),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcencroe-john-2398/text3167>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed 18 September 2017.

²⁰³ Vivienne Parsons, “Mansfield, Ralph (1799–1880),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mansfield-ralph-2429/text3229>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed 18 September 2017.

²⁰⁴ Roe, *Quest for Authority*, 167.

expected to bless a movement in which “deists and atheists participated equally with true believers.”²⁰⁵

Roe was not the first historian to highlight the role played by enlightenment thought in the shaping of Australian culture.²⁰⁶ Manning Clark, for example, had placed heavy emphasis on the fact that European settlement in 1788 coincided with the era of the American and French revolutions, with the consequence that enlightenment thinking was present at the outset and set the colony on a trajectory toward a fully secularised society. Like Roe, Clark positioned the Enlightenment and Christianity as being in direct opposition to each other, describing the Enlightenment as “the other faith.” Unlike the Christian faith, which encouraged “that-sidedness,” the Enlightenment taught “this sidedness,” or “the capacity of man to achieve happiness here on earth.” By the end of the nineteenth century, Clark asserted, the secular moralists “had created a society unique in the history of mankind, a society of men holding no firm beliefs on the existence of God or survival after death.”²⁰⁷

Clark’s story of the secularisation of Australian society is built on the assumption that the version of enlightenment which took hold in Australia was the anti-clerical, anti-religious type that swept through France in the 1780s and 1790s.²⁰⁸ His line of thinking influenced a generation of historians including Patrick O’Farrell, who suggested that twentieth-century Australia was “the first genuinely post-Christian society ... the first modern society without religious roots.”²⁰⁹

As Clark’s PhD student, Roe followed him in the assumption that Australia became progressively secularised in the nineteenth century.²¹⁰ Whilst the “moral enlightenment” that he describes had roots in Protestant religious thought as well as in the philosophy of the French revolutionaries and the aesthetics of Romanticism, its nineteenth-century colonial manifestation was, nonetheless, a genuinely “new faith” that displaced religion and heralded the advent of a new secular utopia. The temperance

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 182.

²⁰⁶ Stephen Chavura and Ian Tregenza, “Introduction: Rethinking Secularism in Australia (and Beyond),” *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 300.

²⁰⁷ C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia 1: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie* (Parkville: Melbourne University Press, 1962), 109.

²⁰⁸ Chavura and Tregenza, “Rethinking Secularism,” 301.

²⁰⁹ Patrick O’Farrell, “Writing the General History of Australian Religion,” *Journal of Religious History* 9, no. 1 (1976); Patrick O’Farrell, “The Cultural Ambivalence of Australian Religion,” in *Australian Cultural History*, ed. S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 70.

²¹⁰ David Stoneman, “Richard Bourke: For the Honour of God and the Good of Man,” *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 342.

movement, with its belief that “everyone could ... become good, wise, prosperous and responsible,” had played a pivotal role in ushering in this new secular culture.²¹¹

Roe’s account of the temperance movement leans heavily on the 1848 description of it by the poet and secularist, Charles Harpur, as:

founded in the heart of wisdom; ... a child of the world’s better destiny; ... the essence of that spirit of moral enlightenment which is beginning to burst like sunrise over the long benighted earth; ... in fine, not so much a graft upon the tree of modern advancement in social propriety as a shoot from its very pith.²¹²

Adopting Harpur’s rhetoric as the lens through which to interpret the goals and ethos of the temperance movement, Roe draws the conclusion that Christians such as Saunders who involved themselves in it were caught up in an inescapable self-contradiction, inadvertently supporting the very movement that was at work to bring about the demise of their own creed.

In the scholarship of more recent decades, significant questions have been raised about the understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular that informed the version of Australian colonial history told by historians such as O’Farrell, Roe and Clark. Ian Tregenza and Stephen Chavura, for example, have argued that Australia’s Enlightenment was less like the strongly secularist version associated with the architects of the French revolution and more like the more moderate version that prevailed elsewhere in Europe.²¹³ It was concerned less with the ejection of all religion from society than with the creation of room for a plurality of religious faiths within the civil and political order,²¹⁴ seeking not to go to war against religion but to reform its social and political functions along “reasonable” lines.²¹⁵ In continuity with that tradition, the enlightenment impulse in nineteenth-century Australia (as David Hilliard has argued) was, for the most part, directed not toward the rejection of all religion but

²¹¹ Roe, *Quest for Authority*, 6.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 169.

²¹³ See especially the examples and analysis in Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

²¹⁴ Chavura and Tregenza, “Rethinking Secularism,” 301; Stephen Chavura, “‘... But in Its Proper Place ...’: Religion, Enlightenment, and Australia’s Secular Heritage: The Case of Robert Lowe in Colonial N.S.W 1842–1850,” *Journal of Religious History* 38 (2014). Hugh McLeod argues that “trends towards secularisation have to be seen in the context of intense religious competition, whether between rival branches of Christianity or between religious and secular views of the world”: McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914*, 28.

²¹⁵ Chavura and Tregenza, “Rethinking Secularism,” 301.

the replacement of religious establishment and sectarian divisions with “a ‘common Christianity’ that transcended denominational convictions.”²¹⁶

In line with this trend, historians of the religious dimension of colonial Australian culture have turned in recent decades to “more porous and reciprocal accounts of crucial concepts, such as ‘reason,’ ‘religion,’ ‘enlightenment,’ and ‘secular.’”²¹⁷ Gascoigne argues that the Enlightenment needs to be seen “as an attitude of mind rather than a formal creed with clearly defined articles.”²¹⁸ The threads of thinking which were termed the “Enlightenment” (and were influential in Australia) were, as Gascoigne argues, a “quest for principles which transcended the confessional divide and which were secular (though not necessarily anti-religious) in character: the appeal to reason, the language of rights, and a growing insistence on toleration.”²¹⁹ A particular emphasis of the enlightenment mindset, as it was manifested in the penal colonies of nineteenth-century Australia, was the doctrine of human improvability, informed by the claims of philosophers such as John Locke about the capacity of the human mind to be moulded by experience.²²⁰

In pushing back against the idea that there was ever a clearly delineated line between the secular and religious in Australia, Wayne Hudson has argued that the enlightenment impulse in colonial Australian culture was in many cases not an enemy of Christian beliefs but a part of them: “true religion was understood as a means to enlightenment, with the result that Christian attitudes and enlightenment projects were often intertwined.”²²¹ Unbelievers and Christians alike shared the belief in the possibility of improvement of society, having been influenced by Francis Bacon’s argument that “the improvement of man’s [*sic*] lot and the improvement of man’s mind are one and the same thing.”²²²

²¹⁶ D. Hilliard, “Australia: Towards Secularisation and One Step Back,” in *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh Mcleod*, ed. C. G. Brown and M. Snape (Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, 2010), 76.

²¹⁷ Chavura, “But in Its Proper Place,” 357. See also the nuanced and perceptive account of the “hybrid world” inhabited by evangelical Protestants of the Victorian era, in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 393-401.

²¹⁸ John Gascoigne, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²²¹ Wayne Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2016), xiii.

²²² Brooke Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, 1956), 190.

The evangelical movement, to which Saunders belonged, was “permeated by Enlightenment influences.”²²³ Many nineteenth-century evangelicals, within and beyond the Australian colonies, embraced reason and science as entirely compatible with their faith.²²⁴ Those who were involved in activities aimed at the “moral improvement” of society were often influenced by a combination of enlightenment ideals and evangelical notions of a “naturally corrupt but redeemable character” of humans.²²⁵ Although the evangelicalism of the century’s first half already included within it the early expressions of the pre-millennial pessimism that would become increasingly influential in the century and a half that followed, its dominant mode of thought was “an amalgam of enlightenment rationalism and evangelical eschatology,” and its “core ‘hinge’” was the Christian doctrine of the Atonement.²²⁶

In New South Wales, this amalgam of ideas was present from the beginnings of the colony. Evangelical Christians were often involved in social reform projects (e.g. education and prison reforms) which overlapped significantly with the improving agenda of enlightenment liberals.²²⁷ The prominent English evangelical, William Wilberforce, wrote to Governor Macquarie as early as in 1810, asserting confidently that “attention to the Religious and Moral State of the Colony would in a few years produce improvement which men would scarcely anticipate.”²²⁸ John Gascoigne concludes:

In Australia, religion and the Enlightenment learnt to coexist and, to some degree, to co-operate in the task of subjugating the strange and distant continent, while reshaping it better to accommodate the needs of its growing European population.²²⁹

Both of these accounts—the conflict narrative told by Clark and his disciples and the sunnier, subtler picture of consensus and cooperation painted by Gascoigne, Hudson and

²²³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 57. For the purposes of this thesis, Bebbington’s definition of “evangelical” will be adopted. He identifies four distinguishing features of the movement: conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. See also James E. Bradley, “The Changing Shape of Religious Ideas in Enlightened England,” in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. Alister Chapman, et al. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 180.

²²⁴ Gascoigne, *Enlightenment*, 23. Boyd Hilton argues that the majority of evangelicals “supposed that there was a permanent natural law operating in the universe [and] looked to science with confident expectation”: Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 23.

²²⁵ Gascoigne, *Enlightenment*, 105.

²²⁶ Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 3.

²²⁷ Stuart Piggott, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), 31.

²²⁸ Wilberforce to Macquarie, 3 Dec, 1810, cited in M. H. Ellis, *Lachlan Macquarie: His Life, Adventures, and Times* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1952), 240.

²²⁹ Gascoigne, *Enlightenment*, 34. See also Chavura, “But in Its Proper Place,” 360.

others in more recent decades—contain elements of truth. Ample evidence can be marshalled for the pervasiveness of enlightenment ideas and language across almost the entire spectrum of colonial religious and political opinion and the broad base of support for the “improvement” paradigm which it articulated, but within that broad, improving consensus, there were, nonetheless, sharp tensions and noisy conversations about the proper relationship between the churches and clergy of the various religious denominations and the machinery of political authority and social reform.

Religion and the Secular in 1830s Sydney

It was against a background of this sort that John Saunders arrived in Sydney in 1834, landing in a city that was in the midst of a vigorous public controversy about the role of religion in public affairs. From the earliest days of the colony, the chaplains and (once they arrived) the various other clergy present had struggled to find a foothold for themselves and for the churches that they represented. Although Allan Grocott’s portrayal of the convicts and ex-convicts of early nineteenth-century New South Wales as (almost without exception) “irreligious, profane and anti-clerical” has been justly criticised for its selective and distorted reading of the primary sources, there is still ample evidence for the more modest claim that the colonial clergy were frequently troubled by the extent of the irreligion that they encountered.²³⁰ Nor were the struggles of the clergy confined to their relationships with the convict population; the experience of the first chaplain, Richard Johnson, whose relationships with a succession of governors had been fraught with tensions, suggests that some anti-religious attitudes ran through all tiers of society.²³¹ His successor, Samuel Marsden, also had a complicated relationship with the State, uncomfortably fulfilling the double function of clergyman and magistrate—a role that earned him the reputation of the “flogging parson.”²³²

²³⁰ Allan M. Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches: Attitudes of Convicts and Ex-Convicts Towards the Churches and Clergy in New South Wales from 1788 to 1851* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1980), 200. Grocott’s view of attitudes to the clergy has been criticized by Hilary Carey in Hilary M. Carey, “Legacies of Sectarianism and the Convict Past in Australia,” in *Religion after Secularization in Australia*, ed. Timothy Stanley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 45–46. See also, Michael Gladwin, “Flogging Parsons? Australian Anglican Clergymen, the Magistracy, and Convicts, 1788–1850,” *Journal of Religious History* 36, no. 3 (2012); *Anglican Clergy in Australia, 1788–1850: Building a British World* (Suffolk: Royal Historical Society, 2015); Alison Vincent, “Clergymen and Convicts Revisited,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 1 (1999): 95.

²³¹ See Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1987), 12; Hilary M. Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 14.

²³² Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 13.

In the mid-1830s a shift was occurring, with a growing number of denominations represented in the colony, a rise in the number of clergy, and a growing interest on the part of the government in moralising and educating the population.²³³ The years leading up to this period had seen the colony struggle with a chronic under-supply of clergymen;²³⁴ of particular note was the almost complete absence of any Catholic clergy until 1820,²³⁵ (a major problem, given that at least a quarter of the convicts were Catholic).²³⁶ In the same year that Saunders arrived, the first Catholic Bishop was appointed.²³⁷ Dissenting denominations were also under-represented before the 1830s (with the exception of the Methodists who had been present since 1815), but this was also shifting in 1834. When Saunders arrived in 1834, the Anglican church's influence was also "quietly growing" under the influence of William Grant Broughton, who was head of the Anglican church in New South Wales and would be appointed Bishop of Australia in 1836.²³⁸

John Saunders described the diversity of the religious scene in the Sydney of 1834 in a letter to his sister Sarah (back home in England), written soon after his arrival:

There are 2 Episcopal places of worship in Sydney supplied by Evangelical clergymen, 2 Presbyterian places, 2 Wesleyan, an Independent & now 1 Baptist, while the Quakers are founding another interest & what is not a subject of congratulation, the Papists have a splendid place of worship; added to the above there are several prayer meetings at private houses & 2 other small congregations of Baptists, that of Mr Mackag [McKaeg] which I came to supplant & that of some of our friends who refused to cooperate with me

²³³ Stuart Piggin, "The American and British Contributions to Evangelicalism in Australia," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark Noll, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²³⁴ John Barrett, *That Better Country: The Religious Aspects of Life in Eastern Australia, 1835-1850* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), 12. According to Barrett, in 1836 there were only 17 active clergymen in New South Wales—one for every 4,500 people.

²³⁵ Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 24-25. According to Hogan there was one priest, Rev. James Dixon, allowed before this in 1803, but permission to have a ministry was withdrawn after the Vinegar Hill uprising in 1804. A Catholic priest who arrived in 1817 was deported by Governor Macquarie. In 1820, two priests were allowed to minister in New South Wales.

²³⁶ In 1803 Governor King made this estimate. The census in 1828 reported 22.5 per cent of the population described themselves as Catholic: *ibid.*, 12.

²³⁷ John Bede Polding was consecrated in 1834, and in 1842 became Archbishop of Australia: Carey, *Believing in Australia*, 23-24. See also: Bede Nairn, "Polding, John Bede (1794-1877)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/polding-john-bede-2557/text3485>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed 19 September 2017.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. See K. J. Cable, "Broughton, William Grant (1788-1853)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/broughton-william-grant-1832/text2107>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed 18 September 2017.

because they were of the hyper-Calvinistic order. This is a very promising description of our heterogeneous population. I trust the spirit of the Lord is moving upon the waters, that the command has been given, "Let there be light", soon therefore shall light, order & beauty appear.²³⁹

The proliferation of denominations and their requests for monetary aid raised the question of which churches (if any) should be supported financially by the State. In 1831, soon after his arrival, Governor Bourke found himself wrestling with this question,²⁴⁰ and in 1833 he presented the Colonial Office with a list of churches, stating that the funding as it stood "cannot be supposed to be generally acceptable to the Colonists who provide the funds." He went on to argue against the notion of an "established church" in a colony where "persons of all religious persuasions are invited to resort," and that the establishment of one denomination would be prejudicial to "the interests of religion."²⁴¹ Stuart Piggin argues that the *Church Act* of 1836 (which came about as a result of Bourke's recommendations) was not designed to be anti-religious. Instead, "it was designed to strengthen the contribution of religion to society. It was not a secular overthrow of the traditional relationship between church and state."²⁴²

But it did result in much controversy, particularly in relation to the place of the churches in the education of children. Roe represents the debate over education as one between the secular government and the Protestant Christians. As Stoneman argues, however, the real battle was between denominational Christian education and common Christian education.²⁴³ In reality, Bourke was attempting to introduce a form of state-funded Christian education, on terms that would be agreeable to all denominations.²⁴⁴

In the midst of these discussions as to whether and how the State should fund the churches, two groups with more extreme viewpoints about the relationship between church and state were already emerging. On the one hand, Bishop Broughton and his supporters claimed a unique role for the Church of England as the established church in the colony, continuing to assert that it should be the exclusive recipient of public funds and should possess a state-enforced monopoly on symbolic titles, presence at official

²³⁹ *Letterbook*, ML B1106, John Saunders to his sister Sarah, 26/27 January and 4 February.

²⁴⁰ Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 38.

²⁴¹ Bourke to Stanley, 30 September, 1835, *Historical Records of Australia*, Series 1, vol. XVII 224.

According to David Stoneman, the Anglicans were receiving approximately 96% of the church and schools budget. Stoneman, "The Church Act," 70–71.

²⁴² Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World*, 295.

²⁴³ Stoneman, "Richard Bourke," 351.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

functions and the right to wear episcopal clothes.²⁴⁵ Broughton was not content with any other system of education than an Anglican one, with an Anglican catechism being taught.²⁴⁶

At the other extreme of the spectrum of opinion in the education debate, a small but vocal cadre of thoroughgoing secularists had begun to move toward the view that religious views had no place at all in the public sphere. One example in relation to the education debate can be seen in a letter written to the *Australian* just months before Saunders's arrival:

The business of Education belongs to the community in general. Although in the dark ages, whilst the Clerks or Clergy were the almost exclusively educated class, it naturally fell to their lot to take charge of these matters, yet such charge is not their inheritance.... If Clergymen be united with Laymen in directing and promoting the great business of Education, it should not be in the character of Clergymen at all, but in that of men of education and experience.²⁴⁷

These sectarian tensions affected the temperance movement as well. In May 1834, several months after the first Temperance Society meeting in Sydney, the *Sydney Monitor* was already questioning the role of the clergy in the movement:

We beg the clergy of all denominations, if they attend the meetings of the Society, not to favour the public with their speeches, because they cannot of course do this without sermonising; and nothing is so out of place, and disheartening at meetings of this sort ... as to hear religious doctrines and pious expletives and allusions broached in every sentence, quite foreign to the real objects of the Society, and extremely offensive to all, except the devotees to their particular creeds. If Ministers of religion therefore, attend at all, we beg of them to keep their feelings to themselves and not annoy the public with what is quite common-place.²⁴⁸

These, however, were the extreme positions in a noisy and complicated debate. Saunders and the majority of other participants in the discussion fell somewhere between these two views. In relation to the education debates, for example, while the

²⁴⁵ Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 56.

²⁴⁶ Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, 245.

²⁴⁷ "Public Schools," *Australian*, August 15, 1834, 2.

²⁴⁸ "Temperance Societies," *Sydney Monitor*, May 17, 1834, 2. Criticisms of this sort were also made in a series of articles in the *Sydney Monitor*, 1838: "Public Houses," *Sydney Monitor*, July 27, 1838, 2.

Protestants at first sided with Broughton against Bourke's general education scheme in an attempt to oppose the Catholics, as Broughton's vision for an Anglican education became clearer the Protestant coalition started to disperse.²⁴⁹ As Saunders (who with most other Protestants had been previously united with Broughton) argued, this gave the catechism "a far too exalted position in the educational question."²⁵⁰ Bourke reported that "with a Churchman of the Bishop of Australia's principles, no Dissenter... [could] long remain united."²⁵¹

While the Anglicans, Catholics, Presbyterians and Wesleyan Methodists accepted State aid, most dissenting ministers refused. In a letter to *The Colonist*, written in 1839, Saunders insisted that he would not accept a salary from the Government under the recently passed *Church Act*, despite the fact he was entitled to £200 a year.²⁵²

Moral enlightenment, Temperance and John Saunders

Saunders's contributions to the public discussions about temperance and abstinence, across the thirteen years that he spent in the colony, include numerous examples of the close and complicated entanglement between reforms associated with enlightenment ideas and the specifically Christian convictions and goals that he held to as a dissenting, evangelical Protestant. Prominent among such enlightenment themes and emphases were his enthusiastic embrace of the quest for social and individual improvement, his boundless optimism about the possibilities that could be accomplished through such ventures, his commitment to co-operative philanthropic projects that cut across traditional religious and sectarian boundaries, and his frequent recourse to rational, empirical arguments based upon experience, observation, and scientific and medical research.

Improvement

Perhaps the most obvious way in which Saunders's advocacy for the temperance cause reflected the language and ideas of the "moral enlightenment" programme was his

²⁴⁹ Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 52.

²⁵⁰ "A Speech in favour of a general education system, delivered at the General Committee of Protestants on Friday August 12, 1836," *Colonist*, August 25, 1836, 6.

²⁵¹ Bourke to Glenleg, 8 August 1836, *Historical Records of Australia*, xviii, 469. Quoted in Stoneman, "Richard Bourke," 92.

²⁵² "Colonial Churches," *Colonist*, November 30, 1839, 4.

tendency to frame the activities of the Temperance Society and the later abstinence societies as contributions to the project of social and individual improvement.²⁵³

From beginning to end of his time in Australia, Saunders's advocacy for the temperance cause included frequent recourse to the argument that society in general could be improved if people gave their support to the movement.²⁵⁴ Visiting Hobart in 1845, for example, Saunders expressed the opinion that "[t]he temperance reformation ... is undoubtedly the great moral movement of the age, and, as such, ought to seize on the minds of those who wish to benefit their species and induce them to unite in one great effort to accelerate its progress."²⁵⁵

Linked to this was his belief that intemperance was the "master-vice" of the age, threatening not merely the wellbeing of the individual but the health of the entire society.²⁵⁶ An 1838 editorial that he wrote on the theme of "Civilisation" included a forceful assertion of this claim: "Civilized we are not, with a large portion of our population under a barbaric and alien influence—civilized we cannot be, until this great evil be uprooted."²⁵⁷ Writing several years later, in 1841, he painted a gloomy picture of intemperance's deleterious social effects in Pitt Town with its "ruined cottages" and "evidences of decay amid the strivings of a new country."²⁵⁸

Hand in hand with the language of social improvement went language that spoke about the improvement of the individual. In his early writings on the theme of temperance, in keeping with the tendency of the early temperance movement as a whole, Saunders typically spoke about the intemperate individual as the passive object of the "improving" work of others. In 1835, for example, Saunders seconded a motion that called for an end to the practice of supplying ships with ardent spirits, arguing that a measure of this sort would "greatly improve the moral habits of seamen."²⁵⁹ Later, however, in line with the emphasis placed by the Total Abstinence Society on the agency of its members in

²⁵³ Ian Tyrell describes the people involved in the American temperance movement from the beginning as being "improvers": Tyrell, *Sobering Up*, 126.

²⁵⁴ The language of improvement was not unusual in the early stages of the movement. E.g. "Temperance Society," *Sydney Herald*, May 29, 1837, 2.

²⁵⁵ "Total Abstinence Society," *Courier* July 30, 1845, 3.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.4, October 1838, 52.

²⁵⁸ "Temperance Lecture at Pitt Town," *Temperance Advocate*, January 20, 1841, 1. Saunders also frequently pointed to the example of other societies, e.g. Pitcairn Island, to show that a society could be changed both by the introduction and suppression of distillation. "Pitcairn Island," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.5, November, 1838, 76.

²⁵⁹ "Domestic Intelligence," *Colonist*, January 8, 1835, 3.

improving their own lot,²⁶⁰ his writings showed an increasing tendency to depict the temperance project in active, self-improving terms, urging “the improvement which would necessarily take place in the health, circumstances, feelings, and ideas of those who renounced the baneful influence of intoxicating liquors.”²⁶¹

Appeals of this sort to enlightened self-interest were not without their critics, including some from within the ranks of the clergy who saw them as evidence of the sub-Christian ethics of the movement. Saunders was keenly aware of such criticisms, responding to them, for example, in an 1842 address to the Total Abstinence Society, in which he defended the moral legitimacy of even the low bar set by such appeals:

Every consistent abstainer exercises self-denial—to exercise a watch and control over himself for some good purpose. He seeks rather his own welfare, or the welfare of his neighbour. He acts either upon the principle of self-love, or benevolence; but self-love or benevolence lawfully directed—directed to good.²⁶²

But the self-improving impulse which Saunders was happy to defend, and to which he increasingly made his appeal, was never detached in his thinking from the larger vision of an improved society and a better world:

It was not difficult to perceive that they were now engaged in the two great departments of charity—the benefit of themselves, and the benefit of their fellow creatures. It was said that charity began at home, but it was also said that it should not end there—that if it were personal, it should also be diffusive—that the benefits of it should not be confined to one house, or to one circle, but be extended throughout the colony, or throughout the world at large.²⁶³

Optimism

The grand scale of the picture that Saunders painted of the “diffusive” effects of the temperance movement’s activities—“throughout the colony” and “throughout the world at large”—suggests a second way in which his language participated in the rhetoric of

²⁶⁰ On the self-improving ethos of the abstinence groups more generally, see Stoneman, “Richard Bourke,” 352; Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 56.

²⁶¹ “Total Abstinence Society,” *Australasian Chronicle*, November 21, 1840, 3.

²⁶² “Speech of the Rev. J Saunders,” *Teetotalter*, May 28, 1842, 2. Saunders also linked it to the idea of “weakening habit”: “Total Abstinence Society,” *Courier*, July 30, 1845, 3.

²⁶³ E.g. his remarks at the St Patrick’s Total Abstinence Society meeting in 1846: “St. Patrick’s Total Abstinence Society,” *Morning Chronicle*, July 1, 1846, 2.

the moral enlightenment movement: the towering optimism with which he predicted and (to the extent that his public rhetoric can be read as an index of his private opinions) anticipated the accomplishments that the movement was capable of effecting.

As discussed above, the sermons and writings of many evangelical Christians in this period expressed high hopes for the success of their endeavours aimed at the reformation of society; in this respect they shared, to some extent at least, in the optimism of the enlightenment movement more broadly about the improvability of the human condition (enabled, in their view, by the redemptive workings of divine grace) and the positive direction in which the tide of history was flowing.²⁶⁴ Saunders's writings as an advocate for the temperance cause were no exception to this tendency.

In the first edition of the *Australian Temperance Magazine* in July 1837, Saunders summarised the history of the global temperance movement and expressed his confidence that the movement was a holy cause, underwritten by providence and destined for "complete success."²⁶⁵ The optimism expressed in this inaugural editorial was further fuelled by the arrival of the new, reform-minded governor, George Gipps, the following year. In an 1838 editorial, Saunders described the support of Governor Gipps for the temperance movement as heralding a "NEW ERA" (capitals original) in the history of the continent:

Awake Australia! The day is dawning; the slumber of the night must pass away, and the activity and energy of renewed life must succeed. Return a grateful answer to the generous appeal which has been made to thee, and let the response be by deeds as well as words.... [T]hen will the admiring nations behold thy peace, smile at thy happiness, and rejoice in thy welfare—the joyful witnesses of a sight so new in the history of man—so truly characteristic of A NEW ERA—that of a ruler and people striving together for the advancement of the common good.²⁶⁶

Saunders's assumption that the default setting of human history was in the direction of progress can be seen even in the language with which he framed reports of events that he viewed with dismay and disapproval. The introduction of the spirits trade to the South Sea Islands, for example, giving rise to "poverty and wretchedness," was to be

²⁶⁴ Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 21.

²⁶⁵ "The Rise and Progress of Temperance Societies," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.1, 1837, 1. On the temperance movement as a work of divine providence, see also "Total Abstinence Society," *Courier*, July 30, 1845, 3, and "Total Abstinence Society," *Australasian Chronicle*, November 21, 1840, 3.

²⁶⁶ "A New Era," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.1, 1838, 5.

viewed as a temporary and reversible anomaly; the larger movement of history and human civilisation was a “tide of improvement,” even if the activities of the spirits-traders had, for a time, “stemmed” or even “rolled ... back” that tide.²⁶⁷

Cooperation

One of the key features of the “NEW ERA” that Saunders perceived in the advent of Governor Gipps was the spirit of cooperation that Gipps and his supporters called for in their attempts to forge a broad-based, socially-reforming consensus—“a sight so new in the history of man ... that of a ruler and people striving together for the advancement of the common good.”²⁶⁸

As a leader within the temperance movement, Saunders consistently campaigned for the necessity of preserving the inclusiveness of the movement as a broadly-based, non-sectarian coalition, embracing members who held to a wide diversity of religious and philosophical beliefs. His own private opinions and allegiances were unmistakably those of an evangelical Protestant dissenter (as evidenced, for example, in the 1834 letter to his sister Sarah quoted above, which described the fact that “the Papists have a splendid place of worship” as something to be viewed as “not a subject of congratulation”). Nevertheless, in his endeavours on behalf of temperance, he went to great lengths to avoid the kind of sectarian disputes that would undermine the movement’s effectiveness,²⁶⁹ advocating energetically for cooperation between different groups to progress the cause and praising the efforts of temperance campaigners from other denominations.²⁷⁰

In explaining what the committee hoped for in the establishment of a new temperance newspaper in 1839, one of the principles highlighted by Saunders was that they would not allow room for sectarianism. Instead, “patriotism without partisanship, and religion without sectarianism,” would be “freely insisted upon.”²⁷¹

This policy on Saunders’s part did not go unnoticed. At a meeting of the Temperance Society in 1839, Richard Windeyer (a lay member of the Church of England) offended

²⁶⁷ “Civilization,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.4, 1838, 50-51.

²⁶⁸ “A New Era,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.1, 1838, 5.

²⁶⁹ Saunders made many comments in his other roles which indicated that he saw sectarian disputes as a distraction from more important matters. In an 1842 sermon he stated: “I have abstained, in my public ministrations from all topics of a sectarian nature. I have acted thus, because the first object of the ministry is to lead men to Christ.” Archives of Baptist Union NSW, John Saunders file.

²⁷⁰ “Total Abstinence Society,” *The Courier*, July 30, 1845, 3. In this lecture Saunders praised the efforts of Catholic priest, Father Mathew.

²⁷¹ New South Wales Temperance Society, “Prospectus,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, June 1839.

many of the people present by praising Saunders for his energetic involvement in a cooperative venture such as the temperance movement. The offence was deepened by Windeyer's further observation that Roman Catholic and dissenting ministers were more involved than their Episcopalian brothers. His praise of these men led to "general unhappiness" in the crowd and (according to some reports) the "hissing" of Bishop Broughton's clerk.²⁷²

Interactions like these reflected the sectarian tensions that were a ubiquitous feature of the time, but the leaders of the various temperance and abstinence societies made it a high priority to transcend such differences for the sake of a temperate society.²⁷³ Saunders's response to Windeyer's comments reflects the way he and other moderate members of the society attempted to keep these tensions from distracting them from the issues that united them. He rose to speak immediately, reminding the audience that "there is no religious denomination in the Colony that is not heart and hand in favour of the Society." After explaining that Broughton and Polding had offered their support, he reminded his hearers "that the motto of the Society is 'Love one another'."²⁷⁴

Saunders and many other moderates like him continued to appeal for unity.²⁷⁵ In an editorial in 1837, Saunders addressed the question of how unity could be achieved with so many sects and parties:

Our Union is one of Practice. Whatever motive may be actuate, we only ask for the result.... Some men, of different creeds, unite because their own particular church has been injured by drunkenness; others again, for their own health, or their own prosperity; and some for the purely religious motive of love to God and love to man.... We man our ship with all the able bodied men who will serve and sign our articles, without asking any question about colour, creed, or country.²⁷⁶

²⁷² "Temperance Society," *Sydney Monitor*, April 12, 1839, 2.

²⁷³ At a meeting of the Total Abstinence Society in 1841, for example, the Catholic newspaper, the *Australasian Chronicle*, reported that the Catholic priest, Rev. Murphy felt they had managed to achieve this type of unity.

²⁷⁴ "Domestic Intelligence," *Sydney Herald*, April 12, 1839.

²⁷⁵ A letter to the Catholic paper, the *Australasian Chronicle*, by an anonymous member ("A Teetotaller"), gives an indication that Saunders was not alone in adopting the attitude that including religion in their addresses "is not right in a Society like that, where there are some of every sect and which was formed to bring about a moral good, and in whose committee there are Catholic, Protestant, Dissenters &c., &c." "Original Correspondence," *Australasian Chronicle*, January 10, 1840, 2.

²⁷⁶ "Union," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.6, 1837, 83.

Saunders repeatedly praised the efforts of the Catholic-dominated temperance groups that followed the pledge of Father Mathew from Ireland.²⁷⁷ He visited the St Patrick's Total Abstinence Society on a number of occasions and was received by the crowd with enthusiasm.²⁷⁸ On the first occasion, he declared that it was his first time "led to celebrate the festival of a saint," going on to explain that he was motivated to go because the invitation came from people "engaged in the sacred cause of total abstinence."²⁷⁹

Saunders's openness to working with other sects won him the respect of some and the criticisms of others. In 1840, despite expressing some dismay that the most recent edition of the *Australian Temperance Magazine* had been disappointing, the Catholic *Australasian Chronicle* nevertheless described it as the "best conducted periodical in the country."²⁸⁰ When Saunders appeared at the meetings of the St Patrick's society, he was met with "prolonged cheering,"²⁸¹ and at his farewell he was praised by prominent members of other churches. Not all were convinced that this was a wise or honourable course to follow; a few days after the farewell, a letter was written to the Editor of the *Sentinel* complaining that Saunders was mixing with Catholics and having praise heaped on him as a minister of the gospel by members of an "idolatrous church."²⁸²

There is no doubt that, as Allen argues, sectarian tensions did affect the movement in the 1840s and early 1850s and played a role in determining which groups thrived and which declined.²⁸³ It is still important to note, however, that in a context where sectarianism was rife, those who led the temperance societies were strongly motivated to overcome such divisions. Saunders and others like him were determined to work together in a context where tensions ran high in the aftermath of the *Church Act*, and that a spirit of cooperation was one of the defining goals of the movement.

²⁷⁷ See "Total Abstinence Society," *Australasian Chronicle*, November 21, 1840, 3.

²⁷⁸ "Total Abstinence Societies," *Dispatch*, March 30, 1844, 3; "St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society," *Morning Chronicle*, July 1, 1846, 2.

²⁷⁹ "Saint Patrick's Total Abstinence Festival," *Morning Chronicle*, March 21, 1846, 3.

²⁸⁰ "Temperance Magazine," *Australasian Chronicle*, January 3, 1840, 1.

²⁸¹ "Saint Patrick's Total Abstinence Festival," *Morning Chronicle*, March 21, 1846, 3.

²⁸² "Testimonial to Rev. J. Saunders," *Sentinel*, December 2, 1847, 2.

²⁸³ Allen, "Sectarianism," 374-92.

Reason, Evidence and science

A fourth feature of the Enlightenment mind-set that was present and prominent in Saunders's lectures and articles was his frequent recourse to rational argumentation and empirical evidence.²⁸⁴

The prominent place that arguments from natural reason occupied within Saunders's public rhetoric as an advocate for the temperance cause was, in part, an entailment of the nature of the movement as a broad coalition, uniting men and women from a wide variety of religious and philosophical backgrounds. The same prospectus for the new temperance newspaper in which he promised his readers "patriotism without partisanship, and religion without sectarianism" went on to spell out the implications of this approach for the editorial content of the newspaper, which would "allow the full discussion of debatable points ... provide for the rapid diffusion of intelligence ... and by fact upon fact, and argument upon argument, ... give a solid foundation for extensive moral reform."²⁸⁵

But the recourse to "fact upon fact, and argument upon argument" in the public rhetoric of the movement does not appear to have been an approach that was uncomfortable or unfamiliar to Saunders. The evidence that survives from his own more private writings indicates that he had a high degree of confidence in the value of human reason and a keen interest in scientific discovery, with a particular focus on natural history, which continued throughout his years in Sydney and after his return to England. A letter describing the voyage out included a careful list of the various bird species that he had seen from the ship,²⁸⁶ and another from his wife Elizabeth to her sister-in-law Jane mentions John "sending home a few birds ... the best we could get. But not so splendid as some we have seen." She goes on to promise "a small collection [of] insects, shells etc" once they are able to assemble it.²⁸⁷ Along with the letters themselves, the Letterbook also includes a large number of newspaper and magazine clippings, many of which were concerned with matters of science and medicine. One of them, for example, is an extract that he had copied by hand from an 1856 article by George Henry Lewes on the new science of heredity.²⁸⁸ Another article argues that the opening chapters of Genesis

²⁸⁴ Characteristic of Saunders's rhetoric was the appeal to "reason and common sense," in his article, "Civilisation," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.4, 1838, 52.

²⁸⁵ New South Wales Temperance Society, "Prospectus," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1839.

²⁸⁶ *Letterbook*, B1106, John Saunders to Harriett Saunders, 16 December, 1834.

²⁸⁷ *Letterbook*, B1106, Elizabeth Saunders to Jane Saunders, 7 November, 1835.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 41. Original article: Lewes, G. H, 1856, "Hereditary influence, animal and human," *Westminster Review*, 66 (July), 135-162.

should not be interpreted literally, suggesting that a figurative reading of the Bible's account of human origins would remove some of the difficulties in "scripture history."²⁸⁹

During his time in Sydney Saunders was a popular speaker at the Mechanics Institute,²⁹⁰ an organisation that had been established in 1833 with the aim of providing an opportunity for self-improvement to members of the working class.²⁹¹ Saunders's lectures frequently focused on topics of scientific interest. In one lecture he discussed "telegraphing" and the electrograph, and wondered whether it would soon be possible to communicate electronically with England.²⁹² In another he spoke on aeronautics, speculating with some enthusiasm on the prospects for the invention of a "flying machine."²⁹³

Saunders's confidence in reason and discovery was reflected in the place that he gave to education within the strategies of the temperance movement. This link was made explicit in a lecture on temperance that he gave in 1835:

Where drunkenness prevails children are neglected, there is no effectual education, and thus ignorance and vice are perpetuated, and if there be any expectation of your receiving a Legislative Assembly, surely the constituents on whose suffrage the senators are to be returned, ought to be moral and enlightened.... Assembled as we are in a room devoted to instruction, may I not with greatest emphasis and at one and the same time, recommend both the Australian School Society and the Temperance Society (which is in effect an education society) to your notice.²⁹⁴

Saunders's own understanding of alcohol and addiction was heavily influenced by the conclusions that he drew from contemporary scientific and medical opinion, reflecting a new understanding of alcohol and habitual drunkenness that had been emerging across

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 101.

²⁹⁰ "All Alive!" *Colonist*, August 11, 1838, 3. The quality of his lectures and "considerable scientific attainments" were also mentioned in his obituary: "The Late Rev. John Saunders," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 13, 1859, 2.

²⁹¹ In practice the Mechanics Institute appealed to a more middle-class constituency: Manley and Coe, *Grace of Goodness*, 237.

²⁹² "Mechanics School of Arts," *Australasian Chronicle*, October 22, 1839, 1; "Domestic Intelligence: School of Arts," *Sydney Herald*, October 21, 1839, 2; "Swindling on a Princely Scale," *Australian*, October 24, 1839, 2.

²⁹³ "Aeronautics," *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 19, 1844, 2. This was one of the few articles about himself which Saunders had kept: Saunders, John, *Letterbook*, B1106, 100-101. For other topics on which he lectured, see "Domestic Intelligence: School of Arts," *Sydney Herald*, August 15, 1838, 2.

²⁹⁴ "Third and concluding Lecture on Temperance," *Colonist*, September 3, 1835, 3.

the immediately preceding decades.²⁹⁵ Benjamin Rush, the North American doctor and author, was the first to clearly articulate the concept of addiction to “spirituous liquors,” identifying that some people had an “inability to refrain.”²⁹⁶ Before Rush’s writings, the problem of habitual drunkenness was viewed as an exclusively moral failing, attributable to the individual’s lack of self-control.²⁹⁷ Rush, contrastingly, identified the substance itself as being inherently addictive, prescribing abstinence as the cure.²⁹⁸ For the first time, the “habitual drunkard” was seen as being a *victim* of the substance.²⁹⁹

Language of this sort was adopted by the temperance movement, including Saunders, who regularly referred to habitual drunkards as “victims of intemperance.”³⁰⁰ Also evident in Saunders’s writing was the new understanding of the way in which a chemical could be viewed as influencing or determining a person’s behaviour. In an 1837 editorial, for example, he asked: “what then, is a drunkard? A human being transformed by certain chemicals into a beast.”³⁰¹ The article went on to argue that, given the problem is related to the substance, not the person, the simplest solution is to remove the substance.

Saunders’s initial scepticism about the necessity of total abstinence was articulated primarily as an appeal to contemporary medical opinion. Like many others at the time, he believed that spirits were an entirely different substance from the alcohol contained in wine and beer.³⁰² In one early lecture he claimed that spirits had a unique effect on the human body, outlining in graphic detail the adverse effects on each organ.³⁰³ Addressing an 1838 Temperance Society meeting which was discussing whether the society should adopt a total abstinence policy, he based his argument on the claim that “it was a fact well known in chemistry that combination had frequently the effect of entirely changing the nature of substances. So it was in this case. Alcohol or distilled spirit is decidedly injurious, but when combined, as in fermentation its nature becomes changed.”³⁰⁴ The *Australian Temperance Magazine* (edited by Saunders) also contained a

²⁹⁵ Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 43-57. From the 1820s, medical doctors were amongst the strongest supporters of the movement internationally: Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 93.

²⁹⁶ Rush, *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*, 266.

²⁹⁷ Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 45-46.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ E.g. In an article addressed to members of the clergy in 1840, he acknowledged that many of them had also been “victims of Intemperance.” “The Clergy,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.8, 1840, 113. See also: *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.1, 1837, 6-7.

³⁰¹ “The New Agent,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.3, 1837, 33.

³⁰² “Domestic Intelligence,” *Sydney Herald*, January 25, 1838, 2.

³⁰³ See for example: “Lecture on Temperance (Part 2),” *Colonist*, July 9, 1835, 2.

³⁰⁴ “New South Wales Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, January 25, 1838, 2.

regular column, entitled “Medical Testimony,” in which medical doctors commented in detail on the physical effects that spirits had on the body.³⁰⁵

Saunders’s eventual conversion to the policy of total abstinence (for which he became a vigorous advocate) was similarly described by him in empirical terms, as a conclusion drawn from the effects he had observed in those who had adopted that principle and the deleterious consequences that he had seen in those who had not. In an 1845 speech to the Hobart Total Abstinence Society, for example, he framed his argument as an appeal to experience and scientific opinion:

Even wines, used by many as less injurious than spirits, were strongly impregnated with alcohol; and, in the London hospitals, he had seen abundant proofs of the injurious vitiation of the system from the habitual use of porter.³⁰⁶

“Fact upon fact, and argument upon argument” may not have comprised the entirety of Saunders’s public rhetoric and private reasoning on the subject of temperance, but (as far as we can judge from the surviving evidence) empirical and rational elements were certainly pervasively present.

“Handmaid to the gospel”

Despite the prominence that enlightenment motifs occupied within Saunders’s speeches and articles on the temperance cause, it would be a mistake (at least, as far as his own conscious self-understanding is concerned) to conclude that he was becoming a convert to a “new faith” that was displacing the evangelical Protestant convictions which had originally brought him to the colony as a missionary, or that elements of evangelical piety and enlightenment reason simply existed side by side as an unconscious, unreconciled contradiction in his thinking.

Throughout the duration of his time in Sydney (and, judging from the evidence of his Letterbook, after his return to England as well) Saunders was deeply conscious of the relationship between enlightenment reason and the received doctrines of the Christian faith within his thinking, and confident that the two could be satisfactorily harmonised. Typical of his thought is an extract that he transcribed into the front page of the

³⁰⁵ E.g. Dr Thomas Graham describing the effects of everyday alcohol use: *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.1, 1837, 4. In the next issue, the dangerous side effects were described: *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.2, 1837, 20.

³⁰⁶ “Total Abstinence Society,” *Courier*, August 6, 1845, 2.

Letterbook from an 1835 article in Thomas Walker's London magazine, *The Original*, which strung together a series of moral commonplaces and followed them with the confident assertion that "this is the Christian doctrine, and the doctrine of reason, which ever go together."³⁰⁷

Confident as Saunders was that a harmonious partnership could exist between "Christian doctrine, and the doctrine of reason" (and, as a consequence, between the cause of the gospel and the various moral improvement projects of the age, such as the temperance movement) the partnership was not, in his mind an equal one. Still less was it one in which reason and moral enlightenment were the senior partners and private religious conviction served merely as an ancillary to the common, secular cause. From Saunders's perspective it was the temperance cause that was (as he frequently described it) an "auxiliary" or "handmaid" to the gospel.

In some contexts, this "handmaid" role could be constructed by Saunders as one in which the temperance project functioned as an agent (within the providence of God) preparing the way for the saving, supernatural repentance that the Christian gospel called for:

The Temperance Society does not come within the Province of the Gospel; this is to renew the heart and prepare for heaven; that is to reform the manners, and amend this terrestrial life; the one, is to reconcile God and man; the other, to reconcile man to man. Yet the Temperance Society has often proved the handmaid of the Gospel, God having designed to bless her as an Agent to promote his own cause, and what God honours man may cheerfully approve.³⁰⁸

Thus, in a letter to the *Temperance Advocate* that he wrote in 1841, Saunders comments on a visit to Pitt Town and the positive effects that had resulted from the minister being a strong advocate of temperance. In Pitt Town, he told his readers, the support of the temperance society resulted not only in an improved society, but also a "crowded

³⁰⁷ *Letterbook*, B1106, 1; excerpted from Walker, Thomas, "Miscellaneous," *The Original*, No. XXVIII, Nov 25, 1835, 423-424.

³⁰⁸ "The Last Motive," *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.12, 1838, 177; cf. Cowper's similar comments, reported in "Domestic Intelligence," *Sydney Herald*, April 12, 1839, 2; "Temperance Society," *Australian*, April 13, 1839, 3; "Temperance Society," *Sydney Monitor*, April 15, 1839, 6.

church,” because the local chaplain, had “not only preached the Gospel, but ... considered the Temperance Society an ally to the Gospel.”³⁰⁹

On other occasions the temperance movement is described by Saunders not as preparing the gospel’s way but as following in its wake, functioning as an organised expression of the love for God and neighbour that the gospel evoked within the affections of believers. At an 1839 meeting in Parramatta, for example, Saunders responded to criticisms that Temperance sought to usurp the place of the Christian gospel, arguing instead that:

[t]emperance was an auxiliary not an usurper. The Society was founded upon the principle of self-denial, and the holy motive of love to God, and love to man; if men thought it a Christian duty to support hospitals and benevolent asylums, it, was a far higher duty to *prevent the necessity for such institutions*.³¹⁰

The “handmaid” or “auxiliary” role that Saunders saw the temperance movement playing in relation to the work of the gospel was connected in his thinking to the function that intemperance played within the biblical narrative—not merely as one sin among many, but as a multiplier or exacerbator of the innate depravity of fallen human nature. In an 1841 lecture, which painted with broad brush-strokes a kind of universal history of intemperance, he pointed to the period after the flood narrated in Genesis as being the point at which “in addition to the ordinary sorrows arising from the ambition, and lust, and fraud, and covetousness of men, all these evils should have been aggravated and greatly multiplied by the prevalence of Intemperance. It has well been said that this first mention of drunkenness, in the oldest and most authentic record of human history is an account of the second fall of man.”³¹¹ A similar notion is reflected in his address to a fictional character, “the distiller,” who (he argues) had become “a coadjutor with Satan in the ruin of the world.” He pleads with him to renounce the business rather than “pollute the world any longer with the wine of misery—the elixir of sin and woe.”³¹²

³⁰⁹ “Temperance Lecture at Pitt Town,” *Temperance Advocate*, January 20, 1841, 1. Similar views were expressed by another prominent member of the society, Rev. Mansfield: “Temperance Meeting,” *Teetotaler*, July 2, 1842, 3. Louis Billington has argued that teetotalism was commonly seen as an auxiliary to the gospel amongst non-conformists in Britain: Louis Billington, “Popular Religion and Social Reform: A Study in Revivalism and Teetotalism, 1830-50,” *Journal of Religious History* 10, no. 3 (1979).

³¹⁰ “Parramatta Temperance Society,” *Sydney Gazette*, May 11, 1839, 2. Emphasis original.

³¹¹ “Lecture II,” *Temperance Advocate*, August 25, 1841, 3.

³¹² “The Distiller,” *Australian Temperance Magazine* 2.10, 1839, 147.

The “auxiliary” role that the temperance movement played in its relationship to the cause of the gospel was not, in Saunders’s mind, something that took away from the properly secular nature of the cause, or of the strategies that could legitimately be employed in pursuing it. Critics within the churches frequently questioned whether a secular cause such as the temperance movement was a proper one for Christians to be supporters of, or a secular organisation such as the temperance society a proper vehicle through which its aims should be pursued.³¹³ But Saunders remained unconvinced by their scruples and hesitations. Christians, Saunders argued, should always be motivated to take action in the secular sphere, as a public, philanthropic outworking of their religious beliefs.

In an 1838 editorial for the *Australian Temperance Magazine*, Saunders defended the secular nature of the Society, arguing that “it avows itself as a moral and not as a religious association; but it is as a moral institution that it claims the support of the religious world.”³¹⁴ Consequently, he called on the religious to become involved, as “there has been so much of religious good connected with it that they would fain identify it with the service of God,” and the religious “are as much called upon as others to the discharge of their secular duty, and the maintenance of every social tie. We grant that they ought to be actuated by higher motives; but the things to be done are identical with those which are performed by the profane. They may be influenced by spiritual motive to the discharge of a secular act.”³¹⁵ An 1840 article addressed to his fellow clergy mounted a similar argument:

Now what are the elements of Temperance Societies? Temperance, self-denial, and love. Instead of being contrary to the Scriptures, it is praiseworthy to talk of and combine in a specific course of temperance; to encourage and to take up self-denial as an element in the compact; and let love to God and love to man be the powerful motive whereby we seek to make our compact universal.³¹⁶

The appeals that Saunders made to explicitly Christian motives were not confined exclusively to contexts in which he was addressing an audience of clergy or fellow-believers. The same theme was taken up in an 1837 editorial that Saunders wrote for

³¹³ M. H. C. Bowen’s response to Saunders (voiced at the first meeting of the Hawkesbury Temperance Society in 1835), that he “hoped he was already a member of a very large Temperance Society—the Christian church,” was not unusual: “Hawkesbury Temperance Society,” *Colonist*, June 25, 1835, 4.

³¹⁴ “The Last Motive,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.12, 1838, 177.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 178. See also: “Speech of the Rev J. Saunders,” *Teetotaller*, May 28, 1842, 2.

³¹⁶ “The Clergy,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.8, 1840, 115.

the *Australian Temperance Magazine*, entitled “The Antidote.” The Bible, Saunders granted, did not forbid the use of alcohol, but it did provide ample support for the principle of self-denial. When drinking would cause someone else to stumble, “in such a case the genius of the Gospel commands us to abstain.”³¹⁷ An editorial aimed at the merchants of spirits in the colony in 1839 managed simultaneously to marshal arguments from Christian motives and premises and to acknowledge that for many of his readers they would fall on deaf ears:

I wish, my dear Friend, I could appeal to you on higher principles; that I could plead love to the Divine Redeemer, and a regard for the spiritual welfare of the tippler; but while you treat the matter so lightly, I have but little hope of these the noblest arguments having any avail.... [I]f you seriously design to entitle yourself to the dignified name of Christian, take the Christian’s book, and look to the Christian’s master, and listen to the Christian teacher Paul, and you will soon find reason to give up the traffic.³¹⁸

Happy as Saunders was to marshal argument and evidence in the furtherance of the temperance cause, the issue was never, in his mind, one that could satisfactorily be comprehended by an exclusively rational, empirical or utilitarian approach. Both in private and in public, his preference was still, wherever possible, to make his appeal “on higher principles,” by means of “the noblest arguments”—i.e., arguments built upon the premises of Christian faith. Even in situations where he suspected that those premises were not shared by the audience he was addressing, they were never far from his own thinking, and frequently present in his own persuasive rhetoric.

Revisiting Saunders’s Farewell

What conclusions can we draw about the legitimacy of Roe’s argument that the temperance movement was, in reality, the first expression of a “new faith” destined to usurp the role that Christian doctrine had traditionally played in shaping the moral consciousness of the Australian colonies, and his appeal to Saunders’s 1847 farewell as illustration and evidence for this claim?

³¹⁷ “The Antidote,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 1.4, 1837, 50. The allusion is to 1 Corinthians 8:6, a text that was used as the tagline for the magazine of the Total Abstinence Society, *Teetotaller and General Newspaper* (published in 1842-1843 in Sydney). A similar use of biblical rhetoric to address the general public can be found in an 1839 article in which Saunders called on the people of New South Wales to follow the example of the biblical heroine Esther in saving her people from destruction: see “Esther,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 3.5, 1839, 66-67.

³¹⁸ “The Merchant,” *Australian Temperance Magazine*, 2.11, 1839, 165.

It is certainly true that (as Roe observes) at Saunders's farewell "the Baptist Creed received no mention, Temperance very much." But while technically correct, the statement gives a false impression of both the occasion and (more broadly) the way in which Saunders related to the "new faith" preached by secularists such as Charles Harpur. The farewell that Roe describes was organised by the leaders of the temperance movement, so it can hardly be a surprise that Saunders's efforts in the furtherance of that cause were its primary focus.³¹⁹ But the speakers at his farewell were by no means silent about the fact that he was a minister of religion. The role in which Saunders was cast by the speakers was not as the devotee of a new faith but as an exemplary and enlightened representative of the old one. The Attorney General made it clear that it was because he was not a member of Saunders's congregation that he would not dwell on "his labours as a minister of the Gospel,"³²⁰ and lauded Saunders for his willingness to work with people of all denominations. The minister of the Pitt St Congregational Church, who moved the second resolution, depicted Saunders as "as a religious man ... of most Catholic spirit, in whose heart bigotry found no place, in the arms of his charity embracing men of every creed."³²¹

Although the enthusiasts for the temperance cause (and the moral enlightenment project more broadly) certainly included convinced secularists such as Charles Harpur, for whom moral enlightenment was, in effect, a "new faith" in its own right, it is a mistake to conclude that all of those who supported the cause of temperance and enlightenment understood it in the same terms. Whilst the movement was avowedly secular in its aims, many of its most vigorous champions, Saunders included, were far from secularist in the ideology that motivated them to support it, and viewed its "this-sided" objectives as entailments and anticipations of a larger and unapologetically "that-sided" vision. As Michael Hogan has convincingly argued, Roe fails to prove that the moral enlightenment project of the 1830s and 1840s was viewed by the majority of religious people at the time as contradictory to the doctrinal convictions of the churches: in relation to the particular instance of the temperance movement it is, as Hogan goes on to say, "much easier simply to accept that the moral leaders of society—secular, Protestant and Catholic—were in fundamental agreement about the need to react

³¹⁹ "The Rev. John Saunders," *Australian*, December 3, 1847, 2.

³²⁰ "The Rev. John Saunders," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 1, 1847, 2.

³²¹ Ibid. These words obviously made an impression at the time on Harpur himself, as he reproduced them alongside a poem he wrote for Saunders on the occasion of his departure: Harpur, "Original Poetry," *Sydney Chronicle*, December 25, 1847, 4.

against a feature of colonial life which was endangering conventional morality, civil order and economic productivity.”³²²

Saunders’s social and theological vision was not, of course, without its blind spots. Reading the rhetoric of his speeches and editorials with the benefit of nearly two centuries’ hindsight, it is not difficult to see a tinge of naivety in his sunny assurance that human reason and Christian religion were natural companions, that the mission of the church and the project of moral enlightenment were self-evidently compatible, or that the workings of divine providence were transparent to human scrutiny. The bold predictions that he and others of his time made about the “NEW ERA” they were part of were not, for the most part, matched by the outcomes that ensued in the following decades.

But judgements of this sort are much easier to make in hindsight than they would have been for those alive at the time.³²³ Understood within the context of his own era, Saunders was neither a convert to a new, post-Christian faith, nor a captive to irresolvable contradictions that he was too blind to see. He was, rather, a minister of the gospel who saw himself as being called by the gospel that he preached to devote himself to philanthropic causes, in which he worked for the common good with anyone who was willing to join him.

³²² Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 75.

³²³ Cf. Manning Clark’s summation of the reform-minded evangelicals in the decades immediately preceding Saunders’s time in the colony: “In our period they were men of achievement: only the sorry farce in their subsequent history drives the historian to search for their worm of failure.” Clark, *A History of Australia 1: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie*, 109.

Rethinking temperance: A social movement in biographical perspective

Making room for complexity: Class, status and religion in the motivations of the temperance movement

The early history of the temperance movement in New South Wales was an intriguingly complex story, involving surprising alliances, sudden ebbs and flows of fortune, and the interplay of multiple, seemingly contradictory cultural and political forces. The existing histories of the movement all attempt, in various ways, to simplify the story, reducing it to a smoother, more linear narrative, creating an illusion of coherence and necessity by isolating a single causal thread from within the larger tangle of interests and motivations.

Viewed through the eyes of Windschuttle, the movement was, in its essence, a manifestation of the economic self-interest of the colony's emerging middle class and upwardly-mobile skilled workers, interfering in the lives of working class men and women to secure the sober workforce that they required. According to Sturma and Allen, it was an exercise in status politics, functioning as a vehicle for the symbolic assertion of respectability and a means of escape from the shadow of a convict-stained past. And according to Roe, it was the first great crusade of a new, secular faith, replacing the heavenly, supernatural salvation of the old religion with a visible, this-worldly paradise to be achieved through education, enlightenment and social improvement.

All of these approaches combine elements of truth with the inevitable exaggerations, distortions and omissions that are required if the complex and contingent nature of history is to be reduced to a neat and simple narrative of inexorable necessity. Useful as such large-scale, smoothed and simplified approaches to history-writing can be, they need to be supplemented by smaller-scale, biographically-framed approaches that allow

more room for the contingency and complexity of individual experience, without implying that the experience of one person was representative of the experiences of all. As Tanya Evans and Robert Reynolds argue, “subjects may not be ‘representative’ of society as a whole ... but it is clear that we can learn much about the world through their eyes and minds.”³²⁴

In the case of the early history of temperance activism in New South Wales, a close study of the involvement of John Saunders as a participant and leader within the movement allows us to see several important ways in which its dynamics were more complex and interconnected than previously understood.

Considerations of class, status and respectability were an undeniably significant feature of all social interactions in the 1830s and 1840s, and feature frequently in Saunders’s own rhetoric. The evidence of his writings, however, is resistant to any attempt that we might make to characterise the movement one-dimensionally as an expression of middle-class self-interest or a symbolic assertion of respectability on the part of the sober and upwardly-mobile. The economic arguments that Saunders employed in his attempts to enlist and motivate his readers for the cause of temperance were aimed at men and women of all classes. Furthermore, his various appeals to the self-interest of particular classes were typically framed within a larger argument about the prosperity and improvement of society as a whole. At times, too, Saunders would consciously and explicitly prevail upon his readers to act in a way that was contrary to their own self-interest, for the larger good of society and the protection of the vulnerable.

Nor was the way in which themes of respectability and self-improvement played out within Saunders’s writings consistent with the claim that the movement’s principal function for its members was as a way of signalling the virtue and respectability of the already sober and industrious. Although it is true that the first wave of the movement struggled to extend its reach beyond its largely middle-class base, this was clearly a source of frustration and disappointment for its leaders, Saunders included. At the other end of the social scale, the difficulties experienced by even the original Temperance Society in securing the involvement of the colonial elite, particularly women, suggest that there was always a whiff of suspicion hanging over it, due to the ease with which it could be caricatured or censured as a “society for drunkards.” Saunders was keen to rebut this sort of depiction of the movement’s composition, but he was insistent

³²⁴ Tanya Evans and Robert Reynolds, “Introduction to This Special Issue on Biography and Life-Writing,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012).

nonetheless that it was a society that aimed to have (reformed and reforming) drunkards counted amongst its members—an aspiration that was more successfully realised within the movement's second wave.

The interplay between religious motives and secularising tendencies within the ideology of the movement (as evidenced in both Saunders's own activities and the way in which they were perceived and reported by others) was also complex, and difficult to fit within the neat, linear arc of the secularisation narrative constructed by Roe. As the movement's most influential figure in the 1830s and 1840s, Saunders was driven by a multi-layered and carefully-articulated combination of enlightenment ideals and evangelical convictions. The co-existence and inter-relationship of those strands within Saunders's religious and political thought offers support to the growing body of scholarly opinion which has argued for the co-existence of moral enlightenment and Christian belief in the political and religious thought of early nineteenth-century Australia.³²⁵ Saunders is a good case study of a colonial religious leader who was not only prepared to work in concert with others who were motivated by enlightenment ideals of improvement and progress, but also showed evidence of the pervasive presence of those same enlightenment ideals, tightly integrated within the internal structures of his own deeply-held Christian convictions.³²⁶

In labelling Saunders as the "Apostle of Temperance"³²⁷ (a title borrowed from the Irish Catholic priest, Father Theobald Mathew)³²⁸ his contemporaries were simultaneously implying the religion-like elements of the temperance movement as a millennial, utopian quest for the betterment of humankind, and gesturing respectfully toward the Saunders's primary vocation as an evangelical Protestant minister.³²⁹ The double function of this appellation is consistent with the complex way in which the frequently-present religious motifs within Saunders's own rhetoric on behalf of the temperance movement functioned: sometimes to provide an aura of religion-like to the activities and aspirations of the movement itself, and sometimes (more typically) to draw connections

³²⁵ Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought*, xiii. See also, Gascoigne, *Enlightenment*, 170.

³²⁶ Cf. the discussion of the interplay between enlightenment rationalism and early nineteenth-century evangelical eschatology in Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 3.

³²⁷ Saunders was first described as "apostle of the temperance cause" in 1839. See: "New Zealand," *Colonist*, April 6, 1839, 3; "The Late Rev. John Saunders," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 13, 1859, 2.

³²⁸ A book was published in 1841 which referred to Father Mathew as "apostle of temperance," and he was frequently described in this way. See, for example: "The Reverend Father Mathew," *Temperance Advocate*, February 10, 1841, 3; "Advertising," *Australasian Chronicle*, February 13, 1841, 1; "The Temperance Cause—Important Letter from the Great Apostle of Temperance," *Teetotaler*, August 3, 1842, 2.

³²⁹ This overlapping set of meanings can be seen even in the way that Saunders was viewed by an ardent secularist such as Charles Harpur. Cf. his poem in Saunders's honour: "Original Poetry," *Sydney Chronicle*, December 25, 1847, 4.

between its avowedly secular goals and the explicitly Christian understandings and motives that lay behind them.

After Saunders: continuities and discontinuities in the nineteenth-century temperance movement

An account of the early nineteenth-century temperance movement in New South Wales that gives due attention to Saunders's contribution also highlights the contingent and, at times, unpredictable nature of historical processes, and the irreducibly human, individual dimension of broader social movements. The sudden decline of the Protestant temperance societies in New South Wales in the late 1840s, whilst the main Catholic temperance society continued to go from strength to strength, is appealed to by Allen as proof for his claim that the temperance movement's second wave functioned principally as a vehicle for the symbolic assertion of respectability (a motive that was particularly powerful for Irish Catholics, eager to shake off the ignominy of the convict past). This is a far from convincing argument, however, given the strikingly different trajectories followed by the temperance societies of Van Diemen's Land in the same period, despite the fact that the same set of broad socio-cultural factors that applied in New South Wales also applied there.³³⁰

A far more obvious explanation of the sudden nose-dive in the fortunes of the Protestant temperance societies in New South Wales is the departure of Saunders, the "Apostle" of the movement, whose return to England in early 1848 left a gaping hole in their leadership.³³¹ It is telling that it was precisely in late 1847 (just as Saunders was making his farewells to the colony) that "the steam" seemed to "go out of the movement."³³²

Although Saunders's departure in 1848 coincided with (and was probably, at least in part, the cause of) a decline in the fortunes of the temperance movement in New South

³³⁰ "Growth of Intemperance," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1853, April 22, 2; "Hobart Town Total Abstinence Society," *Colonial Times*, October 4, 1855, 2.

³³¹ Rev. Joseph Beazley, giving evidence before a Legislative Council committee in 1854, suggested that the decline was due principally to the departure of prominent leaders: NSW Legislative Council, *Votes & Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, vol. 2 (Sydney: Government Printer Office, 1854), 628. An 1853 letter to the *Herald*, similarly, looked back nostalgically to the time when "Governor, Sir George Gipps, took a deep interest in, and presided at some of these Meetings" and "that apostle of temperance, Rev. John Saunders by humble pleading of this righteous cause, carried conviction to many minds of the baneful consequences of drunkenness." "Intemperance," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 1853, 3.

³³² A. W. Martin, "Drink and Deviance in Sydney: Investigating Intemperance 1854–5," *Historical Studies*, 17 (1977): 342. By contrast, Father John McEncroe stayed in Sydney until his death, continuing his support of the Catholic temperance societies throughout that time. It is curious that Allen suggests that Father McEncroe's death in 1868 marked the end of the St Patrick's Total Abstinence Society, but does not give as much credence to leadership factors in explaining the decline of the protestant groups.

Wales during the late 1840s and 1850s, the movement did not die out altogether. Nor, when it returned to prominence later in the century, was it an entirely new phenomenon, disconnected from the legacy of the first- and second-wave temperance societies of the 1830s and 1840s. A closer examination suggests there were strong threads of continuity between the successive phases of the movement across the century. Although they were not meeting regularly, there is evidence that some at least of the original temperance and abstinence groups remained active in some form throughout the 1850s.³³³ The nature of the revival of total abstinence seen in the late 1850s also suggests there was continuity from the first total abstinence groups to the resurgence seen in 1857. At a large temperance “soiree” in that year, for example, Rev. Ralph Mansfield was one of the organisers, and Rev. John McEncroe took the stage, voicing anti-sectarian arguments similar to the ones that he and others had used in the 1840s.³³⁴

The continuity between the first and second waves of the movement and its subsequent expressions in the latter half of the century was not only personal. While historians such as Roe have argued that temperance had become synonymous with a secular, moral enlightenment by the 1840s, the continued involvement of religious leaders and the rhetoric they used, throughout this period and beyond, suggests otherwise.³³⁵ It is true that there were changes in the movement during the second half of the century, as its membership came to be increasingly dominated by evangelical Protestants and Catholic support for the movement declined.³³⁶ There was also a shift in emphasis, as preachers increasingly tended to represent total abstinence as a necessary condition for salvation, and evangelistic revival meetings became almost synonymous with the temperance cause.³³⁷ The membership of the temperance societies in this period, too, was increasingly likely to be composed predominantly of men and women who had never drunk alcohol; Sturma and Allen’s depictions of the movement as a largely “symbolic

³³³ While Allen claimed that the only society left in 1857 was the St Patrick’s Total Abstinence Society, there is evidence that other groups had been meeting up until that point: “Sydney Total Abstinence Society,” *Empire*, May 25, 1854, 3; “Ladies’ Total Abstinence Society,” *Australian Band of Hope Review, and Children’s Friend*, July 19, 1856, 232.

³³⁴ “Temperance Soiree,” *Freeman’s Journal*, June 27, 1857, 3.

³³⁵ As Hudson argues, the WCTU was an example of the dominance of Christians in the social movements of the second half of the century: Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought*, xi.

³³⁶ Quentin Beresford argues that, despite changing emphases in strategy, “evangelicalism continued to be a source of inspiration” for many in the groups. Beresford, “Drinkers,” 7.

³³⁷ Jack S. Blocker et al., *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 75; Fitzgerald and Jordan, *Under the Influence*, 150. E.g. The “Blue Ribbon Temperance Gospel Temperance Movement” which emerged in the 1880s and the message preached by women such as Mrs Hampson in the same decade: “The Gospel Temperance Mission,” *Evening News*, May 7, 1884, 6.

crusade,” whilst inaccurate as a characterisation of its nature in the 1830s and 1840s, have greater validity with regard to this later period.³³⁸ But there were still, even in the last quarter of the century, many commonalities with the language that early advocates such as Saunders had used. The literature produced in the resurgence of the movement that took place in the 1880s, for example, included frequent appeals to science, reason and medical opinion,³³⁹ alongside arguments for the claim that total abstinence was a Christian duty and a way to love one’s neighbour.³⁴⁰

Avenues for further research

Although, as I have argued above, our understanding of the New South Wales temperance movement in the 1830s and 1840s can be significantly deepened and enriched by a close biographical study of even just one of the movement’s leaders, there are obvious ways in which the perspective offered by this thesis’s inquiry could usefully be complemented by a study of the understandings and motivations of other participants within it during the same period. Although Saunders was, in many respects, typical of the evangelical Protestantism of his day, he was also a fertile and original (and at times idiosyncratic) thinker, and it would be a mistake to assume that his perspective was, in all respects, identical with that of his peers and co-religionists. Even within the relatively narrow confines of the early nineteenth-century evangelical movement, there were quite widely divergent schools of thought on the relationship between religious belief and social responsibility, and within the larger coalition that comprised the temperance movement an even wider diversity could be found. If this thesis’s study of Saunders’s writings and activities as a temperance activist could be set alongside a parallel series of studies focusing on other key leaders within the movement, we would be able to draw a clearer picture of which elements in his thinking were representative of the movement as a whole (or, at least, of its leaders), which were the perspective of a sub-group within it, and which were peculiar to Saunders himself.

Beyond the period on which this thesis has focused, another useful avenue for further research would be to examine the human connections between the temperance societies

³³⁸ *Under the Influence*, 153. Hugh McLeod describes the temperance movement in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century as “the supreme embodiment of ‘respectability’”: McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class*, 34.

³³⁹ E.g. the textbooks that Dr T. Broadribb published for school students, outlining the effects of alcohol on the body; cf. Fitzgerald and Jordan, *Under the Influence*, 154. See also: “A Temperance Lecture”, *Australian Star*, October 28, 1889, 8.

³⁴⁰ See for example, the language used in these addresses: “Temperance Sermons,” *Evening News*, May 12, 1884, 8; “Temperance Lecture,” *Maitland Mercury*, April 28, 1888, 3.

of the first and second halves of the nineteenth century. My own preliminary investigations suggest that there were strong familial connections between the early temperance movement of the 1830s and 1840s and the later groups that emerged in the second half of the century. The temperance groups of the 1850s, for example (which have been the subject of very little historical investigation), had significant links with the leaders of the movement in the 1830s and 1840s, and, in turn, strong connections to the groups that emerged in the latter part of the century.³⁴¹ It would also be worthwhile to examine the ideological connections between the early temperance societies and those which emerged in the latter part of the century. While Harrison and Gusfield have carried out large-scale studies of the temperance movement throughout the nineteenth century in Britain and America, respectively, a study of this sort has not been carried out in Australia.³⁴²

One final avenue for further research (and perhaps the most broadly interesting) would be the influence of the early temperance movement on later cultural and political developments. The bridges of cooperation built by key organisers such as Saunders in the service of the temperance cause remained at least partially intact in subsequent decades, carrying a wide variety of philanthropic and political traffic, and the rhetoric that they employed had long-lasting echoes within Australian political discourse.³⁴³ Although the victories won by the temperance campaigners of the nineteenth century were, at best, partial and temporary, their legacy in the political and cultural life of Australia was enduring and profound.

³⁴¹ My own brief research has uncovered two examples—the Rosebys and the Lucases. Ann Roseby was heavily involved in the Ladies Total Abstinence Society in the 1850s and her sons (Thomas and John Roseby) were involved in the Juvenile Temperance movement. Her daughter-in-law, Ann Roseby (married to John) went on to be the first President of the Australasian WCTU: “Juvenile Temperance Hall,” *Australian Band of Hope Review, and Children's Friend*, December 20, 1856, 400; “Juvenile Temperance Hall, Frances Street, Woolloomooloo,” *Australian Band of Hope Review, and Children's Friend*, May 24, 1856, 168; “Ladies’ Total Abstinence Society,” *Australian Band of Hope Review, and Children's Friend*, August 30, 1856, 279; “Mrs Roseby,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 3, 1894, 5. The Lucas family were involved in hosting and chairing meetings in the 1850s and at least one of their daughters went on to play a key role in the WCTU: “Ladies’ Total Abstinence Society,” *Australian Band of Hope Review, and Children's Friend*, August 30, 1856, 279; Vilma Page, “Lucas, Mary Ann (1826–1900),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lucas-mary-ann-13057/text23611>, published first in hardcopy 2005, accessed 18 September 2017.

³⁴² Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*; Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*.

³⁴³ Worth noting, for example, is the way in which the anti-sectarian rhetoric of campaigners like Saunders was echoed in later political discourse, including the education debates of the 1860s, in which appeals to “common Christianity” were a common theme. Cf. Stephen Chavura and Ian Tregenza, “Regulation A Political History of the Secular in Australia,” in *Religion after Secularization in Australia*, ed. Timothy Stanley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 14–21.

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