'Spaces of Drink' and Contemporary Rural Culture: Exploring a Midland Village

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Abstract

Within the wider ecosystem of public social spaces, how varied drinking spaces in rural areas act to facilitate the identities of local communities is of great interest to both rural geographers and those engaged in studying the geography of drink. Such spaces are key to analyse, given the reported centrality of such establishments in facilitating sense of place, especially in more peripheral communities. This research attempts to adds contemporary relevance to the ideas explored by the likes of Bowler and Everitt (1999) and Maye, et al. (2005), surrounding the differing 'cultural terrain' present in differing drinking spaces, and how those differences interact to create individual identities and appreciations of local place. Through a process of interviews, focus groups, participant observations and incursions into the archives of the local history society, an ethnographic understanding of one specific large village in the rural East Midlands could be appreciated. The conclusions of the thesis highlight how, despite processes of economic rationalisation and increasing social isolation, spaces of drink continue to play a significant role in rural communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Fundamentally, this thesis seeks to understand how the varied spaces of drink present in one large village in the East Midlands are appreciated by the community in which they are situated, and contribute to forging local socio-cultural identities within the wider ecosystem of public social spaces and service offerings. Through exploring the day-to-day uses of drinking spaces, and how different people place contested meanings on those spaces constitutes the crux of the approach to understanding the critical, micro-level relationships, which when viewed across the community as a whole, can offer insights into the processes of community building and place-based identity creation.

1.1. Drinking Spaces and Rural England

The spaces of drink present in local communities are a crucial site through which the complex relationships between people and place are formed. Traditionally in rural areas, the village pub has held an important place within local economy and society, and as such has 'pronounced mythic qualities' but is simultaneously 'highly unstable' and consistently fighting external threats to its continued perceived centrality in rural community life. There is also the crucial point regarding how different spaces occupy different 'cultural terrain', and serve differing purposes within communities based on unique, specific terms and both 'material' and 'immaterial' methods of producing space (Maye, et al., 2005, 831, 844). Nevertheless such places, regardless of their fluctuating status or potential risks to their institutional survival, still remain a crucial 'node and centre' of the socio-cultural ecosystem in rural areas, whether directly as a space of socialisation, or indirectly through complementing other services such as sporting and charity events (Cabras, 2011, 2419; Mount & Cabras, 2016). It is also crucial to note how in drinking spaces the spatial relationships formed are inherently classed, gendered and racialised, which is indicative of how such spaces are contested in communities. It also additionally highlights how drinking establishments, and especially pubs, should not be perceived as concrete, unchanging institutions, but rather ones in which there are constant negotiations and re-negotiations of the space, who it is for, and how those included or excluded from their community identities around that (Kneale, 2021). Even in 'new' drinking spaces, for example micropubs, these negotiations are still fundamental as sites of community conflict, highlighting how in contemporary rural society the role that drinking spaces play in forming people's perceptions of their communities are fundamentally contested, both across and within spaces given the complexity and diversity of offerings that exist in contemporary society (Hubbard, 2019).

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In understanding the wider rural context, the upending of traditional rural hierarchies and the fundamental shift from production to consumption as the main economic drivers of rural communities can be seen as a crucial factor in forging the continually fluctuating and contested cultures of contemporary rural societies within a service-based economy, both in and between different groups in rural society (Champion & Watkins, 1991; Norman & Power, 2015). The centrality of place, and citizen attachment to it is crucial for grounding understandings of rural culture, and the contestations within. Such attachment to place is crucial to the socio-cultural wellbeing of citizens and acts as a barrier to social isolation, especially for the elderly (McHugh, 2003). The 'hollowing out' of rural economic and human resources further complicates this, given how the spaces and establishments though which place attachment is facilitated have become harder to access for local people, and the key community ties which are forged in such places have the potential to become weaker (Wray, 2018, 24). This also leans into the contestations regarding the role of deprivation in rural communities, and the challenges with defining it in rural settings (Cloke, et al., 1997).

Regarding broader understandings of the social and cultural geographies of rural areas, and the centrality of place' within that, there is an additional associated complexity given general popular representations of the rural often clash with the reality of rural life. Given geographer's tendencies to focus on the more exceptional and remarkable when exploring communities and drinking spaces, there becomes space for more research focussing on more 'ordinary', otherwise unremarkable rural places, a gap in the research this thesis addresses.

1.2. Bramington – History of the Village and its Drinking Spaces

The anonymised village of Bramington is located in the East Midlands of the United Kingdom. It has a sizeable population for an explicitly rural community with just over 3,000 people residing in the parish. It is located five miles from a market town and local administrative centre, fifteen miles from a city with an urban population of approximately 150,000 and 25 miles from a major national conurbation, with an urban population of over 750,000. Bramington itself is used as a centre for some smaller villages and hamlets to the north and east, where the wide range of services offered are easier to access than in the larger settlements. The village is located in the valley of a major river, which constitutes the western edge of the parish boundary. Flooding is however rare, with the most recent of note (i.e. having a flood marker) being in 2000. The primary land use is for arable farming, with the most commonly farmed crops being wheat and barley. Livestock farming is limited to a few pig farms and seasonal cattle and sheep farming, although a large number of poultry farms do operate in the

surrounding parishes. There is also a considerable amount of gravel quarrying, with some of the exhausted pits having been turned into a nature reserve.

Fig. 1. Street map of Bramington with public social spaces highlighted and drinking establishments numbered. (1 – Dog House Microbrewery: 2 – Bramington FC: 3 – Red Lion: 4 – Queen's Arms: 5 – Bramington CC)

Despite being ethnically close to homogeneous (97.8% white), diversity is found in other areas. Even though slightly older than average, the community has a broad range of occupations, incomes and housing type and tenure. Regarding housing, the oldest properties in the village date from the time of the English Civil War, and there has been waves of growth since, most notably Edwardian semis, a post-war council estate, large numbers of 1970's/80's bungalows and a modern 'eco-estate', nearing completion at the time of writing.

Regarding the available services and social spaces in the village, Bramington has a large number of facilities for community use, which distinguishes it from other rural settlements in the locale. The village for example has two churches, three cafes, two hairdressers, a co-op supermarket, a small convenience store, medical centre, library, as well as small independent 'high street' shops, such as a butcher and a newsagent. The village also has a football and cricket team, as well as a tennis club and bowls club. There is a primary school with space for 210 pupils. There are also two community halls. The village has a rail link, with hourly trains to the nearby market town and larger conurbations, there is one train a day to and from London. There is also a bus service to the market town which runs hourly until 6 o'clock from Monday to Saturday.

Of course Bramington has many spaces licensed to sell alcohol as well, a brief history of which will be described here, to offer a background understanding of the places where primary research will be conducted in this thesis. The Red Lion is the oldest pub in the village, being open since the late 17th century. It is located in the centre of the village beside a key road junction. Prior to the opening of the village hall in 1889, the Red Lion hosted many key community events, such as auctions and inquests, and was also the site of the local agricultural hall, therefore acting as the metaphorical centre of village life at that time. The arrival of the railway to the village in the 1840's saw this position cemented as the pub adopted a token system whereby railway passengers could pay a small fee and be transported by horse and carriage from the station to the Red Lion, and also have a drink or a meal included within that, the token being proof of purchase. Despite six landlords during the first world war, the pub was run without much controversy or issue throughout much of the 20th century, bar a threat of demolition when a road-widening scheme was proposed by the county council in 1972, although after community opposition, this was withdrawn. Contemporarily, the Red Lion is run as a 'community' pub, with the business being run by committee, who lease the pub from the Co-Op, who bought the pub from a national brewer in 2017. The other still open pub is the Queen's Arms, which is now also half a Chinese restaurant. It is opposite the village green. It has been open since the 1810's but has always been seen as the 'little brother', both in status and physical size, of the Red Lion, having far fewer notable events held there, such as auctions of property and land.

As with most places in rural Britain, Bramington has lost numerous pubs over the course of its history. The most recent to close was the Black Bull at the north end of the High Street, in 2021. It is now in the process of being turned into housing. Similarly to the Queen's Arms, the Black Bull was an important centre for local people, especially those who lived to the northern end of the village, but never usurped the Red Lion as the public house of primary local importance. The pub closed following regular changes of management, and 'over-interference' by the regional brewery that owned the Black Bull from the late 1990's (Jeremy). Other pubs existed in the village, such as the Three Horseshoes and The Plough, which closed in 1930 and 1919 respectively, and also on the village periphery were The Railway Arms (closed 1870) and the Merry Sailor (closed 1923/24), which served rail and river traffic respectively.

The ownership and regulation of the village's pubs follows a similar pattern to much of the rest of British brewing and the pub trade. Until the reforms of licensing legislation in 1830, Bramington had as many as 20 places licensed to sell alcohol, supported by both a well-developed network of local maltings, which numbered five in the village at the start of the 19th century, and also a well-established local agriculture of wheat, barley and rye farming. These small, 'local' houses which dominated the drinking scene of the village 200 years ago would

eventually be regulated out of existence, and the agglomeration of local brewers and maltsters would cause a sharp decline in 'in-house' malting and brewing during the early to mid-19th century. As a result of this, by 1900, all remaining establishments would eventually be owned by various small brewers based locally. Continuing rationalisation of the beer trade through the 20th century meant that from the 1970's those pubs remaining were owned by regional and national brewers, such as Home Ales of Nottingham owning the Black Bull from the 1930's to 1996, and the Red Lion being owned by John Smith's (Tadcaster) from 1984 until 2017. The Queen's Arms and Red Lion would also eventually become free houses, in 1978 and 2019 respectively.

Also noteworthy are Bramington's other licensed venues. The Dog House microbrewery is an especially interesting addition to the village's drinking scene. Opening in 2018, it operates out of an abandoned plough workshop, last used for this purpose by the brewer's grandfather, with many seemingly 'original' features being on show in the bar space. It only opens once a month and on bank holidays, due to planning permission. The cricket club and football club also offer drinking experiences in Bramington and fulfil very much the same role depending on which sport is in season. An informal agreement between the two establishments keeps beer prices the same, and both organisations have expanded off the pitch in similar ways in the past half century. Both had new clubhouses built in the 1960's and a bar attached in the 1970's, which have both been expanded on several occasions, as club memberships have grown.

1.3. Exploring the Debates in Bramington

In order to explore the general debates surrounding drinking and the role it plays in forging rural English identity, and how such identities manifest in the village, an insider ethnography was undertaken using a process of interviews, focus groups and participant observations. To analyse this data, a thematic approach was used. Regarding the interviews, a systematic coding technique was applied, covering the seven key themes that can be found in the final paragraph of chapter 3.1. Regarding observation reports, a similar coding process was undertaken, but relating to four areas of analysis that can be found in the final paragraph of chapter 3.2. Further 'simultaneous' coding was then undertaken, to align the coded information from both interviews and observations, with the three main themes of analysis (chapters 4 to 6) (Saldaña, 2015).

Chapter 4: Normality, Drinking and the Formation of a Rural Identity constitutes the initial stage of this analysis and focusses on how drinking spaces in rural communities are considered 'normal' spaces within those communities, and as such form a crucial social hub for a notable

section of the population living in Bramington. It explores how drinking spaces function within a broader ecosystem of other public social spaces, and how local people perceive their community identity through such spaces and ground understandings of how senses of place and place attachment are forged more broadly in the village. Exploring points of contestation within ideas of 'the everyday' and 'typicality' of a perceived rural scene and whether Bramington fits those assertions for a place of its size is also analysed, tapping into debates surrounding whether drinking establishments should be considered core facets of the local social landscape. Chapter 4 also engages with debates regarding whether there is a sustainability to drinking spaces, and whether they will remain a crucial facilitator for local socio-cultural identity, at least among certain sections of the local population.

The following chapter – 'Drink's Role and Relationship to Place Creation' – focusses on three specific lines of enquiry to gather understandings of the multi-scalar patterns and flows through which local cultures and senses of place and attachment are created in Bramington. The first line of enquiry surrounds the broad contestations in the community regarding how different people want different experiences from their drinking spaces, and how such different expectations often clash and create tension. This is also the space where the impact of pub closures, specifically the Black Bull (closed 2021) is explored, and how such changes have altered people's perceptions of village drinking spaces and their broader local identity. The second line of enquiry engages with the perception of rural spaces, and especially rural drinking spaces, as being sites of socio-cultural homogeneity, with such establishments being reportedly bastions of white, middle-class male-ness. Whether this is born out in reality in Bramington is complex, and how different spaces appeal, whether consciously or not to people from beyond those associated with the norm in rural drinking spaces is engaged with, and highlights the complexity of drinking spaces' socio-cultural makeup, and acting to counter perceptions of homogeneity in the rural drinking space. The final point engaged with in chapter 5 is how 'new' spaces, such as microbreweries and 'community' pubs are able to revitalise, or at least alter, drinking spaces' roles in creating community identity, and whether such spaces are able to live up to their theoretical value to the community, and reinvigorate local drinking.

The final chapter of analysis focusses on 'Atmosphere and Distinction in the Drinking Space', and seeks to understand how the influences of subjective affects like 'atmosphere' and personalities of regular clientele can act to facilitate spaces in which certain groups and individual's experiences are prioritised, to the exclusion of others. This chapter also explores how prevalent ideas in the cultural geography of drink related to the dominance in the space of certain identities, are often complexified by the reality on the ground. The affective influences of 'atmosphere' are relevant to this and are explored in depth in chapter 6.1., specifically through engaging with the ways in which the proprietors of different establishments

try and curate their places with an 'atmosphere' in mind, and who they are trying to appeal to through that process. Also explored was whether the local community was perceptive to what proprietors tried to achieve in their 'atmospheric choices', and whether what local residents wanted atmospherically in their drinking spaces, were aligned with those of the varied establishments' management. Another area of analysis regards the distinctive clienteles and affects in play in the village's 'peripheral' spaces, namely the cricket club and the Dog House microbrewery, and how those factors act to include or exclude, or whether those spaces can offer new experiences in Bramington's drinking scene. This is fundamentally to uncover whether those establishments can re-centralise drinking spaces, or are inherently highly exclusive spaces, and thus restrict access to drinking spaces in the village, therefore not being spaces through which drinking spaces can be re-centralised in Bramington's cultural identity.

To summarise, the purpose of this thesis is to address a gap in both rural geography and the geography of drink with regard to a lack of research pertaining to 'normal' and 'typical' communities and how their drinking spaces play key roles in formulating the local identity of such spaces in rural England. Through addressing the topics described in this chapter, how such identities are created, re-created and contested across time and space in one specific Midland community's pubs, and how the different cultural terrain of each establishment enables the formation of local identity, this gap in the research will hopefully be addressed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the extant literature attempting to understand the complexities involved in British drinking culture and the sites in which it is forged, will be explored and analysed. The brewing and the drinking of beer in Britain has been described as a historical constant, situated within a broader national cultural geography, of which drinking, and the drinking of beer more specifically is heavily intertwined (Thurnell-Read, 2021; Alfeo, et al., 2020). The patchwork of changing legislation and regulation, and the fluidity of social, economic and political systems in place across multiple spatial settings, have created an incredible complexity, from which contemporary cultures and understandings of drink in Britain have to be grounded (Jennings, 2016).

Drinking, and especially pub drinking have been framed as an important part of the fabric of British society, it is therefore somewhat surprising that regarding the relationships between alcohol, drinking and drunkenness, there has been a documented lack of research and theoretical grounding (Bowler & Everitt, 1999). Although Jayne & Valentine (2023, para. 36) noted how there had been 'significant progress' in recent years relating to 'theorising and researching geographies of alcohol and drinking', there is still a tendency to 'unreflexively reproduce… the ontologies and epistemologies of 'alcohol studies'', often getting trapped within 'dualistic analysis', whereby studies present alcohol or drinking as either problematic or constructive, which is not very useful for 'critical interrogation'. Similarly, Strauss (2017) identified a lack of research relating to pub design, Ernst & Doucet (2014) a vacuum relating to drink's role in gentrified spaces and Dilley, et al., (2013) highlighted a gap in the research relating to alcohol's role in creating community identity parts of the country away from tourist areas or urban cores.

In this coming chapter, an initial framing of the role drinking and its spaces of consumption play in forming a specific 'English' identity will be explored, followed by an analysis of literature relating to the creation of community identity, and rural community identity more specifically. The chapter will then focus further on the values, subjectivities and contestations of drinking in rural areas, and how the spatial dynamics of place facilitate them, before a final section on drinking as an 'everyday', 'normal' activity, and the impact that has on creating community identity.

2.1. Drink, Pubs, and the Formation of Socio-Cultural Identity

Drinking, and the public house especially is heavily interwoven within the British, and more specifically English national identity, being described as a 'bastion of traditional English

culture', a 'national phenomenon' and as an institution 'nothing more English' (Bowler & Everitt, 1999, 148; Jackson, 1976, 5). This identity has impressed itself across the spectrum of British beer, with mass produced lager *Carling* describing itself as the 'taste of Britain, and new 'micro' and 'craft' establishments being described as 'distinctly British' (O'Brien, 2020, 30; Hubbard, 2019, 782). Despite the well documented decline in both pub numbers and market share of the wider economy of drink, Lane (2018) noted how the pub still plays a symbolic role in British popular culture, in part due to the 'high degree of integration with the life of the citizenry' that the pub has in England, as claimed by Oldenburg (1999, 123).

The pub being so intertwined with ideas of Englishness is unsurprising, given the role that public houses have played in key moments throughout English history going back to before the Restoration (Hsueh, 2016). The 17th century public house was a valorised part of social identity at that time, with it being free from the usual outside constraints of power and facilitating radicalism, the Gunpowder Plot being planned in the *Dog and Drake* off the Strand for example (Withington. 2016). Public houses maintained their role as key sites of social activity throughout Georgian and Victorian England, offering opportunities for 'social, intellectual and professional development' for young men and a place from which to develop communal networks (Booth, 2018, 289). Kneale (2021, para.13) added how the particular 'microgeographies' of the Victorian public house, through the interaction and segregation of space, materialised the social identity and class-based rigidity of Victorian society. Into the 20th century, Mass Observation (1943) reported that the pub was a stronger social institution than religion, politics or popular media.

Much of the focus of later 20th century and 21st century understandings of the pub's social role, are situated in the context of decline. Pratten (2007) noted a 150% decline in brewers from 1945 to 1960 and changes to licensing laws and ownership regulations which ended the 'obligation to community' breweries theoretically had, and major increases in excise levied on on-trade beer sales (Gourvish & Wilson, 1994, 138; BBPA, 2008). These are certainly in part the cause of a reported 8,800 pub closures between 1980 and the end of the century, and nearly 15,000 in the next two decades, despite price rises largely being ignored in the literature base (Davies & Partington, 2018; Shakina & Cabras, 2022). This does however create an interesting debate, given how as Matless (2023, 182) commented, the English pub has been seen, for over a century at least, as being in a state of perennial decline. He points out how Hilaire Belloc (1912) referred to the pub as in 'peril' and Christopher Hutt (1973) writing a book entitled 'The Death of the English Pub', some 50 years ago. Therefore the perceived 'decline' of the pub as a key site of cultural formation must be situated within contexts such as the pervasive growth of 'binge drinking', volume-based, corporate-dominated business models, and also the uneven and contested geographical spread of change, given variations in how

national level policies are enacted, and localised factors such as community opposition to development and change (Roberts, 2015; Talbot, 2007; Hadfield, 2006). Such issues raise debates as to whether reducing numbers are necessarily symbolic of a declining or redundant cultural institution, or rather merely one facet within the constantly evolving history of drink in England and its relation to English national identity.

An example of a new way of understanding the pub and its influence on identity, which will be explored in greater depth later, is the growth of 'community based enterprises', driven by civic groups to develop and strengthen local socio-economic ties and re-establish pubs, amongst other things, as key sites of cultural creation (Somerville & McElwee, 2011). In the context of declining numbers, usage of 'community based enterprises', encouraged in Britain by the 2011 Localism Act, to innovate and keep open drinking establishments, and in doing so maintaining and strengthening the bonds formed in those spaces is seen as an effective method with which to adapt and maintain cultural relevance (Sforzi & Bianchi, 2020).

One factor within the history of English drinking and pub culture that must be mentioned, is the explicit gendering of the pub space, and how that can create bounded spaces, and exclude certain people from identity-creating spaces. Moss (2016) for example described how the pub, and drinking more broadly is central to the construction of manliness, and privileges a certain form of masculinity. Such ideas are fairly well established, James Joyce in *Ulysses* described alcohol alongside women as the 'supplements to male fantasy' for example (Delany, 1995, 385). The female experience in the pub itself is obviously also essential to this understanding, with Leyshon (2008) reporting how women still struggle to gain equal standing in pub culture and Nicholls (2016) adding that women's consumption of alcohol is more heavily policed, monitored and sanctioned. Even amongst newer, theoretically more 'progressive' drinking cultures such as in the realm of 'craft beer', there is a distinctively male, and also white and middle-class dominance, from which that culture is established (Hubbard, 2019; Withers, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2022).

2.2. The Creation of 'Community'

Place is an inherently complex 'concept and entity' that is consistently being made and re-made in response to global flows (Edensor, et al., 2020). The role that 'neighbourhood infrastructure' – the public social spaces, and the 'interstitial spaces' between private relationships and the state, and how they influence local quality of life and forging the identity of communities are absolutely essential for a well-grounded understanding of cultural formation (Buonfino & Hilder, 2006; Oldenburg, 1999; Habermas, 1992; Finlay, et al., 2019). As an example of a public social space, drinking establishments, whether pubs, bars, inns,

nightclubs, social clubs, or sports clubs, have a role in forging the senses of place in the communities they reside in (Hadfield, 2006). How drinking spaces function within the wider eco-system of social spaces is therefore of crucial importance when engaging with ideas of community identity and how it is created, and as such, this wider context needs to be engaged with and understood.

Oldenberg & Brissett (1982, 271) termed these public social spaces 'third places', explaining how they were not 'special' but were rather 'well-integrated into everyday life', and as such became an essential part of a community's 'metaphorical cultural landscape' (Potter, 2004, 322). Another facet of such places is the requirement for such places to be 'lively' in order to facilitate meaningful social interaction, encouraging engagement and in turn forging loyalties between people and place (Campbell, 2017, 157; Meshram & O'Cass, 2013). Such spaces are also of additional value, given how they facilitate the maintenance of a community identity, alongside being a creative force. Van Dyne & Pierce (2004, 442) explained this in their exploration of customer loyalties, whereby individuals have 'psychological ownership' of establishments or places, which drives a symbiotic loyalty between individuals and community establishments. Although it must be said how 'the local' cannot be divorced from processes unfolding at other levels, given how 'places are intrinsically multi-scalar' (Hall, 2008, 235; Jones, et al., 2004). It therefore becomes crucial to appreciate how external forces manifest at localised scales.

Physical spaces have a further essential social function, through their role as facilitators for social capital growth (Thiele & Klagge, 2021). Whilst social capital is a phenomenon with various dimensions, types and levels of measurement, it can still be seen regardless as absolutely essential in creating links between people and place, and creating and reinforcing loyalties between the two (Meshram & O'Cass, 2013; Bell, 2009). The central idea of social capital theory being that social networks have inherent value to human wellbeing was expanded on in Putnam's (2000, 18) seminal work on social networks, where he stated how a 'sense of [cross-generational] shared identity and responsibility' creates 'civic vitality', in places where social capital is created, such as in his work, American bowling alleys. The mental and physical health benefits of these 'engaging', social capital-generating community facilities are well documented (Oldenburg, 1999). Such places act as 'climates of communication', where interactions act to 'bolster feelings of self-worth' (Jeffres, et al., 2009, 343; Krause, 2006, 189). There is also the fact that in these environments, the staff in these socially engaging establishments can protect elderly and isolated patrons from health and quality of life threats (Finlay, et al., 2018; Hickman, 2013).

There are however challenges and contestations regarding the way that public social spaces contribute to place creation. The overriding issue surrounds how provision of such spaces does not in and of itself guarantee strong communities (Finlay, et al., 2019). For example, de Souza Briggs (1997) explained how social capital has a tendency to be exclusive, using as an example the inherently exclusive nature of gang-based violence and the cultures which encourage it. There are also more theoretical ideas about how social capital is not evenly distributed given how different aesthetic and consumptive practises appeal to specific lifestyle groups, meaning that some people are inevitably excluded, which disproportionately effects people from minority groups (Glover, 2004; Hall, 2008; Garland & Chakraborti, 2006). To this point Yuen & Johnson (2017, 297) claimed that Oldenburg's (1999) idea of 'third places' as public places should be 'problematised', as all places have explicit boundaries which limit their accessibility for certain groups of people. There is also the interesting point that in the last few decades there has been a gradual 'retreating from society', whereby people are increasingly disengaging from social activities in places like pubs and bars, where a previous socio-cultural identity had been forged (Oldenburg, 1999, xxix). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that places will always be in constant state of being recontextualised, and as such changes to local socio-cultural identity should not always be viewed through the lens of decline (Edensor, 2008).

How public social spaces operate in explicitly rural settings, and how they forge a certain kind of rural culture are also worthy of analysis here. Short (1992) reported how 'rural community' as an idea is driven by a perception of being timeless, whereby popular culture and imagery come to form a single socio-cultural process. Whilst this is something of an oversimplification and could be perceived as ignorant of the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds extant within a single community, Cohen (1989) explained how a community's sense of meaning is drawn from a cross-community 'culture', rather than a rigid, stratified 'structure'. Contestations have been reported nevertheless, especially in relation to the socio-cultural differences between 'urbs in rure' and 'truly rural' people (Forsythe, 1980). Strathern (1981) suggested that 'real villagers' were defined by their attachment to place, implying that new in-migrants with less of a connection to the community in which they lived were apart from the established meaning associated with that particular place, as a result of long-term, multi-generational relationships forged between both people and institutions within a community which newer families/individuals are naturally removed from. Although Fleming (1979) made less of a black and white distinction, instead saying how there was a continuum from 'complete villager' to 'resident outsider' in villages with changing socio-economic demographics.

2.3. Drink in the (Rural) Community – It's Value, Subjectivities and Contestations

2.3.1. Drink and Rural Socio-Economics

Drinking spaces, and pubs especially are framed as an essential part of local supply chains, both directly through employment opportunities in pubs, transport and breweries, and indirectly through complementing other local services, such as sporting events and charity initiatives (Cabras, 2011; Mount & Cabras, 2016). The 'image' of a village pub is also part of the 'provided service' of rural communities, and is an 'established feature' of the English socio-cultural landscape (Bowler & Everitt, 1999, 147; Markham, 2014, 267). Whilst such ideas fall into the contested debates and myths about the 'rural idyll', it is still a useful indicator of the centrality of the pub to a perception of rural community (Hall, 2020).

Muir (2009) suggested that through various direct and indirect part time and full-time employment, an individual pub injects around £80,000 into local economies. Given the economic and, as explained above, socio-cultural importance for communities that pubs have, it is key for community vitality that establishments remain in operation (Cabras & Reggiani, 2010). In this context Mount & Cabras (2016, 1203) explained how pubs have been reimagined as an 'important locus for regional development and rejuvenation', to re-centre themselves as key assets within 'neighbourhood infrastructure', in the face of multi-scalar challenges to their established management methods. To this point, it needs to be appreciated how changes to food and drink culture more broadly do not exist in a vacuum, and that government policy and globalised 'flows' have significant implications at the local level (Baker, 2019). The 1989 Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into the ownership of pubs, commonly referred to as 'the Beer Orders' have been particularly impactful in this context, as brewers were limited to 2,000 tied establishments each. This caused a mass sell-off of pubs by larger brewers, many of which were bought by so-called 'pubcos', who acquired assets through securitisation, prioritising shareholder value and short-term profits, therefore '[transforming] the ownership and geographies of pubs in Britain' (Keenan, 2020, 1293). This had a considerable impact on the 'socio-cultural values' of the pub, as the Orders accelerated the 'commercialisation' of the British drinks trade, creating significant challenges for pubs, especially in rural areas (Bowler & Everitt, 1999, 150). Largely as a result of this, from 1982 to 2012 one in four pubs closed in Britain, accompanying mass commercialisation and the increasing rationalisation of the drinks industry more broadly (BBPA, 2013; Knowles & Egan, 2002).

Understanding the context in which drinking takes place is also essential to engage with in rural areas specifically. Pubs are seen as being especially valuable to rural places, forming a

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key part of the economic, social and cultural life of rural communities, the presence of which, as a social hub, is indicative of a healthy and vibrant local society (Markham & Bosworth, 2016; Bolet, 2021). Added value is found in the rural pub, as in many communities, the pub is the only publicly accessible space where residents can meet in an informal manner, reinforcing the centrality of rural pubs as 'the nodes and centres of the local social network', and therefore playing a key role in forging a cohesive community and growing social capital (Dunbar, et al., 2016). This was a point proved empirically by Mount & Cabras (2016, 1206, 1209) in their study of 715 rural parishes in Northern England, that there was a district link between pubs and community cohesion, through their role as 'facilitators' and 'incubators' of local socio-cultural values.

An additional relevant point was made by Bowler & Everitt (1999, 149) regarding how closure of a pub was more 'deleterious' in rural areas, with considerable damage to local society as a result. This was a point picked up on by Bolet (2021) who explained how closure of pubs, alongside other community organisations trigger social isolation and loss of identity and status for rural people, which has also been viewed as a cause for increasing social angst amongst rural people, Gest, et al. (2018) adding how this was especially so for those in the 'white working class'. As such, the erosion of key elements of 'neighbourhood infrastructure' represent a symbolically important marker of declining 'health and vibrancy' in rural and isolated communities, in turn creating socio-cultural insecurities (Hickman, 2013, 232; Putnam, 2000).

How rural drinking establishments function within the wider ecosystem of rural economies is also worth exploring, especially as in relation to the 'social embeddedness' of rural firms (Oughton, et al., 2003, 334). This manifests itself in the way that the social processes between individual businesses, other businesses and their customers are seen as more important than the trading relationships between such groups, something which is also seen in space of the pub and the relationships formed in that particular environment (Atterton, 2007).

2.3.2. New Phenomena in the Drinking Scene

In part as a result of the various internal and external changes to the rural drinking scene as detailed in the previous section, a variety of new types of place in which to drink and methods of management have been introduced, adapting rural drinking to the climate of the 21st century.

One such development has been the growth of 'community pubs' operating as shareholder-run community benefit societies in the face of the increasing financialisation and service rationalisation of the beer and pub sectors, which has resulted in gaps in the social infrastructure of rural and marginal communities (Keenan, 2020; Dilley, et al., 2013). Cabras

(2011, 2419) engaged with this topic, examining reasons for decline and the potential for community-run pubs to be successful in countering that threat, focussing on three villages in the Pennines and Lake District. He concluded that community benefit societies, and industrial and provident societies more broadly were a valid way to save village pubs and a 'valuable solution for many rural communities' to protect their assets of social value. There are also the more theoretical values of such societies reviewed by Van Vugt & Hart (2004), who suggested that being involved in a community enterprise creates loyalty through a shared social identity between the people involved in the running of those societies.

Another way in which drinking culture has been revitalised and offered space for new and innovative cultures to be forged has been the rapid growth in recent decades of 'craft beer', 'micro' establishments and engagements with 'real ale' (Sforzi & Colombo, 2020). Drinking those products in those particular spaces are seen as a contrast to the 'smothering homogeneity' of the wider, popular beer culture (Schnell & Reese, 2003, 46). This is caused by a belief that 'real' and 'craft' beers are more 'authentic' and 'natural', supporting the idea that drinking those types of beer has an attached 'lifestyle' (Brown, 2011; Mathews & Picton, 2014, 238). An example of this was explored by Spracklen, et al. (2013, 316) in the space of the beer festival, which was placed as offering 'likeminded people a place to feel a sense of belonging in an uncertain world', acting as a possible antidote to the 'alienating features' of modern capitalism. Small-scale beer brewing also has the competitive advantage over larger brewers given how small-scale businesses can have swift responses to changes in the market and consumer preferences, as an example Milne & Tufts (1993) identified this as the driver of the North American 'craft beer' boom of the early 1990's. This can in turn provide opportunities for a 'bottom up' crafting of a drinking culture, as smaller brewers can get 'ahead of the game' in servicing consumer demand and responding to economic changes. There are however debates and contestations within the community of people who drink 'real' and 'craft', over what those terms actually mean, the example offered by Spracklen, et al. (2013) was of *Black Sheep* which is brewed and sold in a traditional manner, but is sold nationally, removing the product from that distinct localness which, as reported by O'Brien (2020) is revered in some real ale circles. Although it should be noted that the *Black Sheep Brewery* did enter administration in May 2023, highlighting the precarity in which 'real ale' brewing is situated.

There are however debates about the sustainability of growth that have been associated with 'craft' and 'real' ales. This is especially true as it relates to 'micro' establishments, both breweries and pubs, as the explosive growth this century has massively increased competition in the sector (Ellis & Bosworth, 2015). Whist Mintel (2013) reported that two thirds of drinkers believe it is worth paying more for better quality beer and Wright, et al. (2008) that alcohol content is largely not a factor in UK consumer choice – factors which might otherwise provide

a ceiling for success of 'higher quality' products – Hubbard (2019, 765) explained how the longevity of 'micro' establishments is firmly reliant on a 'particular collision of culture, creativity and economic practise', which could theoretically collapse given the consistent evolution of drinking culture and wider multi-scalar socio-economics. This is especially true given how the promotion of 'craft beer' has struggled to reach beyond its traditional market, and attempts to widen the appeal of the product, for example by offering 'craft beer trails' have proceeded to reinforce extant cultures, rather than expanding participation (Murray & Kline, 2015; Slocum, 2016).

2.3.3. Community Sports Clubs – Their Role in Forging Community Ties

The drinking of alcohol and the playing of sport have been framed as being 'united in close partnership', with a 'tradition' of drinking at community sports clubs (Munro, 2000, 199). It is surprising therefore that understanding the relationship between sport, drinking and cultural formation 'remain poorly understood' (Lee & Potrac, 2021, para.1). The literature that does exist tending to engage with 'orthodox' ideas such as alcohol's role in facilitating football hooliganism, rather than seeking to understand the role of sports-based drinking in more unremarkable settings, less associated with mass media-driven 'moral panics' (Palmer, 2014).

It is the prevailing faith that partaking in physical activity facilitates social inclusion and inherently increases the chances of individuals feeing a community identity and sense of belonging (Sandford, et al., 2008; Collins & Kay, 2003). Such spaces have also been described as sites of resistance, for example Fletcher & Walle (2015) examined how South Asian diaspora communities use cricket to challenge systems of racial discrimination. Sports clubs have also been accredited with facilitating the 'social inclusion' role once undertaken by the welfare state, in the context of declining social provision and the resulting impacts on inter-community solidarity (Skinner, et al., 2008; Cassity & Gow, 2005).

Lee & Potrac's (2021, para.3) examination of community sports clubs is a particularly useful grounding for understanding the key role that they play in forging individual identities, noting how clubs 'create affinities, kinship, emotions and solidarity', in addition to the physical benefits of playing sport. This is particularly valuable in the 21st century, as other research has indicated how sports clubs can act as a counter to the drift towards social atomisation and meaninglessness and resist the individualism of 'neoliberal ideology' (Jackson & Everts, 2010; Skinner, et al., 2008, 253). Clubs also act as a facilitatory site for 'wellbeing', both through intergenerational and familial cultures being impressed upon the history of certain clubs, and also through the ability to provide a 'hook' for engaging disadvantaged communities, in sites with a rich and diverse cultural history (La Placa, et al., 2013; Lee & Potrac, 2021; Skinner, et

al., 2008). To further this point Armour, et al. (2013, 258) raises how engagements in sport are seen as a useful way to counter anti-social behaviour in young people, through 'positive youth development', an example being English cricket's 'chance to shine' programme in state schools.

Regarding drink's role in forging the identities of people involved in sports clubs, there is something of a tension between the damaging health impacts of alcohol, and the positive social developments associated with the act of drinking. Sport-based drinking has been described as being both the 'context for' and 'solution to' health damaging and criminal behaviour, with there being a 'U-Shaped curve' between (illicit and non-illicit) drug use and physical activity, signifying how the concentration of unhealthy consumption habits are most prevalent amongst those who regularly partake in sport with its attached socialising, and those most isolated and inactive in society (Palmer, 2011, 168; Peretti-Watel, et al., 2002, 708). To further this point, whilst team drinking is reported as being a 'symbol of togetherness' and being a facilitator for 'team bonding' (Pettigrew, et al., 2000, 71). Munro (2000, 199) said sports-based drinking has been 'mischaracterised' as 'wholesome' and 'character building', as over one third of his study's sample (male AFL players and cricketers) consumed alcohol to a 'hazardous' level, as defined by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council, post-match. Denault & Poulin (2018) come to a similar conclusion, as they suggested that time spent playing team sport was indicative of higher alcohol consumption in middle adolescence. But once again this is not a clear-cut story, as sports participation has also been framed as a protective factor against alcohol abuse, given how it connects people of different ages, and young people can develop life skills in such a setting that they may be unable to learn in other environments (Peck, et al., 2008).

2.3.4. Inclusion and Exclusion in Drinking Spaces

The preeminent social networks of rural areas, forged in public social spaces such as the pub and other community drinking establishments, bound space explicitly, given their smallness, density and homogeneity, creating a potential for what Atterton (2007, 232) described as 'over-embeddedness', and excluding certain 'outsiders' from community activity as a result. This is forged by how community narratives in rural areas are bound by a heavily classed, racialised and gendered ideas of what is 'ordinary', with 'white ways of knowing' being taken for granted in rural England and rigidly enforced (Butler, 2020; Bhopal, 2014, 497).

Even in seemingly 'progressive' new cultures, such as the youth-orientated growth of 'craft beer', there is still exclusion and the bounding, driven by masculine dominance of the space and the marketing of its product, creating something of a contradiction (Thurnell-Read, 2022).

To this point, craft beer marketing is commonly used to 'glorify' masculinity and 'objectify' femininity, which is also re-enforced by the common use of history and heritage in marketing, which is often framed as being 'masculine' and appealing to 'blue collar' histories (Thurnell-Read, 2015, 85; Mathews & Picton, 2014). There is also the distinct class angle that acts to exclude people from 'micro' drinking spaces. Szasz (2007, 204) explained that by removing themselves from the traditional and established cultures, wealthy, 'self-interested' individuals can 'quarantine themselves from risk'. There is also an undeniable class dynamic involved with ideas of 'quality' and the 'organic', which for lower income groups are less likely to be considered (Goodman, 2009; Tregear, 2005).

The gendering of the sports club bar is also noteworthy in creating the social division of societies. Pavlidis (2018) explained how in a broad sense, there is a privileging of a certain type of masculinity, one which is intertwined with heavy drinking. This has caused what Palmer & Toffoletti (2019, 103) referred to as the 'sport-alcohol nexus', a 'holy trinity' between sport, heavy drinking and masculinity, which causes women to firstly be excluded for the sites of such masculinities, and also to be largely ignored in the literature, even in sites where the boundaries of gender identity are being transformed and renegotiated. There have been some noteworthy discussions of the 're-gendering' of space however, given the increasing number of women partaking in 'traditionally' male sports, creating new environments (Jeanes, et al., 2021). Palmer (2014, para.39) however reported that there was not necessarily a challenge to the 'hegemonic masculinity of those spaces', despite their increasingly diverse gender makeup, further complexifying the gender-based negotiations relevant in sports clubs.

2.4. Spatial Dynamics of Drinking Places – How Culture on a Micro Scale is Facilitated

2.4.1. Pubs and the Social Network

The value of the pub and drinking spaces in general to creating and nurturing particular local social networks is undeniable. Flather (2007, 115) reported that such spaces act as '[areas] of social action', created by 'social actors', with Sharkey (2012, 195) adding how drinking spaces can act as a trigger for 'creative output', highlighting the value of such places in creating socio-cultural bonds. Points made in Mass Observation (1943, 17) regarding how in 'the pub… everyone is participator rather than actor' still holds weight, highlighting how such places have a distinct value to individual patrons through facilitating sense of belonging and purpose (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These ideas about the general value to people who frequent drinking spaces are built on by the likes of Thurnell-Read (2021, 61) who identified how it is the 'varied interactions which differ in form, intensity and meaning' which facilitate the 'meaningful social

interaction' and connections forged and 'strengthened' in those places. This status as the 'beating component' of a village helps better integrate communities and improve and maintain socio-cultural wellbeing, especially for older residents (Markham, 2014, 268). There is also the angle to how the 'theming' of the drinking space, and the images and objects found there, are key to the formation of an 'emotional community' in that place, and also how such choices aid in the manufacturing of a 'community myth' (Partis-Jennings, 2022, 132; Lukas, 2007).

What must be understood however, are the contexts in which drinking establishments as key nodes in the social network have changed in recent years, especially in relation to socio-economic upheavals and class identity. Miller (2019, 799) described how historically, drinking spaces and the pub in particular had stood for 'class values', acting as a refuge for working class people, a status which has gradually deteriorated, with an alleged middle class 'colonisation' of the pub space. This taps into points made about how the drinking of alcohol is becoming an increasingly cultural exercise and a means of 'cultural exploration' (Ellis & Bosworth, 2015; Slocum, 2016, 292). Spracklen, et al. (2013, 317) explored this in great depth as it pertains to the drinking of real ale in the specific context of the beer festival, which they said constituted a 'deployment of cultural capital', whereby factors like taste were seen as a key driver of interest, rather than cost for example. They did however explore ideas relating to the performance of masculinity and 'respectability' of women drinkers, highlighting how some of the contestations within the more established drinking culture were maintained in this fundamentally different social network as well.

2.4.2. Creating 'Atmosphere' in a Drinking Space

Understandings of how 'atmosphere' influences and affects people in public spaces and the drinking space more specifically have gone largely under-researched in the social science literature (Böhme, 2017). This is surprising given how important subjective ideas of 'atmosphere' are in curating the 'feel' of a place, and in facilitating the interactions between people the contribute to the creation of place, and forging place identity for individuals.

Casey (2001, 685) described how personal place-based senses of meaning are driven by 'absorption' of the space, driven by that place's 'atmosphere', and creating what he described as 'thick places', where the senses of meaning that create place attachment and individual identities are fashioned. Similarly, Anderson (2009) explained how places generate 'affective atmospheres', which as explained by Duff (2010), catch the 'emotional' feel of a place. Duff (2012, 1391) developed his idea further by explaining how the 'affective resources' of a particular place, enable and promote social bonds and 'enduring friendships' which, as Valverde (2003) explained are facilitated and regulated by the licensee. This environment

enables and promotes improvements to both people's mental and physical health, highlighting the value of a place's atmosphere regarding the creation of socio-cultural understandings of spaces.

The atmosphere of drinking spaces, as an 'alcogenic environment', can create a space whereby outside social conventions are 'suspended or subverted', which can contribute to new types of meaning for people who drink, which cannot be achieved in other environments. In addition to this, another facet of 'atmosphere' in the drinking space, is the role that members of staff play themselves in contributing to the feel of the place (Riach & Wilson, 2014, 335). They also mention how given this context, the environment and atmosphere of drinking spaces is 'sexually spatialised' and sexuality 'commodified' in the pub space, highlighting how 'atmosphere' plays its part in the gendering of the drinking space.

2.4.3. Re-Connecting Place and Person – New Cultures

Since the turn of the century, there has been a wide ranging change in consumer habits as they relate to food and drink in the United Kingdom with 'distinctly geographical implications' for local communities (Schnell & Reese, 2014, 167). This 'turn' in consumer habits can be seen as being driven by demand for a more localised 'authenticity' in food and drink, with consumers desiring local products as a means of reconnecting with the production and consumption cycles of their purchases (Roberts, 2015; Morris & Buller, 2003; Durisin, 2013). This reconfiguring of the 'spatial relationship' between producers and consumers, entwined within ideas of 'neolocalism', acts as a vessel for local people make connections within, and 'reconfigure' local socio-cultural identity through local food and drink culture (Alfeo, et al., 2020, 124; Weiss, 2012, 624). Regarding spaces of drink, this desire for 'authenticity' has had many consequential impacts, most notably the rise of micropubs and small-scale brewing (Zukin, 2008).

The growth of micropubs, 'craft beer' and associated ideas have been allowed to flourish in the context of a general drive toward the 'emotive and embodied labour' of 'craft' more generally, and the accusation that large, multi-national brewing companies are 'bastardizing beer' (Evans, 2017). Hubbard (2019, 763, 780) adds to this, by explaining that new 'micro' establishments do not just act in response to the perceived issues of mass-produced drinks, but also, through the 'enthusiasm' of both landlord/brewer and customer, a 'socially connective' consumption is attainable. He also notes how micropubs have regenerative abilities for local economies, especially in towns and cities, through revitalising otherwise declining high streets. There is also the noteworthy point regarding how the increasing support for 'craft beer' is being driven by younger drinkers, especially in urban settings (Voight, 2013; Schroeder, 2020). As a

result of this environment, by 2018 there were reported to be some 1,700 'micro' or 'craft' breweries in the UK (SIBA, 2018).

In this context of consumer desire for a more locally bound, socially connective experience, and the evident commercial success of 'micro' establishments in recent years, how such places are re-creating local cultures and identities need to be looked at (Cabras, 2020). Schnell & Reese (2014) noted how by simply engaging with products produced and consumed on a local scale, local loyalties are inherently formed, re-imagining local identities in the process. There is also the role of brewers themselves in leveraging trends of localism and 'parochial geographies' to sell their product, implying something of a symbiotic relationship between producers and consumers in forging new local identities in drinking spaces (O'Brien, 2020, 24). As evidence of the inherently localised value of small-scale beer production, Schnell & Reese (2003, 53) highlighted how in the 1990's, American microbreweries who attempted to sell beyond their locale largely failed, as the 'seduction' of small-scale brewing could not be repeated on a national scale.

The space of the 'micro' establishment itself is also a key site where sense of place is forged, and contrast is drawn with the hyper-commercialised, 'commodified' nature of the drinks industry more generally (Ernst & Doucet, 2014, 196). Thurnell-Read (2014) makes this point, where he explained how micro-brewers play up the embodied and affective nature of their work, foregrounding notions of skill and passion in their craft, which creates a 'one-of-a-kind' social setting. The embodiment of 'craft' and 'micro' as inherently niche also contribute to this, forging establishment-by-establishment differences, which re-enforce the inherent localness of such places (Mathews & Picton, 2014).

2.5. Researching 'Normality' and 'The Everyday'

Given the centrality of drink to the English national consciousness and how the drinking of alcohol and its spaces of consumption are central to ideas of national identity, they can be considered as a 'normal' or 'ordinary' aspect of communities in England. This therefore requires an analysis of literature pertaining to ideas of 'ordinariness' and 'normality', to develop an understanding of how 'normal', 'everyday' places are created, offering a grounding of the context in which the culture of rural drinking is situated and normalised.

Thomson, et al. (2018) concluded that 'the everyday' is the space in which the structure and sociality of cultures are enacted. Bell & Neill (2016, 10) add more detail to such ideas, by explaining how 'the everyday' and the governing of societal norms are driven by 'expectations', of both people and spaces. Their example was of late-night 'pie carts' in New Zealand

becoming a normal feature of everyday life, through it being internalised as 'expected' by the citizenry, even if not necessarily used by an individual, as such becoming 'mythologised' as part of an 'everyday' cultural identity. An example in Britain would be a fish and chip shop or a church. Although it should be said that the norms governing 'everyday' people and spaces are a constantly changing, active process, even if externally there is the appearance of consistency (Liu, 2017).

It is within this context, of a fluidity of what constitutes ordinariness across space and time, that it becomes important to note the point made by Kralik (2002) surrounding how there is no fixed meaning of what might be considered extraordinary either. Such an understanding can help place 'ordinariness' and appearing to be 'normal' as a mechanism to transcend societal definitions, such as class, ethnicity or gender, through engaging in shared practices which make individuals 'normal' and 'in place' within a particular context, despite potentially varied facets of identity. The ability of 'ordinariness' to act cross-class has been theorised as a partial explanation for the ambivalence of class in Britain, through the ability of 'ordinariness' to avoid individuals being labelled on class grounds, instead being defined by if they act in a 'normal' or 'expected' way (Savage, et al., 2001, 875; Skeggs, 1997). This especially notable to rural communities, where people from across the economic spectrum live in closer proximity to each other and share more community spaces (Hoggart, 2007). Additionally, the socialisation processes that drive the creation of 'ordinariness' can facilitate the adoption of risky behaviours as 'normal' and otherwise socially acceptable, an example pertinent to this thesis being heavy drinking (Witney & Keogh, 2021; Grummell, 2010).

Therefore, theoretical ideas surrounding 'normality' and other associated ideas are clearly important to the formation of individual identities, but why is it relevant to the study of cultural formation and the drinking space? It was de Certeau (1984) who identified how studying 'the everyday' is essential when researching ideas of citizenship and national and regional identity, relevant given how closely linked drinking, and especially the pub is to ideas of Englishness. There is also, as described by Thomson, et al. (2018, 17), an 'intimacy' to the 'normal' and 'everyday', which can help explore untold stories of class, gender and racial politics, which looking at through the lens of exception can potentially miss out key understandings of issues in society. Researching the mundanity of 'the everyday' can also allow understandings of how micro-level experiences are made and re-made, exposing society-wide socio-cultural patterns (Wyn & White, 1997; Woodman, 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

For this thesis, an ethnographic research approach was used. There is a great deal of value in using this approach, especially when researching inherently subjective ideas such as 'community' and 'identity', aiding in the uncovering and 'teasing out' of the varied 'webs of action and meaning that constitute culture', the efficacy of which is improved when a diverse range of qualitative data is collected (Heley, 2010, 324). Using interviews and focus groups, observations and forays into local archives, a mixed-methods approach was used to achieve this goal, developing a richer understanding of the research subject and the contestations within.

3.1. Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups have been described as an 'incredibly versatile research instrument', and as such have become a staple of ethnographic research (Hitchings & Latham, 2020, 398). Within this thesis, interviews and focus groups will broadly function to understand the personal perspectives a diverse range of community actors hold relating to rural life, drinking and community identity.

The value of interviews for researching geographical debates is well recorded. To generalise, interviews are intended to 'provide understanding of actions', though engaging with the 'diverse human representations' extant in a particular environment, therefore enabling an appreciation of multi-dimensional 'interpretations, experiences and spatialities' (Seidman, 2013, 10; Denzin, 2001; Dowling, et al., 2016, 680). Such an approach ideally will allow for a multi-layered analysis of a particular geographical issue to be facilitated, and therefore a more insightful understanding of people's relationships, perspectives and experiences of place. Such a process is well used in the geographical exploration of space of drink and alcohol, with Cabras (2011) using interviews to explore the diversity of opinion between customers and management at 'community' pubs, Ellis & Bosworth (2015) to understand the variations in consumer attitudes within and between different microbreweries, and Hubbard (2019, 780) how 'micro' establishments facilitate 'socially connective consumption' through an 'authentic' drinking experience[1].

Interviews have also been used to add depth to prior findings gleaned using other methods, such as Atterton's (2007) use of interviews to explore issues raised from preliminary questionnaires relating to localised links between rural small businesses, and Sforzi &

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[1] It should be noted how Hubbard's work in this field, alongside his use of participant observations, formed the basis for this thesis' ethical review.

Colombo (2020) using a preliminary questionnaire to gain understanding in an area with little prior research, namely understanding of Italian co-operative beer manufacturing and selling, from which interview questions would later be devised.

What is important to note is how the space in which interviews are conducted influences outcomes, and the value that can have to researchers. This is especially true when interviews are conducted 'in place' given how, as reported by Finlay & Bowman (2017, 263), doing such can produce 'spatially grounded and place-specific data', enabling researchers to 'access subtler and more complex meanings of place'. As such, new approaches to interviews have been devised, to try an enhance the usefulness of being 'in place'. An example of this is Evans & Jones' (2011, 849) enquiries into 'walking interviews', where by physically moving in and between noteworthy spaces during the interview, can create 'meanings and connections to the surrounding environment', potentially unravelling new ideas which may have been otherwise been unexplored. Additionally, the 'safe' environment in which one to one interviews should be conducted allows disagreement and contested perspectives to be teased out by the researcher, as in an environment such as a focus group, social pressure could influence the contributions of certain people, incorrectly suggesting a group consensus (Latham & Nattrass, 2023). Although it is important to consider how the 'micro-geographies' of place and the 'sociospatial' relations influence the 'human dynamic' of the interview environment, and they may influence the outcomes of the conversation (Elwood & Martin, 2000, 656).

Despite this, when used well focus groups can be of vital use to researchers to add additional layers of understanding to their qualitative research. The nature of a 'collaborative research performance' in a focus group environment can act as an effective way to reflect on the 'socially constructed nature of knowledge', due to how querying and questioning come from both participants and researcher, creating multi-perspective lines of enquiry (Moore, et al., 2015, 18). This idea of focus groups offering access to different perspectives in and of the same environment is central to their value, as a spectrum of views individuals have in an area of interest can be questioned and expanded on by other participants (Krueger, 1998). The additional numbers of people in the research space also adds value in that there can be a spontaneity to ideas that are being discussed, as participants can introduce relevant topics which may have been missed by the researcher, therefore offering 'alternative' ways of thinking and potentially improving the representativeness of collected data (Skop, 2006; Wight & Jackson, 1995, 111). The usefulness focus groups have for qualitative research is furthered as they can become a 'safe space' for authentic discussions, which ideally would create more representative data to be recorded, furthering enhancing and showing the value of the role participants themselves play in regulating the findings of focus groups (Hopkins, 2007; Longhurst, 2003). Also noteworthy is how focus groups can 'empower' participants, especially

those from minority groups or from disadvantaged backgrounds, to share stories and be given a 'voice' in the research (Skop, 2006, 117). These advantages emerge primarily due to what Johnson (1996, 521) called the 'attractive synergy' of group conversation, which facilitates the exchange of views and debate, an idea expanded on by Crang & Crook, (2007, 56) who said how value is added by focus groups as ideas can be appreciated on a much more 'intra- and inter-personal level' than a basic interview. Regarding explorations of drinking spaces, focus groups have been used to identify places and meanings forged within drinking establishments and the wider social arena which have a 'collective' and shared sense of meaning to a group of people. Duff (2010, 887-888) for example used this when engaging with the affective influences of 'atmosphere' in social spaces, given they offer 'particular emphasis on the role of affect and practice in the production of place on the individual and collective aspects of [the place-making] process. This is similar to Sforzi & Bianchi's (2020) use of group discussions, where collective opinion is recorded in relation to the importance of pubs as places through which local campaigns to promote 'community activity' and strengthen socio-cultural ties 'in place' are conducted.

The value interviews and focus groups have for explicitly rural research should also be noted. For example, Ceccato (2016, 126) noted how in rural communities there is generally a 'density of acquaintances', which is extremely useful for researching small communities with limited numbers of initially agreed participants, as it can facilitate snowball sampling and increase the numbers of interested research participants. Similarly, communication within the research population can cause trust to spread quickly, as the usually non-problematic nature of interviewing becomes public knowledge, encouraging more people to take part in research (Mohebbi Mehrsa, et al., 2018).

Interview and focus groups have are also of great use for conducting ethnographic research. Campbell & Lassiter (2014, 4-5) highlighted specific value in interviews for ethnography, although it can be applied to focus groups as well, given how ethnography revolves around 'engaging in, wrestling with, and being committed to human relationships', and speaking to people, whether individually or in a group, is a highly effective method of gleaning such information. They also add how interviews are a good way to engage with the fundamental ethnographic feature of dealing with 'deeply personal and positioned' ideas, allowing researchers to engage with the subjectivities needing to be 'teased out' from qualitative data. In this context interviews and focus groups are a vital ethnographic method, as they can offer a way to highlight this diversity of understanding. There is also the value to ethnographers relating to interviews as being more 'authentic' than other methods of qualitative data collection, therefore meaning theoretically more representative data will be collected (Campbell & Lassiter, 2014, 87-88).

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It is also important to note the potential problems, both ethical and empirical, involved in using interviews and focus groups as a method of ethnographic research, and how the impact of those problems can be mitigated. A fundamental flaw of interviews surrounds how conversations can act as a narrative device for the researcher or their participant, rather than as an accurate reflection of reality. There are also particular inherent pre-existing power relations which can influence contributions from research participants, or produce less rigorous lines of questioning from the researcher (Hofmeyer & Scott, 2007). These power relations are especially of concern when conducting insider research, an in depth discussion of which can be found in chapter 3.4. There are also potential problems with creating an unrepresentative, 'ideal' sample of research participants, playing into assumptions about people's 'life worlds' and not giving an accurate reflection of the research population (Goss, 1999, 113). Ethically, there are always concerns regarding the identity of research participants and the importance of anonymity for protecting the identity of researched individuals, this is especially true when interviewing disadvantaged groups, where challenging topics may be discussed and the importance of 'respect' is paramount.

In this thesis, interviews and focus groups were intended to be held within one of the village's drinking spaces, to engage with the textual and affective nature of drinking spaces and glean extra data from conversations being 'in place', lasting between ten and 45 minutes. Once consent had been gathered (an example consent form can be found in appendix *1*) the interviews proceeded along key seven key lines of enquiry, namely:

The life of Bramington generally, to ground perceptions and understandings of the local socio-cultural scene.

Bramington's public social spaces and the importance local residents place on those institutions for their local socio-cultural identity.

Ideas surrounding 'typicality', to understand whether Bramington is representative of wider rural communities.

Understanding people's drink preferences and what they ideally want from a drinking space, to see what services local people think their village spaces should provide as part of the 'village scene'.

Exploring public perspectives on the individual establishments in Bramington, in order to see whether the individual spaces in the village effectively service demand from the community, and align with expectations explored in the previous line of enquiry.

How ideas of 'atmosphere' influence people's perception of place, and how the effect of 'atmosphere' creates different consumption patterns in the village.

The future of drink in Bramington and rural areas generally, to see whether drinking spaces can remain a central facet of rural socio-cultural identity.

Additional themes were also engaged with relating to the specific role of individuals, especially those involved in the management of places. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, coded and evaluated in a report (appendix 2), normally with a length of 500 words for every ten minutes of discussion. Interviewees were selected using two methods. Firstly, people associated with the management of the various establishments being researched were contacted, both in order to gain consent for interview with that individual, but also to act as a point from which to gain access to other relevant interviewees using 'snowball' sampling. Additionally, being an 'insider' to the village (explored in chapter 3.4.) people the researcher already had knowledge of as being interested in local drinking cultures or the wider identity of the village, could be readily accessed and interviewed. A list of interviews and focus groups can be found in figure 2 below.

Date	Participant Name	Village Resident	Location	Duration
21/02/23	Sophie Wheaton	Yes	George Green Library	18:05
25/02/23	Harold Alston	Yes (Lifelong)	Dog House Microbrewery	23:52
26/02/23	Ashley Lucas Dale Hood	Yes Yes	Dog House Microbrewery	25:48
19/03/23	Harold Alston Dale Hood Corine Hood	Yes (Lifelong) Yes Yes	Dog House Microbrewery	55:39
21/03/23	Harriet Wilder	Yes	Red Lion	27:56
26/03/23	Corine Hood	Yes	Dog House Microbrewery	32:24
24/04/23	Jack Delaney John Poll Allan Daniel Colin Holland	Yes No Yes Yes (Lifelong)	Bramington Cricket Club	15:09
08/05/23	Jeremy Butler Sam Butler	Yes Yes	Jubilee Rooms	2:05:12
16/05/23	Mike Morgan	Yes	Beyond Coffee	40:43
27/05/23	Andy Delaney	No (Ex resident)	Bramington Cricket Club	14:20
01/06/23	Jacob Haye	Yes (Lifelong)	Bramington Cricket Club	10:44
11/06/23	Martin Egan	Yes	Red Lion	25:15
06/07/23	Richard Bromley	Yes	Red Lion	34:16
07/07/23	Fraser Whittal	Yes	Red Lion	11:21

| 08/07/23 | Bill Franklin | Yes (Lifelong) | Bramington Cricket Club | 23:45 |

Fig.2. List of Interviews and Focus Groups

3.2. Participant Observations

In order to understand the varied actions and emotions that forge the affective influences on people in drinking spaces, participant observation acting to enable a 'sensory ethnography' is a good way to understand the 'rich details' and 'flavour' at play in drinking environments (Pink, 2009; Hunt & Saterlee, 1986, 63).

Taking inspiration from the mid-20th century *Mass Observation*, looking at the spaces of everyday life can highlight particular representations of society and fashion 'anthropologies of ourselves', when the researcher and their participants engage in the activities in the same place (Hubble, 2006; Purcell, 2023,1). Noteworthy from *Mass Observation* was how this form of observational ethnography can create potential for everyone to become 'natives' in the research setting, and allow for the collation of a 'people's history', uncovering perspectives that are potentially ignored elsewhere in more 'conventional' research. *Mass Observation's* work specifically related to pubs and drinking was recorded in 1943 with *The Pub and the People. A Worktown Study by Mass Observation*. The work focussed on how observers could find answers to large-scale 'abstract questions about time' by studying small concrete actions, showing its useful value for an ethnographer (Taylor & Prince, 2021, 1083). The key point about 'the pub' as a space useful for *Mass Observation* surrounds how the pub is a 'familiar' space and part of many people's 'everyday' surroundings, especially in wartime Bolton. Conclusions surrounded how 'pub-time' was separate from the rest of the lived experience, in part due to how those doing observations enabled understandings of the patterns of drinking and socialising 'in context', rather than focussing on the 'pathological consequences' of drink (Taylor & Prince, 2021, 1104).

The general value of participant observations more broadly has historical precedent beyond *Mass Observation,* such as Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1920's saying how observing his research subjects enabled him to 'grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world' and as such forming a crucial plank of his ethnographic investigation (Campbell & Lassiter, 2014, 57). More precisely, by participating in the rituals of a place themselves, a researcher hopes to gain an authentic experience of the researched environment, therefore enabling routinised 'social practice' to be uncovered (Reckwitz, 2002). For example, Hubbard (2019, 766) explained how observing his research participants 'in place', created an 'authentic' insight into the ways the places he observed (micropubs) operated to foster social cohesion, and how the production and consumption of space instigates certain behaviours. Observing sites of interest also adds value given that

phenomena can be viewed in the context in which it is generated and reproduced, theoretically providing a detailed and rich interrogation of said phenomena and enabling researchers to untangle the complexity of daily existence, and reinforce the reality that people are not passive actors in space (Sforzi & Colombo, 2020; Adler, et al., 1987). There is also the additional advantage to observing research sites, given how it can be a way to record the reality of what people do, rather than what they say they do, leading to better appreciation of the 'microsocial' order that participants may potentially have internalised to such a degree that they become unaware of the symbiotic relationship between person and place (Silverman, 1993, 248).

It is important to note however, that there are some issues with observations that can potentially problematise the method. Ethically, given observations occur in a 'living' environment, it is very difficult for researchers to gain informed consent from participants, without damaging the validity of data collected from method valued for its authenticity. There are also issues with observing groups or individuals from 'disadvantaged' groups or people with potentially antisocial attitudes, in this thesis that might mean someone dealing with alcohol addiction for example. Empirically, some issues emerge too, for example, a researcher trying to 'immerse' themselves in an outside culture, will not achieve that alongside 'recorders or clipboards', to quote Hagan (2022, 1183), suggesting how the data collection techniques for observations, will always result in some degree of being 'out of place'. Another point raised by Hagan (2022, 1183) was that observing an individual for a limited amount of time can result in assumptions 'based upon one [visible or audible] trait', which increases the chance of unrepresentative data being collected. This was a problem raised by Hubbard (2019, 766) in his observations of micropubs, where he explained how him being 'in situ' would 'no doubt' be 'somewhat schematic and impressionistic rather than rich in ethnographic detail'.

To counter the issues raised in the above paragraph, especially the ethical issues, it is important not to compromise individuals being observed, for example by keeping individual descriptors to a minimum and to make management, and members of the public of they ask, aware of the nature of the observations, and the intent behind them, by engaging in conversation if asked and always having an information sheet to hand. To deal with the noted empirical concerns, visiting spaces multiple times can attempt to counter the issues relating to 'assumptions' and the difficulties in immersing oneself in the environment. In the observations themselves, four key factors were targeted for observation, namely:

Conversations

Atmospheres

Demographics

The performance of drinking

These observations lasted anywhere from one to three hours, from which notes were written with pen and paper, which were subsequently coded and written up in to an observation report (an example can be found in appendix 3), normally around 1,000 words in length, the list of observations can be found in figure 3 below.

Date	Drinking Space	Time Observed
29/01/23	Dog House Microbrewery	12:00 – 15:00
26/02/23	Dog House Microbrewery	16:30 – 19:00
26/03/23	Dog House Microbrewery	14:00 – 17:00
03/06/23	Bramington Cricket Club	12:00 – 14:00
06/06/23	Bramington Cricket Club	18:30 – 20:00
08/06/23	Bramington Cricket Club	14:00 – 15:00
09/06/23	Bramington Cricket Club	20:00 – 21:00
10/06/23	Bramington Cricket Club	18:00 – 19:30
04/07/23	Bramington Cricket Club	20:00 – 21:00
07/07/23	Bramington Cricket Club	20:00 – 21:30
08/07/23	Bramington Cricket Club	12:00 – 15:00 / 19:00 – 21:00
09/07/23	Bramington Cricket Club	14:00 – 16:00
24/02/23	Red Lion	13:30 – 14:30
25/02/23	Red Lion	16:30 – 17:30
26/03/23	Red Lion	18:00 – 19:00
10/04/23	Red Lion	17:00 – 18:30
12/04/23	Red Lion	13:30 – 14:30
14/04/23	Red Lion	20:30 – 23:00
21/04/23	Red Lion	17:00 – 18:30

Fig. 3. List of Participant Observations

3.3. Archives and Local History

Another, much smaller facet of the research process of thesis surrounded visiting the archive of the local history society in Bramington. The core idea of this was to understand the historical grounding in which the village's drinking establishments are placed, and also to gather an appreciation for other historical events and places which have influenced village identity. These archives were visited once, on the 8th of May, and a variety of different documents, mostly newspaper clippings and old postcards were studied, alongside interviewing local historians Sam and Jeremy.

The value of archives generally are well recorded, such as by Osborne (1999, 51) who said that archival research adds 'ethical and epistemological credibility' to research, especially when a diverse range of archival resources are accessed. This has become especially true in the 21st century, as the increasing presence and range of online archives have allowed for the 'sharing of new histories' (Revill, et al., 2020, 291). In the geographies of drink, archives have been used to great effect, given how such spaces allow for 'in place' readings of the past, so is especially useful when researching the historical geography of drink and the past relationships that people had to their drinking spaces, a noteworthy example being Beckingham's (2017) exploration of the regulation of barmaids in early 20th century Glasgow. Although it must be said that archives are not a methodological panacea, given how archives are in most cases 'partial or incomplete' and as such only show 'fragments of history' (Mills, 2013, 703). It is also important to understand the positionality of the 'makers of memory', and how certain facets of historical data have consciously been ignored or removed from the record.

Focussing specifically on local history archives, and local history societies more broadly, there is evident value in their use for ethnographic research. The primary value of local history archives surrounds how they can highlight individual and shared community experiences that may otherwise be absent from 'official' publications, and as such creating valuable 'public' geographies (Dymond, 2011; Merriman, 2010, 387). Local archives also have value as they can document a radical and anti-establishment history, which may potentially be ignored in larger archives, or those with ties to the state (Cosson, 2017). There is also the point regarding local history archives being 'by the community', and as such can act as a vital lens with which to view community activities and engagements, and the historical context in which they are grounded. There is also the value in that the community usually maintains their own records, and as such there is a desire to preserve the record for the sake of civic pride (Dixon, 2008). This is particularly of use give how drinking establishments, especially pubs, have entered into the folklore of the village, and themselves are indicative of local histories, and the long-term socio-cultural contestations which have forged local identity in contemporary times.

Although local history archives being 'constructed by, created for, and consumed within the local community' does have evident value as explained above, they do as a result become 'saturated with local peculiarities and biases', potentially becoming 'parochial and undemocratic', and as such falling foul of the same issues with more 'traditional' archives surrounding the 'makers of memory' (Cosson, 2017, 45). Whilst having cross-community co-production of knowledge in local archives evidently does have its limits, the theoretical diversity of contributors, especially those from non-academic backgrounds, can expose key facets of local histories that may otherwise be ignored (Finn & Smith, 2015).

In Bramington, the local history society is relatively well supported, having a membership of over 50. The charity was founded in 1977 and currently has an archive facility opened at the organisation's founding, it also has a journal, *Local Local*, which is printed every twelve to eighteen months, and features fifteen or so articles on a variety of local history themes, some articles from which appear on their website. This journal is a useful resource for understanding the niches of how Bramington's pubs and other drinking spaces have been crucial to the formation of local socio-cultural identity, especially given the prevalence of articles pertaining to pubs and drinking spaces, with there usually being at least one article focussing on drinking spaces in each issue.

3.4. 'Insider' Research

Given how the community being researched is one in which the researcher has lived his whole life, it can be considered as an 'insider' ethnographic approach. 'Insider' research refers to 'those undertaking research in and on their own organizations while a complete member' and is used throughout the social sciences, to gain greater access to and within a studied community or establishment, which would be harder to achieve if conducted in a more orthodox, distanced manner (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, 59).

So far such approaches to ethnographic research have permeated the geographies of drink to only a limited degree. An example where this has been used however was Thurnell-Read (2014), where his experiences and insider knowledge gained through being a small-scale brewer himself gave him inherent understandings of the associated terminologies and tasks involved in brewing, creating advantages for his research into 'micro' drinking establishments, such as improved rapport with the brewers and better lines of questioning. Similarly, in Heley (2010, 324) explorations of the pub as a space in which rural middle-class identity is created and re-created, his own positioning as a man from the researched village and working in its pub allowed for better rapport through the pre-existing trust that existed between the researcher and his research participants. He describes how such a relationship allowed him to be privy to a 'rich mixture of conversation and social interaction that gave [him] insights into the social organization of social identities with the bar itself'.

The general advantages of such a method are well explained elsewhere in the social scientific and qualitative literature more broadly. For example, it has been noted how 'entry' into the research population can be achieved more quickly with ready access to, and knowledge of research participants, and how 'insider' research offers a better chance of 'productive interaction with participants', given that trust is easier to be developed when both the researcher and the researched are from the same 'in-group' (Hodkinson, 2005, 136). A specific

example of this from the social sciences is Zulfikar (2014), who detailed the advantages that he had as an Australian Muslim researching young Indonesian immigrants and how that demographic views issues such as religion, family and place. He explains how his inherent understanding of participants' backgrounds allowed for better constructed, more efficient questioning and his prior relationships with people within the research population granted him better access to community 'gatekeepers'. There is also the additional point raised following on from this, about how 'insider' methods are useful for researching marginalised groups, who might otherwise by unwilling to engage with individuals and organisations associated with discriminatory power structures. An example of this is Alridge (2003), whose positionality as an African American man gave him a better understanding of the varied contexts in which his research subject – African American education – operates. Adding later how 'insider' researchers have a better chance of really immersing themselves in their area of study, more so than someone from outside the community of interest, especially if that community may have issues with outsiders due to historic or contemporary conflicts.

Specific examples of 'insider' research's advantage in researching explicitly rural environments are also noteworthy, especially in the context of rural ambivalence to outsiders and the way outsiders change place when they enter communities (Villa, 2019; Cresswell, 1996). Much of this surrounds the concept of trust, which was described by Heley (2011, 225) as being a 'gateway' into the research population which might have required more persuasion if he was not from the community he was researching. Also, given how researchers are more often based in urban areas, Kerstetter (2012) noted how outside researchers are often perceived as having a more powerful and privileged status within preeminent social structures, which Fahmy & Pemberton (2012) reported at its most extreme, can result in a dehumanisation of research participants, especially in relation to rural poverty. Given what could be argued as a more 'insular' view of outside researchers in rural communities, research conducted by people with prior relationships within that place, can engage better with local people, '[amplifying] voices of community members and [empowering] residents to advocate for their needs', increasing the richness of the data collected (Kerstetter, 2012, 103). A similar point was raised by Heslop, et al. (2018) given how research participants in an 'insider' ethnography would have an appreciation that research was being conducted without malicious intent, which in turn can facilitate more reliable participant responses.

Despite the evident value associated with 'insider' ethnography, it has been problematised to a degree, given how 'insider' researchers may become unable to distinguish between their own personal experiences and assumptions with those of their participants, which can compromise the validity of the research. There is also the issue raised by Porisky & Glas (2023, 51) regarding the contested, 'variable salience' within a researcher's positionality that

can shift over time and is dependent on different facets of one's identity. Although another noteworthy point regards how it is never truly possible to become an 'insider'. Even if researching a community which the researcher has been part of for a significant period of time (as in this thesis), that individual will still have the label of 'researcher', and as such, even when well-integrated to the spaces, social groups and organisations of the researched community, there will still be an element of distance between researcher and researched.

Overall, it is clear that whilst 'insider' approaches to ethnographic research have seen limited use, it has phenomenal potential, especially in the context of community studies where subjective and person-specific understandings are central to the research. It's ability to immerse the researcher within the community being studied, and guide research with more than just theoretical knowledge, highlights the vital role it can play in uncovering the 'webs of action and meaning' in place that this research seeks to uncover (Heley, 2010, 324).

Chapter 4: Normality, Drinking and the Formation of a Rural Identity

As explored elsewhere in previous chapters, it is vital for ethnographers to study 'ordinary' people in 'natural' contexts, enabling an appreciation of the complexity of daily existence, and to understand the ways different actors behave in the creation of local community identities (Adler, et al., 1987, 219). This chapter seeks to understand the perspectives, methods and contestations through which local people understand their community spaces, and the centrality of certain people, places and institutions to creating local identity. This chapter analyses how Bramington's rural public social spaces are crucial nodes through which local community identity and senses of belonging are formed, as well as an exploration of how the local community in Bramington perceives itself with regard to ideas of community 'typicality' or 'atypicality'. Also explored is the role drinking spaces specifically play within those debates, given such establishments being central 'public' spaces in the village. There is also analysis of whether the centrality of 'public' drinking spaces is sustainable, and whether they will maintain their crucial presence with the fabric of rural socio-cultural experiences.

4.1. Public Social Spaces in a Rural Context

An initial line of enquiry in this thesis was to understand why people live in, moved to and stayed in Bramington, to offer a grounding of people's perceptions of their community and what it offers to their lived experiences.

Whilst there was a general consensus from those who had moved to the village that it appeared a 'a nice place to live' for someone previously an outsider, the causes for this were varied. One prominent factor was the facilities offered in the village. For example, Mike, who moved to Bramington in 2009 with a young family noted how the local schools were seen in high regard and having facilities like a public park and well-established sports clubs offered useful spaces for family-based recreation. Also, facilities like the local Co-op supermarket and railway station were explained as contributing factors in outsiders moving to and staying in the village. This is especially true of those moving from smaller communities, such as Sophie, who moved from neighbouring South Wittlebury, which only has a church and village hall as community facilities, and as such had limited opportunities through which activities facilitating attachment to place could be experienced. Another interesting driver of people to Bramington was the relatively affordable cost of living, although this was only mentioned by people who had moved to the village over 15 years ago, implying how costs in the area may have

increased, and reduced the accessibility to the village for those on lower incomes in more recent years.

The conversation with Harold, the local microbrewer, was a particularly elucidating discussion, given how he is the seventh generation of his family to live in the village. He said having such deep ties to Bramington creates a 'feeling of belonging' to the community, adding how if he was to move house, it would be to somewhere else in the village. This fits him into Strathern's (1981) bracket of a 'real villager' with strong attachment to place, enforced by having lived within the same community for multiple generations. As someone in his sixties, Harold has evidently developed his attachment over time, so an appreciation of younger community members' views on 'belonging' is interesting to explore, and specifically whether they can foresee themselves staying in Bramington. For Sophie (20's) she felt 'it's just too rural' and that it can be difficult to 'access work and opportunities' if she was to stay in the village, preferring a place where 'there's more going on'. Jacob (20's) shared a similar view, where even though he said he had no problem living in Bramington and felt some level of 'enjoyment' when using the facilities in the village, especially the drinking establishments, he said he wanted to leave, because 'it's such a hassle getting about anywhere'. Such youth perspectives offer interesting insights into the challenges of 'incubating' sense of belonging in the village, and that the processes which allowed Harold to stay in Bramington and formulate his long-term attachment to a place, may be considerably more difficult in contemporary rural communities.

Expanding on an idea discussed above regarding the facilities on offer in Bramington, the role that public social spaces play in forging identity, both generally and specifically in Bramington were explored. In a more general sense, most research participants were of the opinion that having these publicly accessible social spaces was a necessary good for cultivating an 'enlivened' community, Harold saying how if Bramington did not have an array of such facilities it would be 'culturally bereft' and 'monochrome'. Another participant asked how 'if people can't socialise then what have you got really?', expressing dismay at how new developments, both in Bramington and generally, do not encourage 'socialising', and accused them of having 'absolutely zero sense of community' (Dale). This taps into the point made by Oldenburg (1999, xxix), regarding the gradual 'retreating from society' by people that has led to a reduction in public spaces through which lively socio-cultural identities are formed. This is despite a further point made by Dale relating to how 'community is an economic spear', implying a link between a successful local economy and the development of a local identity and sense of place. Whether these manifest in Bramington was considered in other interviews, and brought up a variety of responses, although there was a general consensus that Bramington's public social spaces were of value to the community, even if numbers had

declined in the last few decades, despite population growth. As someone with a young family, Mike said how the village was a 'family-oriented place' and justified that by making reference to the family-owned nature of some of the remaining 'high street' shops, such as the butcher, which is in its 4th generation of family ownership. To a similar point, lifelong resident Bill explained how due to the presence of what he termed 'proper' shops 'the village has not been ruined' through becoming 'a village full of second hand shops and other supplementary type things' and therefore still has a 'village-y feel'. There was also additional value placed on local facilities as they mean local residents do not 'have to leave the village too frequently', and given the diversity and relatively large number of offerings, a 'dynamic clientele' are able to be facilitated for, and therefore included within the village's activities (Sophie and Richard). These contributions combined show the importance of the village's services to a wide range of people, and taps into Meshram & O'Cass' (2013) point regarding how places which engage the local population are effective sites through which attachment to place and local identities are formed. Although Ashley (50's), a resident of four years, added how a 'welcoming bunch of people' have made the village easily accessible to a newcomer, adding to the perceived inclusiveness of the village's facilities. How these 'central focal points for a community' influence the character of the place and the value residents see in their community cannot be understated (Mike). Many people indicated that without the array of public social spaces they 'would probably move out', as stated by Corine, Dale's wife, tapping into a similar point regarding the village feeling 'quite isolated' without its social offerings (Sophie).

In conclusion, the variety of public social spaces in Bramington are shown to have obvious value to the community, both in terms of creating the identity of place and also on grounds of general usefulness.

4.2. What is Typical? A Community's Contestations

As shown in the preceding section, residents of Bramington do value their public social spaces and appreciate their contribution to local sense of place. However, to appreciate how representative Bramington is of wider trends in rural society, it can be useful to consider whether the village is 'typical' of the rural Midlands generally, and whether local residents appreciate that typicality or atypicality. Looking at figure 4 it can be seen that whilst Bramington is better served when compared to most other communities of similar size in its county, it is not abnormally so. One other noteworthy trend from figure 4 is how those with limited access to public social spaces were typically either 'newbuild estates' or those close by to major conurbations, unlike most villages in the area, which have either developed over several centuries, and are beyond the sphere of a major urban area.
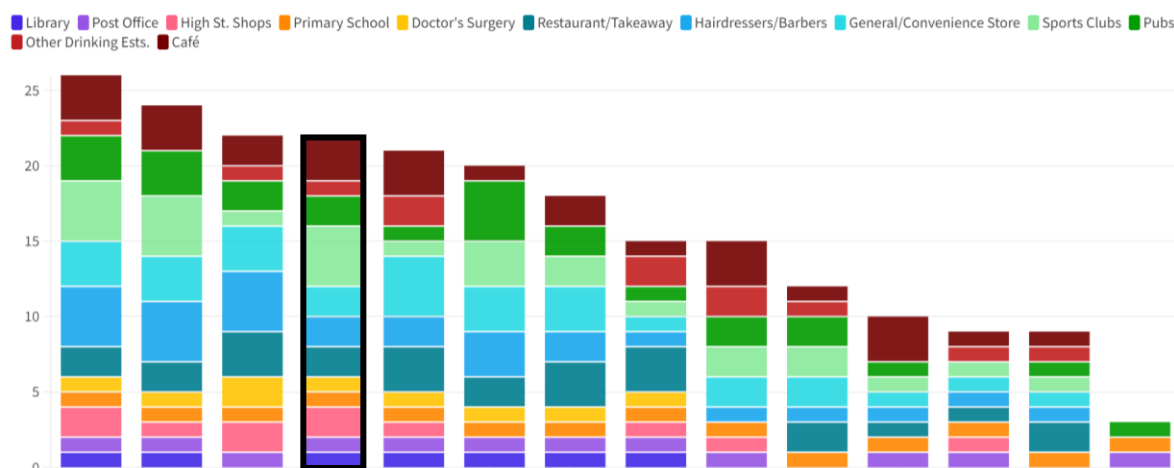
Fig. 4. public social spaces in other similarly sized communities (population 2,000-4,000) in Bramington's home county. Bramington highlighted in black. (Source: Village Websites)

How the residents of Bramington see this typicality, and how it manifests in the community are somewhat contested by the people who live there. There was a fairly even split between people who thought that Bramington was typical of similar villages in the local area and people who felt it was not. A common trend with those who view the village as typical, was how the perceived typicality was driven by the 'idea' of what a village should be and what it should have. For example, new resident Fraser (20's) explained that 'most places have pubs and shops' and made reference to the line from rural mockumentary *This Country* – 'we've got a pub and a shop, why would you leave?', thus centring those facilities as key facets in the imagined image of rural community. Sophie added how even though 'it does have really good amenities, probably more than other rural villages… it's quite typical', which does suggest that citizen ideas of a rural norm do not always correlate with service availability and access to social spaces, with other factors being relevant, such as access to employment and housing. What was notable was that those who said Bramington was typical, were either young people with limited experience of other places in adult life, like Fraser and Sophie, or people like Harold, who have lived in the village all their lives, him simply saying how the village 'was not atypical really'. This taps into ideas about the subjectivity of normality, and how the 'norm' for those specific individuals relates to their own differing experiences of place, rather than a concrete understanding of community norms.

For residents who view Bramington as atypical however, there was a common theme relating to how the village's pubic social spaces set it apart from other communities, even though as figure x shows, it is not markedly different from that many other similarly sized places. Ashley described how even though 'it's like a little village… it's got lots going on', citing the 'dentist, doctors, butchers, shops, supermarkets, co-op'. A similar point was raised by Bill who

mentioned how the maintenance of the village's services, 'set it apart from other places', also making reference to the physical growth of the village as well, noting the large new estate (~100 new properties) that has been developed since 2018. This theoretically expands the market for village services, and as such improves their chances of remaining open and continuing to be sites of socio-cultural formation. There were some less definitive reasonings from why the village is atypical, with Mike saying how 'Bramington is special', and Martin (bricklayer, 40's) describing the village 'as like nowhere else'.

Overall then, there is an unquestionable contestation within the community as to its typicality or atypicality, with the role of its public social spaces being key to such contestations. How such places act to set the village apart from other similarly sized communities, whilst simultaneously becoming 'normal' in the specific context of Bramington are essential to this contested understanding, and highlighting the broader subjectivities involved in the formation of place based identities.

4.3. A Desire for Normality

So far in this chapter it has become evident how valuable public social spaces are for forming community identity and creating senses of belonging in a rural community. Moving forward, the role that drinking establishments play in creating senses of belonging and forming community identity in rural communities, within the wider ecosystem of public social spaces, can be seen as vital. Most contributors to this thesis were of the opinion that pubs and drinking spaces are important to communities, even if they themselves were not regular drinkers, seeing such spaces as important to the 'normal', 'everyday' rural scene, and highlighting the centrality of drinking spaces to people's perceptions of rural identity formation.

What residents want in order to feel part of and be a contributory actor within this 'everyday', 'normal' and 'expected' place of community action was again contested, especially along lines of age and gender. The value placed in what drinks are sold in an establishment was a key site in which this contestation can be understood. For example, 'the beer' was viewed as crucial to an attractive drinking space for many middle to old aged men, whilst Harriet (40's), manager of the Red Lion, said that gins were important, describing herself as a 'girly girl' and a 'cocktail girl'. Dale explained the importance of good drink, or in his case beer, as a broad range of 'good beer' creates a 'genuine scene', forming a productive relationship between individuals and place, where people feel involved and a sense of belonging. Another key driver of a 'normalised' relationship with drinking establishments, and also something of a generational point of delineation, surrounded 'the type of people' that frequent drinking spaces. For younger adults, having a place where 'people aren't really judgy' and is not 'cliquey', was

seen as important in their feeling part of a particular establishment, as such environments can 'create a threatening atmosphere', and create an institution which excludes those people from a crucial site of local socio-cultural formation (Fraser and Sophie). This also taps into points which will be explored later in chapter 4.4. regarding young people potentially not being present in drinking spaces, reducing the centrality of such places in young people's social lives. 'Atmosphere' and its influence on drinking spaces is explored further in chapter 6.1. Continuing, there was also an insinuation that what creates the derided 'cliquey' environment, was the kind of drinking and drinker associated with more elderly men, who exclusively drink beer in small groups, have limited conversations, and do not like music to be played in the drinking space. This contrast in opinion can create a significant rift between various groups who desire to be present in drinking establishments and the wider community, limiting access to that particular 'everyday' space. Such contestations also lean into debates about the subjectivity of normality, given differing perceptions of what seemingly 'normal' places should offer members of the community, and how certain sections of society are included and excluded from the space as a result.

The reasons for people's desire to be included in the drinking space were varied, but one key factor, as explained by Corine, was how drinking spaces, and specifically pubs have a 'service to community', through which village residents can use as an 'outlet' and 'disconnect' from the trivialities of everyday life, she said this was particularly true for 'people who are lonely'. To this point, Ashley said how 'you don't go to the pub for the beer, you come to the pub for the company of the people', and specially made reference to how for men, being slightly inebriated in the space is a good place to engage with their emotions which '[they] don't do so much in other places', adding how 'men need to go to a pub and have a drink and talk shit basically'. This point was also expressed by other participants, given how 'with a glass of beer in your hand, you're inhibitions are released a bit and you know you can enter into conversations more easily', which highlights how when 'under the influence' discussion and the bonds between people which emerge from that are easier to facilitate and create relationships between people in a drinking space (Richard). This convivial 'vibe' induced by conversations and actions between people are also seen from deriving from those individuals who manage and curate the drinking space, Dale speaking of how the 'passion of the people running this stuff', itself enables people with shared interests to congregate in and within certain establishments, and forge relationships with fellow members of the community.

Overall therefore, there is evident value in having easily accessibly drinking spaces in rural communities, in which use of the village's drinking establishments is seen as a 'normalised' practice and as such is at the centre of ideas regarding place attachment and the formulation of local socio-cultural identity. Whether this manifests in Bramington, and how that influences

the lived experience of members of the community will be explored in greater depth in following chapters.

4.4. Sustainability of Public Popular Culture

As the literature explored in chapter 2.1. suggests, drinking, and especially pub drinking are considered to be important planks of English cultural identity. How that manifests in the contemporary rural setting is relevant to explore, and how differences in individual perceptions of changes to the state of drinking and its spaces of consumption leave a contested, and sometimes confused understanding of the role spaces of drink play, and will continue to play in rural communities in the future, especially as this relates to the centrality of intergenerational relationships to place-based identity.

It is generally regarded that drinking establishments, and pubs especially are under significant strain, especially in rural areas (McDonald, 2018). Popular perceptions of why there has been a perceived 'decline' was multi-faceted and the residents of Bramington had several suggestions for why there has been added strain. One key factor is the cheaper cost of home drinking, and the relative expense of drinking in pubs and other licensed premises, encourages increasing numbers of people to drink at home, rather than going out. Although it should be said that people do not necessarily prefer to drink in despite cheaper cost, given Corine mentioned how drinking at home was 'more boring' and Fraser rhetorically asked how 'going to the pub is just better isn't it?', even if costs are more than when staying in. This does imply that drinking as an act has a distinct hedonistic element, and that individual consumption choices are not driven simply by market forces, but are at least in part driven by the affective influences that drinking spaces have on consumers. Where market forces are extremely relevant however, was the point made by Richard relating to how economic pressures on pubs increase the chances of closure, and the creation of 'dry' communities. He mentioned how the pub in South Halebury, a much smaller village six miles to the north, was forced to close because 'the level of business couldn't sustain the bottom line that the owners of the pub wanted'. This led on to a discussion of breweries and pubcos and how their profit-driven business models are often unsustainable for smaller and rural pubs with a limited catchment from which to draw customers, bringing in the ideas of Knowles & Egan (2002) regarding how the increasing commercialisation and rationalisation of the pub trade has caused the closure of many smaller, rural pubs. Although Richard did say how models such as that of 'community ownership' could be effective in maintaining the presence of pubs in more peripheral communities, as it could be a way to bypass 'prioritising profit' and re-connect a pub with its community.

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How wider societal changes impact the usage of drinking establishments was raised by local historian Jeremy, who cited a broader 'radical change in entertainment' which was 'driven by the internet', which has reduced citizen's apparent need to use their drinking spaces as a social hub, as local news and gossip can be found online or on social media, with him asking 'why would you bother [going to the pub] anymore?'. Similarly, Dale raised how wider societal issues directly relating to alcohol had reduced people's usage of drinking spaces. For example, he mentioned the 2007 smoking ban and increasingly punitive drink driving legislation as factors reducing the popularity of pub drinking, and also the wider societal move amongst some sections of society towards teetotalism, with him criticising campaigns like Dry January, which he accused of 'trying to destroy the whole pub business'. Bringing the discussion back to issues of cost influencing consumer habits, it should be mentioned how Britain has some of the highest duties levied on on sale alcohol in the developed world, and also how increasing business rates, with increased costs forced back onto the consumer, and increasing the attraction of cheaper home drinking, 'harms pubs massively' (Martin).

The theme of young people and their (perceived) absence from drinking spaces, it is useful to discuss, alongside the medium to long term impacts of this absence, and how it will disrupt and more broadly impact English drinking culture. From the perspectives of young people themselves, there was a seemingly positive outlook, with the accessibility of pubs in particular was mentioned, for example Sophie saying how on Friday nights 'it's an easy option', when compared to going out to in a town or city centre, placing value on how 'if there's a pub you can just walk to and walk home [from], people are always going to want to do that'. Fraser added something similar, saying how 'there is something for just being able to walk comfortably to somewhere to meet people and have a drink', and agreed with Sophie's point that 'it's easy' when you have a local pub nearby. Similarly, in the context of younger people being seen to prefer city centre drinking and 'trendy bars', Ashley raised the point that 'people won't be young forever', and made reference to his own youth, where '[he] always went into towns and cities' and described a 'definite progression' through his lifetime towards pub drinking and drinking in 'my community', a process he clearly feels is still prevalent in contemporary culture. Although it should be noted that all of Sophie's, Fraser's and Ashley's contributions are very individually focused, placing a large amount of responsibility for the future vitality of drinking establishments on consumers of drink, and ignored more structural and macro scale issues which influence both the running of drinking establishments and consumer habits.

Another point of note in this debate, and one which can act as a counter to Ashley's previously referenced point about the changing preferences throughout an individual's lifetime, are the changes in the past few decades which have halted previous inter-generational relationships

that formed in drinking spaces, and maintained the value of such places to a community. Harold made this point in reference to his own upbringing and first experiences of pub drinking four decades ago, where such spaces were a 'rite of passage into manhood'. He added how the status associated with the pub, at least for young men, 'isn't a thing anymore', and compared contemporary pub drinking to that of a classical music concert where 'it's all old people'. This also operates in the key context of changing rural cultures and economies more broadly, given how he mentioned the space of the Black Bull, where he started his 'drinking journey', was at that time where 'the farmers would be'. Census data showed 3.7% of people in Bramington worked in agriculture as of 2021, highlighting how the socio-cultural processes and landscapes which forged the drinking habits of people in Bramington in the past no longer exist, and how the disassociation of village residents from the primary economy locally has fundamentally altered and upended the traditional centrality of 'the pub'. Although it must also be said that Harold did contradict himself to a degree by agreeing with Ashley's point about 'progression' about how 'people go through different phases in their [drinking] lives'. There was also point made relating to the growth of young people increasingly drinking at home, as drinking in licensed establishments 'is so expensive so you youngsters organise parties at home' (Corine). This point is somewhat an oversimplification of young people's drinking preferences, it does tap into ideas regarding young people's drinking 'development' being disconnected from the space of the pub, which was not true of previous generations.

This 'concern' surrounding young people's perceived ambivalence to using licensed premises for their drinking, instead preferring to drink at home, in city centres, or not at all, has been explored above, but other problems remain. Problems stemming from irregular flow of customers, combined with increasing costs, both for the establishments themselves and their potential users have caused such drinking spaces to be under intense economic pressures, regardless of the age demographic of their clientele. There are however active moves to change and adapt to this climate for rural drinking spaces, and aid in the maintaining of rural drinking space's vitality. One such is the 'community' pub model, which theoretically serve the purpose of 're-embedding' pubs at the centre of local socio-cultural landscapes given the 'democratic' management of such establishments, and the prioritisation of the 'community' over shareholder dividends. This would agree with the point made by Cabras (2011, 2428) regarding how establishing 'community' pubs was a valid way to save village pubs and a 'valuable solution in the rescue of village pubs' to protect their assets of social value. Another addition to the rural scene has been the growth of more 'niche' establishments such as micropubs and the increasing proliferation of small breweries, with there now being almost 2,000 independent breweries in the UK (Perrett, 2022). Harold, as the proprietor of the Dog House microbrewery, did view himself as an actor in helping to address declining rural service

provision, and therefore can be seen as part of this move to diversify rural drinking spaces, and preserve the centrality of such spaces in rural communities.

Overall then, it is evident that drinking, the establishments in which it is consumed and the cultural identity forged though such acts and places, is currently in a state of flux and inter-generational contestation regarding its place as a crucial factor in creating community identity. The long-term centrality of spaces of drink as central to the formation of rural identity remains in dispute, especially given the increasing affordability of home drinking, and debates surrounding whether the young people of today will continue to be associated with city centre drinking as they age. Although it should be noted how attempts to re-imagine rural drinking through ideas like 'community' ownership of pubs can act to revitalise the rural drinking scene, and construct a new role for drinking spaces in the 21st century.

Chapter 5: Drink's Role and Relationship to Place Creation

As Matless (2023, 181-183) states, pubs and wider spaces of drink are crucial to the 'geographical narrative' through which multi-scalar 'culture' is grounded, situated as crucial sites in the creation of 'local and regional identity'. The literature engaged with in chapter 2 explores these variations, and foregrounds the centrality of drinking establishments to the creation of place-specific identities and senses of meaning and belonging in rural areas. In this chapter, how individual perspectives of Bramington drinking establishments influence people's perceptions and relationship to their community will be understood in a place-specific setting. By analysing the contestations present in Bramington through exploring how differing groups and individuals want to feel part of their community spaces, and also through evaluating how new types of space and alternative ownership and management structures are appreciated and understood, the chapter summarises how spaces of drink are central (or not) to individual perceptions of community and forging sense of place.

5.1. Contestation in Community: Exploring the Vagaries of a Village

How the residents of Bramington see the village itself and generalise the people and places present is useful to offer some context as to how people view each other, and in turn desire to partake in community activity and use the village's spaces of drink. Most people agreed that Bramington was a 'nice community' as a result of the 'nice people' that live there, and is a community which 'enjoys it's own company' (Corine and Dale). Even those who were not regular users of the village's public social spaces, such as Sophie (20's), explained how 'most people are friendly, there's a few exceptions but most people you can generally get on with'. Therefore, the socialisation spaces of the village, are at least to a degree, 'open', and the rest of this section will explore how drinking spaces function in this social environment, and the importance of such places in the creation of the reported 'nice' and 'friendly' community.

In researching Bramington, there was a broad insinuation that drinking establishments and the local citizenry have a symbiotic responsibility to one another. A point made by Ashley, a 'regular' at all three of the researched establishments, was how 'pubs need to be supported so we can maintain them'. In analysing this otherwise 'basic' statement, usage of the word 'need' brings through the importance of the role individuals play, or are seen to play in maintaining service provision in Bramington, and also highlights the importance of the space itself, rather than factors like the quality of drink and the price in appealing to the community. The value of the space was seen in the story of Dennis, who was mentioned numerous times as a 'regular' every day in the Red Lion, a man who's 'quite ill and he's lost his wife, that man, would not exist, I think he would not be able to exist without the pub', which in a very stark

manner, highlights the centrality of the pub space to that individual, and the socialising which he enjoys in that environment and gives his life 'meaning' (Martin). The centrality of specific places to individuals, and the resulting relationships formed in such spaces, often surround a collective 'responsibility' toward place. For example, Dale explained how 'responsible attitudes from all people' (customers and staff) encourage a 'nice atmosphere', resulting in a place you feel deeply involved in'. As a result of this users can gain what Van Dyne & Pierce (2004, 442) described as 'psychological ownership' of place, driving loyalty and a sense of shared responsibility in that environment.

Such environments do not just emerge from the void however, with them being created across multiple scales and spaces. How management of Bramington's spaces of drink try and facilitate that crucial 'sense of ownership' is key to understanding the way in which certain places contribute to the sense of place in Bramington. This was especially pertinent for the Red Lion which from observing the space over many hours, appeared to have a much more 'conscious' approach to how it appeals to the community, in contrast to the Dog House and cricket club, which were 'planned' in a much more 'haphazard' manner, to quote Harold, the Dog House's proprietor. In a discussion with Harriet, the manager of the Red Lion, the importance of planning a space 'to fit every age group' was highlighted as important in widening the appeal of the space, given the potential for the space to be solely geared towards older people as the plurality demographic in the village. She said the pub was putting on events like a '90's-themed music night' and 'diversifying' the menu away from traditional 'pub grub', such as by adding pizzas to the menu in an attempt to attract younger people, as part of wider campaign for a more 'inclusive' space. Although this attempt to be all things to all people seems well meaning and is appreciated as such by most people in the community, such moves have led to accusations that the pub is 'bland', has 'no real personality' and is an 'inauthentic' space, therefore bringing in discussion regarding whether pubs have ever been, or can theoretically be all things to all people. This would appear especially damning give how those comments were made by Jacob and Sophie respectively, who are both in their 20's and as such a key target for the changes made by the pub's management. The 'personality' comment made by Sophie is particularly of note given how the self-admitted 'haphazard' management and appearance of the Dog House, 'gives it personality' (Corine). Such a contrast is a useful indicator of how ideas of attachment, 'psychological ownership', and the feeling of an 'authentic' place cannot necessarily be 'curated', but instead are forged by other factors outside the direct control of management.

Debates about the 'authenticity' of the drinking spaces in the village were also analysed, alongside how different people centralise 'authenticity' within their own perceptions of drinking spaces. This was especially relevant regarding the contestations and division in the

community over the status of the Queen's Arms pub, which since 2016 has had the additional name of the Lily Garden, given it has been half converted into a Chinese restaurant and take-away. This 'half and half' status creates community debates as to whether it is a 'real' pub or not, and how the establishment is seen in comparison to the much larger and more geographically central Red Lion. Regarding whether the community sees the Queen's Arms as a 'proper pub' was clearly delineated along lines of 'regularity' of drinking out generally. For example, infrequent drinkers Sophie (20's) and Jeremy (70's) respectively explained how 'the Chinese isn't really known to be a place where you go for a drink' and 'you can drink at the Queen's Arms but it's a Chinese restaurant really'. This is in contrast to more frequent drinkers who described how 'we've got two pubs' and 'obviously we've got the two locals', Fraser (20's) and Ashley (40's) respectively showing no distinct difference in how they perceive what type of establishment the Queen's Arms and the Red Lion are. Such contentions highlight the subjectivity of seemingly basic questions like 'what is a pub?', and taps into Partis-Jennings' (2022, 122) point regarding how the differing 'spatial dynamics' of place influence micro-level perceptions. Another point raised regarding the 'authenticity' of different pubs in the village, was how amongst those that drink more regularly, the Queen's Arms was seen as a more 'authentic' space. Dale noted how factors such as the personality of the proprietor, the bar staff who 'you always know from the village', the beer being better kept and more varied, as well as not being a 'pretentious' establishment, leads to patrons feeling more involved with and attached to the Queen's Arms, than those who only drink in the Red Lion. There was also the point made regarding how some people's ambivalence towards the Queen's Arms was down to allegations of racism and prejudice against the owner, who is of Chinese descent, especially in the context of increasing Sinophobia post-COVID (Mearns, 2023). The point regarding the importance of a well-kept, wide range of 'decent beer' to people's perception of their drinking establishments is also worth exploring, especially given how numerous participants decried the Red Lion's offerings as weak, maligning a poor range of beer in particular. This was evidenced on Easter Monday, when observations showed that four out of seven of the beer pumps in the Red Lion were not 'on'. Although it should be noted that the manager of the Red Lion said regarding the potential conflicts between the village's two major establishments 'I think a lot of our customers split their time between both pubs', although she did acknowledge that 'the pubs are very different'.

Given the relative ease of access by public transport of local towns and major contributions, as well as local 'wet' villages within a ten minute drive, external places have an influence on how Bramington centralises drinking establishments in the formation of its local identity. Increasing local criticism of the village's pubs and the limited opening hours of the micropub and sports clubs, has caused some people to look elsewhere for their drinking needs. Harold

said how the good rail connections to large towns and cities were made use of by him, as he could drink in 'real ale pubs' which can solely serve his specific demand for high quality, well kept real ale, which he said was 'hit and miss' in both the Red Lion and the Queen's Arms. Although Corine, another enjoyer of 'real' and 'craft' alcohol, described the county town (30 minutes by train) as 'not very nice' and 'really, really horrible' so would rather drink in the village's pubs, even if their offerings were less to her taste. Regarding the attraction of pubs in other, smaller local villages, Sophie mainly associated them with 'more of the younger demographic', who Bramington pubs are 'not aimed at'.

The perceived increasing popularity of drinking spaces outside the village must be placed in the context of the closure in 2021 of the Black Bull, which Sophie said had a 'reputation for being the young people's pub… because it had like pool tables and stuff'. This however contrasts with the point made by Ethan (30's), the bar manager at the Red Lion and lifelong village resident, regarding the Black Bull being more associated with 'a lot of the older gentlemen'. Such contrasting viewpoints further elucidate how subjective people's memories of drinking spaces are, even those from relatively similar demographic backgrounds.

The closure of the Black Bull needs to be considered as an important moment in the history of Bramington and its drinking, given how it is the only pub to have closed in living memory, the second most recent closure being the Three Horseshoes in 1930. People's views on why the Black Bull closed were varied, but poor management by the pub's owner, a regional brewery, and the resulting impact that had 'on the ground' was particularly relevant. Local business owner Mike highlighted how the pub was not 'selling enough beer to justify their opening' so the business model 'was to charge as much rent as possible' to keep the pub a worthwhile asset for the brewery. This model 'was not fully viable' and as such the license was not renewed in 2021, forcing closure and subsequent conversion into residential properties (Richard). The perception of poor management contrasts with the belief amongst some in the community of the merits of the service it provided to the village. Mike added how 'it was well used, [had a] good quiz night, the restaurant there always ticked over, so it was just the commercial side of things that kept it from being successful'. Although one key issue, raised by Mike and Dale was the lack of 'consistency' and 'stability' in the management, 'which wasn't good for continuity' and as a result the pub 'lost the community' given how 'villagers really like consistency in their pubs'. There were legitimate criticisms of the Black Bull beyond those enforced by much maligned brewery, for example having a poor range of beer which was not kept well, and also the point raised by Harold regarding the pub appealing to a 'dead culture', which he associated with drinking in his youth in the village, where the Black Bull was the domain of 'young kids' and 'the farmers'. In this context, especially of the declining relevance of agriculture to the village and the bonds facilitated in that industry, the pub was criticised as

'failing to get with the times', which when combined with mismanagement by the brewery, contributed to a sense of 'community malaise' and little serious desire to keep the pub in operation upon its sale by the brewery. The loss of a well-established institution locally is indicative of national trends regarding the loss of rural pubs, and brings up interesting debates regarding whether the loss of that establishment has caused the 'health and vibrancy' of the local socio-cultural landscape to be diminished (Hickman, 2013, 232). In response to this, despite the explained local disappointment in the loss of a drinking space, it was also suggested how there could be a 'silver lining' to the closure of the Black Bull, as 'it's made people realise that they need to support what's left, and shown that what we really can't afford to do is lose another' (Ashley).

In the context of decline locally given the recent closure of the Black Bull, and also national trends relating to reducing numbers of drinking establishments, especially in rural areas, it is noteworthy to consider how residents of Bramington view this decline and the unlikely but not impossible scenario of the village becoming 'dry' (IPPR, 2012). There was marked concern amongst residents regarding the idea of the village losing its spaces of drink, general comments included 'I would leave', 'it would be shit', 'there would be nothing to do' and how the village 'would become a much bleaker places to live', justified via how there would be 'no places to meet and socialise and organise events', if the village was to lose its drinking establishments (Harold, Fraser and Ashley). This taps into Dale's conclusion regarding how losing drinking spaces would result in 'losing the community'. Such a scenario was painted by Jacob (20's) as being more damaging to 'people who are into the village, the community, have more friends in the village', highlighting the point regarding how such places act as sites where 'cross-generational' senses of identity and belonging are forged, causing absences of such spaces to be particularly deleterious for those with deep ties to their community.

Similar points also raise interesting debates around the privileging of the pub above other public social spaces when creating local identities and sense of belonging. Especially given the context explored in chapter 4, where public social spaces were seen in combination as central in the creation of sense of place in Bramington, rather than any explicit overriding importance being placed on drinking spaces. Although it should be said how some people did think the community would overcome a loss of drinking spaces, such as Mike, who mentioned how 'people are very inventive at finding ways to socialise, so if there wasn't a pub in the village, we'd probably find ways to socialise', and also Sophie, who appear to be unconcerned by potential loss of drinking spaces, saying how 'I don't think it massively effects the village [anyway]', although it should be noted that she is an infrequent user of the village's spaces.

Given this situation regarding the loss of the Black Bull, a 'traditional' public house, it is important to note new and 'alternative' drinking spaces which have opened in the village and altered the drinking landscape. The Dog House microbrewery is especially relevant as a new space, but also given its location immediately opposite the Black Bull, which can act as a visual metaphor for changing consumer habits as they relate to drinking, and tap into ideas regarding drinking spaces popularity and cultural importance as being in 'flux' rather than 'decline'. Specifically at the Dog House, the proprietor Harold said it had been subjected to 'organic' growth, benefitting from being seen as 'friendly', 'inclusive' and being 'like a kind of birthday party'. He also said how the space offers 'something more', mentioning how 'we have music and performances which wouldn't exist in Bramington if it wasn't for us'. This taps into the point regarding how 'micro' establishments can effectively revitalise the drinking scenes of the communities they are based in, growth of which can in part be attributed to how those who drink 'micro' as part of 'lifestyle' decision to become part of a 'different' drinking community (Mathews & Picton, 2014, 238). Fraser supported this assertion in the Dog House, describing it as 'more alternative' and like a 'jumble sale', which he said made the place interesting for him. Interesting to note is that Fraser is younger resident (20's) and also works employed as a manual labourer, which sets him apart from the common conception of the people who like 'real' and 'craft' beer as being 'culturally' middle class and middle aged, although he is a white male, an identity strongly associated with the 'scene'.

Emerging from a discussion regarding what the village lacks with regard to its drinking spaces, was a distinct dichotomy, especially in relation to 'families', and whether the village's offerings are geared towards them or not, and therefore lacking spaces for people outside that group in which to form a local identity. For example, Richard (70's) said that 'the clientele that you meet can be a bit one dimensional', namely older, male members of the community like himself, with little attraction in the village 'from the point of view of young people' who therefore 'prefer to go elsewhere'. Although Mike, himself someone with a family, said that there were a lot of 'shall we say, family offerings', and to that ends, said that the village 'could do with an additional offer for different levels of drinkers, so you know… a spit and sawdust pub', an example he gave being 'Just Beer' in the nearby market town. But whether there would be a wider market for such an establishment was questionable, with the 'typical families' in the village 'not [being] the sort of the people who would be going out drinking' anyway (Sophie).

Overall, the general value that the residents of Bramington associate with their drinking spaces is diverse and contested. Relating to how different spaces create different forms of attachment, and how internal and external factors influence the village's perceptions of its spaces of drink, highlight understandings of community identity as consistently changing depending on space

and time, and serves to highlight the importance of such spaces as crucial nodes in local socio-cultural networks.

5.2. Homogeneity in Village Spaces?

A vital area of analysis relating to the way individuals see Bramington's drinking spaces, and the role that they play in creating understanding of place at the micro level, surrounds the theoretical homogeneity of the village's spaces, along lines of class, gender and race. This is relevant given how the spaces of sports clubs, 'micro' drinking establishments and rural pubs generally are associated with ideas of manliness and the 'privileging' of certain kind of masculinity, alongside being seen as fundamentally white and middle-class spaces.

The gendering of place is crucial to understand this debate and was uncovered through observations of the various village spaces. Regarding the gendering of the Red Lion, one notable feature was how 'regulars' (defined as people present at least twice during observations) were all male, and all situated themselves around the bar itself, and were all middle to old age, this was especially prevalent during the afternoon before the space got busy during the evenings and around lunchtime. What should be mentioned is how, outside of this male-dominated bar space, the rest of the pub's environs were much more equal, if not majority female. For example, families and couples would be sat in peripheral spaces such as the snug and in the corners of the main bar space at this time, also groups of women, often middle aged, would also frequent the peripheral spaces of the bar at this time. This dynamic in the space suggested how despite the presence of people from outside the demographic of the middle aged white male, due to the centrality of the location in which the 'regulars' placed themselves, they still have a disproportionate influence on the place's 'atmosphere', and reinforces the sense of a male dominated space. Explicit division with regards to gender in the space was particularly evident on one Saturday afternoon, when an England rugby union fixture was being shown. The bar space, where the game was being shown was dominated by men, with greater than three quarters of those present in that space being male. There was also a cross-generational feature in that environment, with two groups of fathers and their young sons in that particular space. This contrasted with the snug, where five of the six people sat in that space were women. Such rigid distinctions were not evident however on one Friday night where there was a unique 'event' on, namely a 70's night, where the gender balance was much more equal. Despite the age of the music, the age demographic was much also younger, and was additionally well supported by people from the village's 'working class'. It can be argued from this comparison therefore that the explicit gendering of the space is less common amongst younger people, and that the historic 'privileging' of masculinity in the pub

space and rigid division of space may not be guaranteed moving forward. Although it should be noted that there were young men present in the very male dominated space during the showing of the rugby.

In the spaces of the cricket club and Dog House, the gender dynamic was less spatially rigid, but followed a similar pattern, with relation to a core, central group of 'regulars', who were almost all men, and a more mixed gender group of peripheral customers, who drank less often and for less time, and also skewed younger. In the cricket club, this core group of men constituted the 'old guard' of former players, many of whom had their names on the club's honours boards, whether through being former club captains, or being honorary life members, a significance which centralises such people within the space of the club. In the Dog House, the core group of men consisted of people who arrived at the space before the 'rush' and clearly had a relationship with the proprietor and his assistants, often engaging him in their conversations. They also had a clear passion for beer, seen though how some wore shirts from beer festivals, and someone was observed in the infamous 'afraid you might taste something lagerboy' shirt from Hobgoblin. Similarly to the Red Lion though, these places beyond their 'core' customers were a more diverse mix of people with regard to age and gender. This was especially true at the cricket club, where friends and partners of those playing visited to the club several hours into the games, regardless of the gender of the fixture or what day games were being played.

Continuing with the theme of young people, how the younger residents of Bramington adapt spaces to fit their interests or ignore certain spaces was explored in the interview process. One key feature that cut through was how young people perceived the ability to enjoy and co-opt drinking spaces to their interests, correlated with 'having put down roots in the village' and as such have the 'psychological ownership' of place which allows them to change the spaces in the village (Sophie). There was also the point made by Jacob (20's) regarding how 'a place doesn't have to be really niche… for it to be a nice place'. Such a statement acts as a counter to the perception explored in chapter four regarding young people's perceived deference to rural drinking establishments and attraction to spaces seen as being 'trendy', and additionally serves to highlight how young people are in fact present and creating spaces where there is an alleged absence.

The sharing of the same drinking space by people with vastly different outlooks on life was evidenced during the February observation of the Dog House, and further highlights how drinking spaces are the sites of different people's socialisation spaces. In this observation, political statements from both left and right were evidenced, for example a discussion of transgender rights was overheard, where someone said how 'you know some people even

identify as cats now', perhaps in reference to the recent 'false rumour' of a such a scenario occurring in an Aberdeenshire school the previous month. But in the same space a man was dressed in a 'Soviet propaganda' style 'Corbyn' shirt, who was also the local candidate of the Socialist Alliance party at the 2001 general election, highlighting the diversity of political thought within the Dog House's clientele.

Continuing to highlight how places are not homogeneous, but instead offer a variety of services to a more diverse range of people than often implied in popular media was shown through observations. How people shift over the course of a drinking session between different identities, even those within closely aligned demographics was evident during the cricket club's busiest night of the week, Saturday, the day of men's senior fixtures. For example, given how a narrow majority of players at the club do not live in Bramington, their drinking is limited due to driving to the club, as a result of this players who live in the village's identity and relation to the space shifts as the night progresses, from socialising predominantly with young to middle aged male players and the 'old guard' mentioned earlier in this section. This transfers to socialising with a much more diverse and representative sample of the village's population once 'outsiders' have left, causing a shift in status of those with the dual identity of 'player' and 'villager' towards the latter over several hours of drinking. Such changes in status re-make the space of the cricket club for those individuals, altering their meanings and relationship to the place.

Overall, it is evident that the spaces of drink in Bramington do not formulate 'concrete', spatially rigid identities, but rather identities that are constantly in flux depending on space and time, with predominant understandings regarding homogeneity of place being increasingly challenged and re-invented, especially by young people.

5.3. New Methods and Spaces: Hope for the Future?

The addition of the Dog House microbrewery to Bramington's drinking scene can be seen to have enlivened and added some diversity to the village. One key facet in the literature regarding this new phenomenon nationally, is the 'culture' associated with 'micro' establishments, and a perception of more 'authentic' production and consumption. Whilst Harold, the proprietor of the Dog House, said how he did not set it up in 2018 as a result of lifelong passion for beer or desire to revitalise Bramington's drinking and cultural scenes, it instead being a retirement project and 'something to do', it did cut through in interviews and observations how the 'cultural offerings' of the Dog House did add something of value to the village's sense of place and belonging. 'Regular' and Harold's close friend, Dale put this in very clear terms when describing the place as 'not a bar or a pub' but 'a cultural centre'. He

also added how the 'cultural' aspect of the place was 'unusual', and by having 'three national theatre plays, having the sawpit gallery' the place can attract 'people who want to go and look at other people's art, people who want to create art'. This constitutes a very direct exposure to the 'cultural' aspects on show in the Dog House, which is also seen in the nature of musical performances which often occur during the monthly open days, which to quote Harold, 'wouldn't exist in Bramington if it wasn't for us'. Most of the bands would be considered to be from the folk genre, and as such sets it apart from the live music played in the village's other venues, which would be considered much more generic. An interesting point emerged during the March observation of the Dog House, where a four-piece folk band turned up unannounced and without prior advertisement. Following the band starting to play, there was no noticeable change in atmosphere, suggesting that something which might seem outwardly unusual in this context was in fact 'in place' and not unexpected by the patrons of the establishment on that day.

The clientele of the Dog House is also noteworthy and links back to the point regarding the 'cultural flavour' of drinking 'micro'. A general sentiment was echoed by Ashley, who even though he himself drank at all the village's establishments, said how 'there's some people, this is not derogatory, but some people who drink in the Queen's and the Lion, they would never come here… they'd hate it'. More depth was added to this statement by another 'all spaces' drinker in Richard, who said how 'it attracts people who are interested in beer, and it even attracts CAMRA members' and added how 'quite a lot are not from Bramington in fact, I meet somebody who's from Halebury there who I don't see anywhere else'. The focus on beer as a driver of people's interest in the place was evident in observations, where a conversation was overheard pertaining to the Dog House having 'some of the best beer around', and bemoaned the difficulty of getting a 'proper pint' in city centre pubs. During another observation, a conversation was overheard in a similar vein relating to the Canterbury craft beer scene and also their opinions on local Castle Rock houses, a noted regional brewer. This familiarity and interest that the patrons of the Dog House have towards the product they consume fits into the idea discussed by Jayne, et al. (2012, 9) regarding how spaces where 'high quality' beer is portrayed as central to the attraction of certain drinking spaces, alternative drinking 'cultures' can be formulated. Another aspect of how the environment at the Dog House and the way it manufactures an alternative drinking experience can be seen through how presence in the media is limited as events at the establishment are driven by 'word of mouth, [they] don't advertise' (Corine). This can limit the accessibility and understanding of the establishment, amongst people who are not 'in the know', and maintain the beer interested, culturally 'aware' clientele of the Dog House. Although it should be said that despite this exclusivity, the proprietor said how 'if somebody new comes in, you feel almost like a proprietorial ability to

go up and start talking to them', adding how 'you almost own a bit of it yourself', which adds to the ideas of 'psychological ownership' which can manifest amongst patrons of establishments where there is a strong connection between person and place.

There is also the noteworthy feature of the Dog House as to the unquestionably 'unique' décor and design, with the walls of the space being populated by 'rusty stuff on the walls' such as agricultural relics, and old workshop tools. This creates an 'organically designed' space, which alongside features such as beer being poured directly from oak barrels, in clear view of bar space creates an 'authentic' space for consumption of the beer sold. The Dog House's proprietor Harold was keen to stress how this created 'an experience that's different', as the 'little things can make your visit better, by just being a bit different you know, you remember'. The difference between the Dog House and other more 'conventional' drinking establishments, and the foregrounding of an 'authentic' space and craft taps into the points made by Zukin (2008) regarding 'micro' establishments curating specific clienteles that prioritise an 'authenticity' in their drinking habits. Another area where the Dog House creates a different experience, unusually, is through the toilet facilities, which are situated outside and in the case of one facility, is just a 'hole in the ground', or 'eco-loo' as Harold put it. Regular customers Dale and Corine respectively said how 'the toilets are built around Harold's personality' and are a 'reflection of his values' as an 'old school environmentalist'. This puts the Dog House, which is in essence the brainchild of one man, in stark contrast to the pubs in the village, which as will be explored below, are curated by numerous people at different levels of a management hierarchy. Such a system potentially allows for a more 'authentic' consumption experience, given the place has been created almost in its entirety by someone with an evident passion for brewing, rather than a committee or manager with profit as the driving motivator.

Building on such a point, how this allegedly more 'authentic' space facilitates different, and more 'meaningful' experiences is relevant to uncover. One factor which should be noted, is that whenever the Dog House was observed, it was always a busy and bustling place. Harold said how this emerged as a result of 'novelty', given how the space is only open once or twice a month, but in discussions with his patrons, it become clear that there was a difference in terms of conversation and the relationships between customers, when compared to other drinking spaces in the village, and that such differences are not purely driven by 'novelty'. For example, Ashley said how for him, at the Dog House 'you just end up chatting all day with [other people], more so than in the two pubs actually'. This links into a point made by Harold himself regarding how open days 'feel a bit like a private party or being invited into somebody's private space rather than a generically designed public house' and how 'there's a kind of roping in of people into one big friendship group, which is in kind of an ideal way'. Therefore, the Dog House becomes a space where bonds and healthy relationships between people are

facilitated, which may not be the case in the village's other spaces. Another point of difference with regard to the place's 'atmosphere' was how even after the space had been open for several hours, and many customers would have been inebriated, the environment remained 'generally calm and civil', which contrasts to observations of other village spaces, which often became quite hectic after large numbers of people became inebriated. Such a scenario could point to a manifestation of the idea explored in chapter 5.1. regarding 'responsibility' that drinkers who feel 'part' of a place experience, and as such become more likely to 'respect' the space and its 'symbolic' relationship to its patrons.

Nevertheless, the Dog House cannot be viewed simplistically as a cultural juggernaut in the village, and as such the challenges that Harold in particular has found in operating the space are relevant to discuss. First and foremost, he is limited by law regarding the number of days he is licensed to sell, due to planning permission from the parish council limiting the number of days he's allowed to open annually to 24. However he did say that the license was almost defeated, again due to an objection by the parish council, who he said feared that the Dog House 'might become a pub under the radar'. Despite this he said he did not regret the inability to open more, saying how 'I wouldn't particularly want that' and how 'it might become boring', removing the novelty which appears attractive to some in the community. Regarding whether local residents are supportive of Harold's project, he said how '70 to 80% are favourable but there are the unfavourable ones'. Some local people have complained to the local council and made derogatory comments on social media platforms of noise and occasionally loutish behaviour after closing, although Harold did insinuate criticism often occurred from a general 'NIMBYism'. Although it should be said that Harold did lay some of the blame for potential citizen concern with his establishment with himself, describing himself as 'a bit arrogant when I first started it', by allowing bands undertake intrusive activities like film music videos and play multiple sets over several hours, sometimes into the night. Although as a counter to this, 'regular' customer Dale said how 'the so-called stupidity… actually breeds loyalty', through a desire to defend the establishment, which its core patrons have an attachment and connection to, against seemingly egregious complaints from local residents.

Another way in which 'alternative' methods have been used in recent years to 're-vitalise' and save rural drinking spaces, and specifically public houses, has been the growth of 'community pubs', a structure through which the Red Lion has been run since 2019. Such structures, facilitated in the wake of the Localism Act 2011, are 'pubs owned and run democratically by members of their community', operating under 'a one member one vote shareholding structure' (Plunkett Foundation, 2019, 1). The structure of a shareholder-elected committee who appoint managers brings with it challenges, and how the management operates under the umbrella of a democratically elected committee is important to contextualise the experiences of the pub's

patrons. A crucial factor raised by Mike, a former Red Lion committee member, was the importance of 'diverse skillsets' on the committee, and the importance of having 'a set of values – what it wants to be [and] the direction it's travelling', from which the committee can recruit members of staff and serve the community. Another important issue, and potential area of conflict, was made by Jeremy, a local historian with a keen interest in pubs and someone involved with the initial steering committee to try and register the pub as an 'asset of community value'. This was regarding how the people on that initial committee, and also subsequent ones, 'weren't people who had experience of being involved with pubs', instead being 'local community people'. This obviously can create discord between an unknowledgeable management and a committee with experience and knowhow of how pubs operate, and potentially lead to the mismatch in 'values' which Mike saw as damaging to effective running of the pub. Although Mike mentioned how he did not have an issue with a lack of pub running experience on the committee, saying how all that was needed was to '[present] yourself as a credible service provider and [make] your customers feel welcome', saying how 'it really is hospitality when you boil it down'. Whilst from a business perspective this is evidently true, chapter 5.1. highlighted how people view the pubs in their community as not comparable services to other hospitality or social spaces, raising the potential for conflict between an inexperienced and underqualified committee and the general public, and also the management group as an intermediary. The pub's manager Harriet, was somewhat critical of this relationship, given how 'we [management] know how the business works' and even though 'we try to put our foot down when it comes to things we know are going to work', 'six or seven of them make the final call really', which taps into Mike's point regarding mismatch in 'values' and 'skillsets', which could potentially reduce the effectiveness of the pub's operations.

A key facet in the running of 'community pubs' involves the Plunkett Foundation, who offer support and guidance to community-owned projects. Mike described them as a 'very worthy organisation', but support is dependent on demonstrating an ability to both finance, and then maintain smooth running of the establishment in line with the rules of the society. Additionally to this, the Plunkett Foundation's rules require the 'primary objective to be the community', and that the business model of establishments under their guidance must be 'community focused, not shareholder focused'. These contrasting focuses can be the cause of conflict on committees when some member's priorities do not align with the rules of the society they are part of, and result in committees becoming ineffective or counterproductive when trying to run a successful 'community' pub.

In this context, it is important to note the challenges the pub faces due to its 'community' status, both resulting from internal decisions and also external influences which challenge the structures of pub management. One key problem, highlighted by Mike as the reason why he

became involved on the Red Lion's committee was the 'revolving door of managers' which causes people to 'just stop attending' and lose trust in establishment as a 'service provider'. There was also what he saw as 'a significant lack of communication' between the committee and the broader 'shareholding community', and also communication problems between the pub's management and the general community as a whole. This highlights the complicated relationship that exists between the various distinct stakeholders in the 'community pub', which is further complicated by wider community factors, such the manager Harriet's point regarding 'Bramington as a village is very set in its ways' and how people have 'been brought up with this is how the pub should be', implying how village attitudes remain fixed, and attempts by management struggle to cut through to an unreceptive population. Although it should be said that ambivalence to the pub's 'new ideas' in the community is not merely down to the alleged conservatism of its residents, but also through a failure of the pub and its committee to adapt itself. Mike mentioned how the voluntary nature of the committee 'became troublesome very very early' due to the 'different levels of skill' present within that structure, and as such issues with communication within the society inevitably emerged, and quality of service was damaged. Criticisms of the committee structure came from both within and outside the society, with Red Lion 'regular' Mike saying how 'the committee sort of operates in the dark', bringing in the point regarding local rumours of certain committee members meeting to make decisions outside of official channels. Such allegations are in stark violation of the 'democratic' aspect of the pub's management structure, and exemplifies the divisions on the committee, which in turn reduces the efficiency of the pub's running.

One additional problem, as it relates to village perceptions of the Red Lion, is the subjectivities involved with the word 'community', and how some residents feel their understanding of what a 'community' pub should be are not realised in the Red Lion. An occasional drinker at the Red Lion made reference to how 'they shouldn't advertise it as a community pub' because that means 'people in the community think that means it's a pub for everyone' (Corine). Harriet, the pub's manager added to this saying how 'you have a lot of people who are very opinionated because it is a community pub', who 'think that all of their opinions are valid' which results in a situation where 'it's very hard to please everyone'. This acts as a contrast to the literature regarding 'community' pubs, which places them as institutions which have largely been effective in re-centralising pubs within rural communities, engaging local people and therefore is an effective site through which 'community cohesion' is facilitated (Cabras, 2011).

The community was however generally supportive of the idea of having a 'community' pub, in least in theory, as 'if the community did not want it to be open it wouldn't be here' (Richard). For example, new resident Fraser, 'liked the idea of the community pub' as it appeared 'friendlier' to an outsider like he was initially. There's also the more practical point raised by

Richard regarding how 'other models of ownership are not viable' in the village and as such 'community ownership' is a useful mechanism to maintain that service. Evidence that there is community support for the Red Lion beyond its usual clientele was seen during the '70's night' one Friday, where the pub was very busy, with every seat being used in the bar and snug, and large numbers of people standing, or stood up by the bar. In addition to this, a much more diverse range of people with regards to age, class and gender were present at this time. Such a scenario shows how the Red Lion can attract people from across the socio-cultural spectrum of the village, and highlights how the committee and management are making an effort in servicing the wider community beyond their 'regulars'. Although this point in itself, that the pub has to put on specific events to get certain groups of people in rather than them being able to enjoy 'the norm', is noteworthy.

Members of the committee and management themselves also spoke positively of how community ownership could enliven and re-centralise the pub in the village. Ex-committee member Mike said how such an ownership structure 'can address societal issues' such as youth unemployment by employing 'local people… on a living wage', and also through '[engaging] with local training providers such as local colleges' catering and hospitality departments' which can 'engage the community' and show 'the community that's it's [the pub] actually a community-based, engaged organisation'. This however was an entirely theoretical advantage of the structure, as whilst Mike did say that the pub does have links to a local college's catering department, other opportunities to 'engage the community' were missed when he was on the committee. For example, the pub does not acquire meat for its restaurant from the local butcher, and only on occasion purchases beer from the Dog House, decisions which would seem at odds with the purported 'values' of a 'community' institution.

Nevertheless, the incumbent committee and management have at least identified that the Red Lion needs changes in order to improve its reputation in the village as a 'community' establishment. Harriet and Mike as both current and past members of the leadership structure were relevant discussions in this regard, and had much to say on the improvements which had been made and what still remained. Harriet, who had been the employed at the Red Lion since August 2022, suggested that prior to her involvement 'there was no love in this place' and how 'experiences with other management' had damaged the pub's reputation. After having 'ask[ed] all the difficult questions', to quote Mike, improvements have been made, and Harriet made the point regarding how now 'the atmosphere's great especially when the fire's on, you've got the right music, we've re-done the restaurant', and as such 'good adjustments have been made' to the 'customer experience'. Harriet also pointed out how future improvements to widen the appeal of the pub, especially towards younger drinkers, were in the process of being implemented, for example noting how 'we're talking about getting maybe

a flower wall put up there, to make it very Instagram-able, to help bring in the younger people', and more broadly 'finding out what people want'. Through observations, it was evident how changes were being made effectively to broaden the appeal of the Red Lion. The success of the '70's night' has already been discussed in exemplifying how people from outside white, middle aged men are being included more, but other new events such as 'after work perks' on Fridays from 4PM to 6PM, which sees reductions in prices and '2-4-1' deals on certain drinks, and also the introduction of coffee mornings which appeal to the 'cream tea set of retired women', to quote one village resident, also serve that purpose of widening the service offered by the pub (Richard).

Overall then, how new types of rural drinking space and methods of managing them have revitalised and changed the place of drinking establishments within Bramington's broader sense of place are varied and spatially contested. The Dog House microbrewery was seen to be very influential in revitalising the village's drinking for those who used it, especially given how the space was seen as offering a more 'authentic' consumption experience for its users. But the extent to which the space was used by a representative sample of the village's population was up for debate, and as such its overall value to adding vitality to the village's drinking scene was somewhat questionable. The Red Lion pub, as a 'community' pub was seen to be less effective in altering and re-centring drinking spaces as key nodes in the local social network, through mismanagement and a cumbersome organisational structure, but was nevertheless seen to be more proactive in trying to revitalise its own place in the village as a whole, even if this was not necessarily appreciated by all members of the community.

Chapter 6: Atmosphere and Distinction in the Drinking Space

As seen in the preceding chapters, as well as in literature from the likes of Cabras (2011) and Ernst and Doucet (2014), how different drinking spaces influence people's perceptions of place varies over space and time. In this chapter, how people are included and excluded from certain spaces will be explored. To understand this, how 'atmosphere' is defined and how its subjectivity influences the production and consumption of space will be analysed, as well as asking how 'peripheral' spaces, beyond the traditional public house, include and exclude certain demographics and individuals, and how those influence citizen perceptions of their communities.

6.1. Affective Influences of Atmosphere

The subjectivities involved in discussing 'atmosphere' and its role in creating individual perceptions of particular spaces were evident in the interviews conducted for this thesis. 'Atmosphere' is seen as a crucial factor in forging different perceptions of space, with over half of discussions (8/15) mentioning 'atmosphere' as important to the drinking space, before being prompted on the subject. Differing factors were mentioned as forging these understandings, but even so, research participants had problems with defining what 'atmosphere' was, serving to exemplify this point. The words of Dog House proprietor Harold were particularly relevant to this, as even though he has vast experience and interest in beer and drinking, he said how 'you know it when you feel it, but I can't put my finger on it'. This was in addition to other responses, such 'I don't know really' and 'that's a tough one' (Fraser and Bill). Nevertheless, despite the subjectivities and collective difficulty in defining 'atmosphere', there was still a consensus that it was an important facet in people's support or criticisms of certain establishments. For example, Harold mentioned how the Black Bull used to be the most popular pub in the village because 'it [had] atmosphere' and Sophie (20's) remarked how 'good atmosphere would probably be like [the] number one' reason she had for enjoying a drinking establishment.

Moving into the individual-level specifics of how a good 'atmosphere' is formulated, and how that in turn encourages members of the community to drink in Bramington's drinking establishments and contribute to the creation of local identities were varied and occasionally conflicting. Whilst points such as valuing 'how the place actually looks' were mentioned, good 'atmosphere' was seen to be primarily driven by 'conversation' facilitating 'a lovely little buzz' about a drinking space (Mike and Fraser). Especially in the context of how 'you go to the pub really to talk to people', it can be seen that 'conversation' can act as both a facilitator for, and also results from group discussions and how they create an attractive 'atmosphere' for social

interaction (Fraser). Such environments can facilitate spaces where 'people are happy', and as such feel included in those spaces (Ashley). This taps into the literature of Valverde (2003) and Duff (2012, 1391) which explains how the effects of good atmosphere in a particular place, enable and promote social bonds and can facilitate 'enduring friendships', as a result of affects on individuals in those spaces.

How a space which is effective in facilitating 'conversation' is created is varied between different people and the way in which they use drinking spaces. 'The people' present in drinking spaces and what groups of people use the space were seen as important to a number of participants in creating a good 'atmosphere', although how this manifested varied between people, often along lines of 'regularity'. For example, Sophie (20's) who rarely used the village's drinking spaces, said how having 'loads of different types of people' makes places 'feel quite welcoming', a contrasting statement to that of more 'regular' drinkers Richard (70's) and Corine (50's) who respectively said how '[you want] a significant proportion of people in there you know' and a space that has 'got all your neighbours in'. Whilst such statements are not necessarily at odds with one another, there is a contrast in opinion between people who like uniformity in the clientele in their drinking spaces, and those who favour diversity.

An additional area of contestation was the role music plays in facilitating a 'good atmosphere'. The division here appeared to be along lines of gender, with for example Red Lion manager Harriet saying how having 'no music on' makes a place 'cold', and Sophie adding how 'good music can add to the atmosphere'. This contrasted with the views of some male respondents, who said how 'I don't want loud music' as it can facilitate 'silly behaviour or unsociable behaviour', and also points were made in the context of 'conversation' and its evident value given how 'loud music means you can't hear' and how 'it interferes with the conversations and gets in your ear' (Bill, Fraser and Richard). Such explicitly gendered divisions regarding the value associated with background music in the drinking space opens up arguments regarding the centrality of 'masculinity' in spaces of drink. This emerges from how it appears there has to be 'something else' for a large number of women to feel included within an atmosphere conducive to making people feel welcome, and further taps into the discussions in chapter five, regarding how appeals to people from outside the 'norm', require specific efforts to be made to include them.

Where division in the community was limited however, was regarding the important role that members of staff play in creating convivial atmospheres. The quality of service and 'experience' was described as deriving from having 'good bar staff' and a 'good landlord' by Bill, as, to paraphrase Harold, such individuals make a place welcoming when they 'do it right'. In the context of the 'community' pub, Mike made an interesting and relevant point regarding

how bar staff play a key role in 'engaging the community' given how 'if it's your friend's sons and daughters who are working there, there's a connection there across the bar', which can add to the feeling of an intergenerational space, and centralise drinking spaces as crucial nodes in local community social networks.

The contested perceptions of 'atmosphere' were especially relevant to discuss in relation to the Red Lion, given its status as a 'community' pub, which as discussed in chapter 5, suggested to people that it should be trying to include and engage as a much of the community as possible. Harriet, the manager herself was keen to point this out, saying how it was a key area which she wanted to improve when she began working for the pub in a management capacity given 'there was a massive issue with the ambience and atmosphere' prior to her involvement. Participants echoed this, with Sophie saying how her 'Dad doesn't like the atmosphere in the Lion, so he just doesn't go', Ashley saying how there are 'question marks' regarding what the management is trying to achieve with its affective choices and Bill saying how he 'can't say the same about the Red Lion', with regard to whether the pub had a 'welcoming' atmosphere in when compared to the Queen's Arms. Harriet did say however that 'we're correcting that now' with regard to resident dissatisfaction at a perceived poor 'atmosphere' at the Red Lion. Whether such attempts at change had cut through to the populace were seen through observations, and concluded that in fact, whilst efforts had been made, for example by having 'the fire on during evenings' and 'fine tuning the music', to further quote Harriet, community perceptions of the Red Lion's atmosphere had shifted very little. As such, with the exception of events like the 70's night and also St Patrick's day, which Harriet said had 'a really good atmosphere' because 'we decorated the place', there was very little increase in community support, with observations outside of expectedly busy times (Friday night etc.) showing the pub as being very poorly supported. Notes drawn from observations can show this, with for example a Friday lunchtime being 'relaxed' and 'uneventful', and notes from a Wednesday lunchtime describing how 'literally nothing happened' for much of the observation.

Beyond the space of the pub, in the cricket club and Dog House microbrewery 'atmosphere' is created very differently given how there is 'novelty' associated with both spaces, given they are not open all year round in the case of the cricket club and usually only once a month in the case of the Dog House. Given the centrality of 'conversation' as highlighted at the start of this sub-section, observations showed how both spaces are better designed to facilitate such an environment. This mainly emerged from them simply being smaller in physical size than the Red Lion, and as such it becomes easier for them to a least 'feel' full and contribute to that 'buzz' which one interviewee saw as an essential tenet of good 'atmosphere' (Mike). Another key factor which differentiates the cricket club and Dog House from the pub is the size of the

groups who socialise there. Observations of the cricket club showed how, especially on matchdays, the players would socialise as a team, and as such have a relationship as a group of players, in which conversation is made very easily. Even on non-match days, there appeared pre-exiting relationships between 'regular' members which meant that conversation was easy to be facilitated in the space. In the Dog House, the 'novelty' point becomes especially relevant, given how it is only open for a limited number of days annually. This means that those who want to enjoy that particular space will often meet the same people by chance, and develop relationships in that space that would not be possible in a regularly open public house. A point to this end was made by one 'regular' of the Dog House, who mentioned how he sees someone 'from Halebury there who [he does not] see anywhere else' (Richard). This taps into the point made by proprietor Harold, regarding how 'it feels like a private party' and 'something like a birthday party' during open days, as a result of the 'collective relationship' his patrons have to each other and his place. This can draw similarities to the cricket club, and a contrast to the Red Lion, regarding the size of involved individual's 'social circles' in those places, and make the appreciated 'conversational' aspects of good 'atmosphere', much easier to be created.

In conclusion, 'atmosphere' and how different people appreciate its subjectivities is a crucial driver of attracting different people to spaces of drink. How this works in competing spaces, and how management of particular establishments perceive 'atmosphere' and its affective influence are key to understanding how those places, consciously or unconsciously, include and exclude certain people, and create different experiences for different socio-cultural groups in Bramington, facilitating sites through which local identities become contested.

6.2. Peripheral Spaces – Limiting or Liberating?

With regards to the potential inclusive and exclusive qualities of drinking spaces, how the villages varied 'peripheral' spaces, namely the sports clubs and the Dog House microbrewery influence the identity of the village, and forge a certain sense of place are worth analysing. The key exploration when addressing this surrounds whether such spaces are restrictive enterprises which reduce local residents access to their drinking spaces, or whether by having 'other' spaces alongside public houses in fact contributes to a diversified experience for local residents in Bramington, adding another angle to the centrality of drinking spaces in forging local identities.

The bar at Bramington cricket club was first established in the early 1970's alongside the building of a new clubhouse, the bar was put in solely 'to make money for the club', to quote the groundsman and bar manager Jack. Since then, the bar area has been expanded twice,

again simply to get 'more people drinking' and 'more people in', although Jack did also say how increasing demand had also been a factor, noting how 'there's more usage of the club room now than there was years ago', referencing increasing numbers of private parties, and general expansion of the club with regard to the women's teams and junior section. On whether the space could be 'improved' or expanded further, Jack and his grounds assistant, club legend John, respectively said how 'I don't think we can add a lot more' and 'you won't get a bigger bar will you?', although there was seemingly very little need for expansion, given how 'everybody that comes in reckons its nice in there'. How the bar space achieves this alleged 'niceness', was primarily seen as being down to two factors, club secretary Bill said how 'the fact we cater for everybody', given the club is 'moving with the times to a significant degree' and 'cover a pretty good range' of drinking preferences. There is also the point made by Jack about how 'the prices are favourable' and as such the club's bar can appeal to those who want more affordable drinks, when compared to the village's public houses. Bill concluded by adding how 'the fact that we don't throw too much away is probably the indication that we're doing reasonably well', and is at least a 'well-run' organisation.

The nature of the club as an amateur-run, voluntary organisation, as a contrast to both the Red Lion and the Dog House, was described by club secretary Bill as a key way through which 'loyalty' can be instilled in the users of the club's bar, given how people 'like to see and support people who they know', which creates strong relationships between those on either side of the bar. Club chairman Andy also added to how being 'an amateur run club we are cheaper' which adds to the point in the previous paragraph regarding the attraction of the establishment to the village, with regards to its relative affordability. Overall then, the importance of the space as a volunteer run organisation cannot be overstated, as the structure from which the theoretical advantages explored earlier emerge from.

Moving on to a purely cricketing context, it is important to understand the role that the bar space plays for creating sense of meaning and place for the members of the club, especially given how, as Bill said, 'cricket has always been synonymous with a social drink after the game', and as such can be seen as key tenet in the culture of amateur, village cricket. The size and stature of the club was deemed to be partly as a result of having the bar, Jack saying how 'we'd be massively worse off' without such a space to raise revenue, and Bill adding how the has been a good way of growing the club's membership, mentioning how 'the bar has come into its element more widely because of junior cricket and ladies cricket', although he did admittedly say how the bar was 'very much an added extra', rather than a core reason for people playing cricket at the club. For the members of the club, the memories of the space are fundamental to their own sense of attachment to the place. Experiences which are encouraging of a general 'collective mockery' and enable a sense of 'social solidarity' to be

formed between members, which become fundamental foundational memories of the bar space. Whilst such incidents are often nothing more than 'drunken shenanigans', such as one club member allegedly consuming '25 bottles of Smirnoff Ice' and passing out in the changing rooms with a towel around his head, they still form key memories of the place for many of the club's members, and centralise the place within their own drinking histories (Jack). The 'showcasing' of the club's history in the bar space is also crucial in fostering 'attachment' to the club for its members, the very public positioning of the club's honours boards which note the club captain back to 1877, amongst other notable positions, and also the walls littered with old photographs of Bramington sides going back to the 1920's. Such foregrounding of the club's history is important to forging sense of attachment to the place for its members, especially considering the multi-generational and cross-generational nature of many of the people involved at the place. Although it does therefore become important to ask whether the strength of attachment forged in the place between the club and its membership acts as a barrier to the wider community, through a perception of an 'insular' and inward-looking organisation.

In this regard, how the club relates to the community more broadly, and how people in Bramington who do not have ties to the club view the space is useful to contextualise. Firstly, it should be noted how the club does try and extend its service to beyond just its membership, club secretary Bill made this point highlighting how the club does try to 'develop some community', for example by hosting events such as a national 'scooter rally and mod convention', and also hosting the local celebrations of royal events in 2022 and 2023. One Saturday observation of the club showed how post-match, a birthday party was being held for someone from the village who had no direct family association to the club, there was also the point made by Jack in his interview regarding how people who 'don't use the club regularly' made the most of the space for events such as christening receptions and funeral wakes. With regard to less 'important' events, the attraction of the club is seen beyond its membership given how, as Bill said, 'we get a lot of people who are very loosely connected with the club… who come down here because it's a nice environment', he also mentioned the cheaper cost of drink, a sentiment echoed by Jack who said how 'it's a nice place to come' in a 'good area' and somewhere with 'cheaper prices' than the rest of the village. In this context, at least those associated with the club, did not view that particular space as being 'closed off' to the rest of the village, or indeed a particularly 'exclusive' space, although it should be noted how Bill said that 'it definitely was', mentioning how 'historically the club has been seen as quite insular', a point recognised by a long-term local resident who said how the club was historically for the 'landowners and farmworkers' (Dale). Bill noted the 'opening up' of the club as resulting from the expansion of junior and women's cricket, which 'you just cannot underestimate the

importance of' to opening '[the club] up to the village as a whole', given how it has brought 'families' into the club and widened the scope of its community involvement. Non-member Dale commented how the club puts on enough 'inclusive events' as to include the wider community, evidencing the success of the club in broadening it's appeal. There was also the point raised by Jack how following a christening reception, the mother of the christened child, who had no prior affinities to the club, '[wanted] to come play with the ladies' and for her family to become members, somewhat highlighting the success of the club's attempts to reach out into the wider community as an 'open to all' establishment (Bill).

Although it should be said that some aspects of the club do still limit its accessibility to the wider community. For example, the interior décor, of old photos and honours boards make the club seem 'very old fashioned' and out of step with most people's perceptions of a vibrant social space, although once again the foregrounding of history does contribute to the idea of an 'authentic' space which is honest about its past (Andy). There is also the issue raised about how such places can be seen as inherently 'clubby' when not using the space for a specific reason, such as a party or advertised community event, and this could be seen in observations throughout the week, given how very few people from outside the membership would use the space when these 'events' were taking place.

One other point made was regarding the drink choices that the club was making in order to widen the appeal of the bar space, and improve the club's service 'year on year' (Bill). Club secretary Bill mentioned how such changes were being made such as by having 'these flavoured gins for example' and 'these big, large gin glasses', which also taps into the importance of the growing women's section to the club's drink offerings, given how such gin-related changes occurred because 'it's what the ladies want'. There have also been changes with regard to 'what sort of lager we should serve' given how the new offering for the 2023 season *Neck Oil*, 'is popular with the younger members', and continues to expand the target market for the club beyond middle-aged men. Observing the space showed how such changes in offerings were well taken up by the club's clientele, with a Tuesday night observation following a midweek match and women's training highlighting the popularity of the new beers and selection of gins on offer, of which there was a distinct split regarding their popularity.

There is additionally a legal issue when it comes to the 'openness' of the club, given how 'from the licensing regulations point of view, you legally have to be a member to purchase drinks' at the cricket club, theoretically meaning that only paying members of the club can enjoy the space (Andy). Although regarding this, given the club's aforementioned 'open to all policy', there is something of a conflict between the license requiring membership of the club to use the facility, and the club's commitment to 'openness', the latter of which seemingly takes

priority, given how there appeared a very relaxed attitude by the leadership of the club when enforcing the legal requirements of a 'members only' club. This does raise an interesting point regarding how the club is willing to approach the terms of their license flexibly in order to broaden its appeal and provide a service to the village at-large, rather than operate as a more insular 'member's club' in the traditional sense.

Specifically in relation to the club as space where the playing of cricket is the primary activity, it is important to note the role that alcohol plays in that sport and acts as a potential barrier to entry, and how the centrality of drinking to the social aspects of that sport, act to exclude certain sections of local society. This is especially relevant in the context of the June 2023 Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) report which found cricket to be institutionally racist, sexist and classist, with the 'consumption of alcohol considered 'a necessary part of 'fitting in' and 'making cricket feel unwelcoming to those who do not drink', thus perpetuating the institutional failures of the sport (ICEC, 2023, 94). The response by the club's representative to this was to accept the findings, saying how he was 'disappointed' by them, but to also imply that such problems were not relevant to Bramington cricket club, adding how 'I don't think [the findings] are an indication of what we're like'[2] (Bill). He also added how 'the issues were more to do with non-equal opportunities as it were', which he said were not relevant to club, citing the significant growth in opportunities in women and girls to play for the club, and also to separate the issues on the ground in the amateur game to those in the professional, where much public attention has been raised regarding the discriminatory experiences of non-white and Muslim players such as Azeem Rafiq, and sexist dressing room cultures. Observations of the space generally supported the assertions of people involved in the club that the club did not suffer, at least on the surface, from the issues raised in the report. For example, the observation conducted following a men's midweek fixture and women's training saw integrated socialisation between the men and women present in the bar space that night, as did post-match socialising following Sunday fixtures, when both the women's team and the men's Sunday XI were playing simultaneously. It should additionally be noted how there is increasing female representation on the club's committee, with women being represented on the committee in roles beyond those set aside for the women's section. For example, the incumbent head of the junior section and also the 'community outreach' officer are the first women to hold those posts, which highlight the aforementioned increasing involvement. Although it should be said that this is still a significant minority on the committee, and also how the spectating of fixtures is still largely the domain of men.

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[2] Club chairman Andy Delaney was interviewed prior to the publishing of the ICEC report, and as such only club secretary Bill Franklin was available to comment from the club.

One other noteworthy aspect if the ICEC report, especially as it relates drinking and how the act can include and exclude people from the space, was that of racial discrimination, especially against the Islamic community, who are well represented amongst amateur cricketers. In this regard Bill placed the club as being in 'a slightly different position to others' given how little representation the non-white and Islamic communities have at Bramington cricket club, him noting how 'I don't think we've got more than half a dozen of our huge membership of 140 playing members or so, [who] are from an ethnic minority'. Whilst this seemingly might point to the findings of the report being borne out in reality at this specific club, regarding prevalence of Islamophobia and racism generally reducing opportunities in the amateur game, it should be noted how Bramington overall is 97.8% ethnically white and is only 0.2% Muslim, and even in the wider local authority (pop. over 100,000), those percentages only fall to 96.3% and rise to 0.6% respectively. As such it can be difficult to either prove or challenge the findings of the ICEC report with regard to racial and religious discrimination in the space of Bramington cricket club, given limited presence of non-white people and the Islamic community in wider local society. Although in relation to how a culture of drinking (alcohol) can discriminate against non-drinkers, an observation of the club following men's training on a Thursday night, showed how almost every member training that night stayed for a drink, including under 18's and the club's one senior member of Muslim faith, who drank an orange and lemonade. Such evidence, although limited, would imply that the mistreatment of non-drinkers, whether on religious and racial grounds or otherwise as reported by the ICEC was not outwardly true of the club researched in this project.

Regarding the village's other 'non-pub' spaces and their potential exclusivity, how the Dog House's niches, enabled through it being a 'micro' drinking establishment allow for the creation of a unique drinking experience in the village, or indeed anywhere more generally need to be analysed. A crucial point to understand regarding the Dog House is how the proprietor Harold and his personality is absolutely central to everything about the place, whether than be the 'atmosphere', the clientele and obviously the drinking options available, one participant saying how 'Harold makes this the place it is'. Through this 'benign authoritarianism' he is able to create a space reflective of his own preferences for drinking and socialising, he said it is, given how 'you want something different' and 'you want to be surprised' as a customer. This is undoubtedly reflected in the Dog House, given the range of beers on offer, and the interior design dominated by agricultural relics, which set the place apart from other drinking establishments locally, designed in his image. Whilst this does offer the community somewhere 'different', whether this difference is appreciated by a broad range of local citizens is up for debate, especially in the context of one individual's centrality to the establishment's operation. In discussion with Dog House 'regulars' Corine and Dale, Harold was portrayed

almost as a messiah-like figure in the village, Corine saying how he 'is like a founding father of this village' because of his family being resident in the same property for seven generations, and as a result of his family's long-term residency, 'he knows a lot of people' who drink in the Dog House 'because [they] know him'. The 'personality' of Harold cuts through in his space of drink 'by the way he's trapped in the past' which was alleged as the reason why 'it's such a mess' and how 'you've got all this old stuff'. This was seen as important by Corine and Dale given how such 'design choices' act 'as a deliberate refusal to accept this safety-first, health-conscious way of doing things', which can help to explain why artefacts such as rusty saws and the metre-long 'hammer of Damocles' are still in place in the Dog House, given how the artefacts could undeniably be dangerous if mistreated, but are nevertheless kept accessible to the public. Observing the space also highlights the centrality of Harold to people's experiences, given how throughout the day, even when busy and 'normally' would be behind the bar, he was always mingling with his patrons, and 'facilitating socialising', often by starting conversation with groups himself. This taps into a point discussed in chapter 5.3. regarding how the Dog House has the feel of being a 'private space', where common perceptions of 'how drinking is done' and delineations between the user and provider of the drinking service are broken down.

Given this, there is an undeniable 'uniqueness' at the Dog House, more so than other drinking establishments, even those who market themselves around their individuality as places, with the idiosyncrasies of the place being a key facet in the forging of differing perceptions of that space. In observing the Dog House, elements of 'unprofessional' ways of working which would often be seen as unacceptable in other spaces were prevalent, an example being how during one observation, the prices of his bottled beer were not agreed yet, despite the fact that the place had been open for fifteen minutes. This otherwise 'unusual' approach, which might in other contexts see the place derided, seemed to have the opposite effect on the 'regulars' at the Dog House. Dale for example said how such idiosyncrasies mean 'you know it's going to be a very relaxed environment', meaning that people 'can do their own thing', implying how the Dog House's users can curate the space to their preferences with a greater degree of freedom than in a more 'traditional' establishment. This 'relaxed' environment was also seen to allow for an 'old fashioned way of doing things' to cut through in the space, noting how 'people can let their kids run around and climb trees'. Such a scenario would seem to place the space at odds with the conclusions of much of the literature, such as Withers (2017) and Spracklen, et al. (2013) which suggests how 'micro' drinking establishments typically become quite insular spaces, where the symbiotic relationship between staff and patrons gears such spaces towards middle-class, middle-aged white men, as such excluding large numbers of people. To continue this point, Harold said how people from different backgrounds do use the

space, noting how 'there's a kind of roping in of people into one big friendship group' which enables social barriers which exist in other spaces to be removed or reduced. A large part of this emerges from the point made by Harold, regarding how the novelty of usually only opening once a month adds a vibrancy to the space, given how otherwise 'you'd just be coming through here, there'd be a trickle of people and it would be the same boring people you see around Bramington as well', suggesting how a more diverse range of people regularly visit when the space is open. This also raises an interesting point regarding the creation of 'regulars' in drinking spaces, with the Dog House having a system whereby the 'regulars' are formed through frequenting a place once or twice a month, compared to three or four times a week in a more 'traditional' establishment like a pub. This therefore can create a much larger 'inner circle' of regular customers in the Dog House, and make the place seem less cliquey, which as reported in chapter 4.3., was a major factor in potentially excluding people from a drinking space. The uniqueness of the Dog House's affective influences should also be noted as crucial in forging a 'different' clientele in that space, Harold himself saying how 'anecdotally, people say don't change anything' and 'we love it like it is', with regard to features like the agricultural relics and the folk bands, which as reported in an observation, creates a 'calming atmosphere' ideal for inter-personal conversations.

On the other hand however, it should be noted how through observations, it was clear that the space was predominantly middle to old-aged, disproportionately male (although not to the extent that much of the literature suggested), and often homogeneously white. As such, the idea that the Dog House's uniqueness and idiosyncrasies help to break down barriers to accessing 'micro' drinking spaces should be disputed, even if the rigidity and reported homogeneity of such places was not as evident as implied. The inclusiveness of the space pertaining to social class was also somewhat contested, Dale saying how 'you have the senior police and the clergy' and 'multiple lawyers' frequenting the space, which certainly implies how regarding the social class of the Dog House's clientele, the reported 'norm' that such spaces are the domain of the middle classes, appears to be borne out in reality. In this context therefore it is important to consider whether there has been a conscious attempt at 'excluding' certain individuals and groups in the space. One of the 'regulars' did not think there were any conscious 'exclusive' practises in play at the Dog House, saying how 'I think it's just an interest of Harold and something that he always wanted to do', and as such any exclusivity that might be associated with the place was purely 'coincidental', placing the space as one not curated with a conscious target market in mind (Richard).

In a similar vein then, it was also discussed in interviews whether the place appeals to certain people because of what it is not. In direct response to that, Harold said how he thought his customers did use the space because of what it is not, saying how in comparison to a 'normal

pub', 'it feels like a much friendlier place', noting the high number of children and families who use the space, although observations showed how this was only for the first few hours of an open day, 'families' often leaving after the parents had only had one or two drinks. There was also the point made regarding how his beer is 'not particularly expensive as well' when compared to other local establishments, some of his beer being sold at £3 a pint, which is considerably cheaper than most other local pubs in the area. During an observation, a discussion with a patron of the bar that day almost proved Harold's point for him, given how this member of the public aimed considerable snobbery at the popular drinking culture, and said how the Dog House was a 'different' and 'better' experience when compared to other more 'traditional' establishments.

One final point of note, regarding the Dog House was the cross-generational aspect of the place. Whilst certain atmospheric factors, like Harold's point about the place feeling like a 'birthday party', and also a point made by Dale about how the place feels 'more like being round your dining table than being in a pub', lend a certain familial feel to the place, observations showed how family groups were common, and people from across the generational spectrum would socialise together, with groups not being delineated along lines of age or gender, thus confirming that Harold and Dale's perceptions of place were not too influenced by their affection and close relationship to the establishment. Such an inter-generational scene was facilitated, in the view of Dale, by the people who frequent the Dog House being people 'who've done lots of interesting things' who are a 'really lively, eclectic mix' of people, creating a social hub for local people who are 'interesting' and 'have something to say', regardless of their age, gender or social background.

Overall then, how the village's 'peripheral' spaces of the cricket club and Dog House microbrewery vivify Bramington's drinking scene is contested, complexified and hard to define, especially given the central role that individuals and 'characters' play in forging their identities in within the village, seemingly more so than in the Red Lion. The nature of the spaces as both being run by volunteers and being removed from the pressures of market forces, unlike the village's pubs does create niches in such places which allow alternative identities and perceptions of local drinking to manifest. The 'freedom' this gives such places can easily become excluding, and the literature certainly suggested that that does often happen, although how this manifested in Bramington showed how such spaces include and exclude is not black and white, and that accusations of socio-cultural homogeneity in both places is an over-simplification of the processes involved in creating individual drinking spaces.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has presented original research into spaces of drink in the large village of Bramington in the East Midlands. In this concluding section, how the research conducted in this thesis compares to the pre-existing literature, both in regard to the geographies of drink and how they operate within wider understanding of rural geography will be analysed.

Throughout much of the literature, drinking spaces, typically pubs but also other types of space, were presented as being central to the idea of rural Britain, Bowler and Everitt (1999, 147) noting how pubs are seen as part of the 'provided service' of a rural community. In Bramington this was generally seen to be born out in reality, although this was understandably more important for those who were 'regulars' at the various establishments in the village. This was exemplified by how some of those regulars said how if the village was 'dry', they would move out, which simultaneously centralises the drinking spaces for those individuals, but also sets them apart from other public social spaces, which even though seen as important to local socio-cultural vitality, did not draw the same level of personal attachment.

Expanding on this, local perception generally agreed that public social spaces were crucial for facilitating socio-cultural relations between individuals, tapping into the key point of Oldenburg (1999) regarding how public social spaces are the arena through which local cultural identity is formed. Regarding drinking spaces, Kneale's (2021, para.13) analysis of the relationship between the 'microgeographies' of the drinking space and the formation of socio-cultural relations can be extended beyond the strictly defined pub space. It is key to understanding how a broader range of drinking spaces in Bramington appeal to different people, and create contestations in those spaces framed as central to a community's vitality. In Bramington this manifested itself clearly. The different atmospheres of the village's varied drinking spaces, in combination with the often divergent individual ideas of what a pub should be, created fundamentally different spaces supported or critiqued by different groups within the village, deriving from a variety of different 'affective influences' and ways of seeing, through which people's perspectives of place were created.

One vital facet within the 'microgeographies' of the drinking space which create the affects and atmospheres central to ideas of place attachment are the negotiations and re-negotiations present in spaces. This centrally surrounds the ways in which class, gender, age and ethnicity interact to create bounded spaces, whereby certain identities are privileged to the exclusion of others. How this manifested in Bramington was complex and did not always follow pre-conceived notions regarding drinking spaces as a bastion of white, middle-class, male culture, as reported by the likes of Moss' (2016) comments on the gendering of the drinking space, and Miller's (2019) description of drinking spaces as having been successfully 'colonised' by

the middle classes. Research conducted in Bramington indicated a much more fluid negotiation of the drinking space, especially with regard to gender, and complexified notions of spaces being 'for' particular social groups in the village.

It is also noteworthy to analyse how the village perceived ideas of 'decline', given the contemporary context of declining pub numbers nationally, and also the 2021 closure of the Black Bull in Bramington. There appeared something of a malaise in this regard, with residents seeming disappointed about the loss of a local drinking space, but not to any great extent, with a more common viewpoint being that the roles and community understandings of drinking spaces change over time, constantly being in flux. Such conceptions align in part with Matless' (2023) description of drinking spaces being perceived as in decline, but also indicate how spaces are being constantly re-created and re-imagined over space and time. This somewhat counters the perennial shadow of doom placed over the drinking space, such as Hilaire Belloc a century ago, and Christpher Hutt 50 years ago; a contemporary parallel would be Keenan's (2020) commentary on increasing financialisation and commodification of the drinks trade causing closure of less profitable, but nonetheless socio-culturally vital, establishments (Matless, 2023). From researching Bramington, it would seem that the temptation to engage in scepticism about the future of drinking spaces was countered due to the emergence of the Dog House microbrewery, and at least theoretically, the 'community pub' structure of the Red Lion. This aligns with the findings of Somerville and McElwee (2011), whereby the emergence of rural 'community-based enterprises' acts as an effective way through which local socio-economic ties could be re-formed and communities revitalised. The point regarding the microbrewery and bar to reinvigorating community attachment to drinking spaces is noteworthy, Hubbard (2019, 780) noting how drinking in 'micro' establishments offer opportunities for 'socially connected' experiences, driven by ideas of 'authentic' consumption of a 'real' product, an experience which was also generally understood to occur in the bar of Bramington cricket club. When viewed in combination with the above discussions surrounding the stark decline in pub numbers, the presence of new, arguably revolutionary, but still somewhat unusual drinking spaces, offers the village of Bramington a mechanism through which it can avoid the multi-scalar problems which have plagued other communities in rural England, in regard to the loss and decline in social value of drinking spaces. Within the wider context of declining public social space usage and provision more broadly, this point becomes especially relevant. The sustainability of such premises remains however dependent on the navigation of tensions around particular forms of ownership, whether idiosyncratic individual visions or complex community committee structures.

When understanding rural culture more generally and how it is forged, studies of Bramington generally confirmed prior perceptions from studies of rural geography regarding the creation

of senses of place and meaning in rural communities, supporting Cohen's (1989) point regarding how cross-community 'culture' is a stronger factor in forging social attachment, rather than a rigid, stratified 'structure' divided along the lines of factors like age and class. In Bramington this was evidenced in its drinking spaces, given how attachment to individual establishments and the village generally, was not defined along such lines, but rather through parochial, place-based attachment. Evidence for this comes from how the 'social actors' present were usually from beyond distinct, homogenous social and economic backgrounds, and as such created diverse atmospheres through which wider socio-cultural identities could be formed (Flather, 2007, 115).

Overall then, viewing Maye, et al.'s (2005, 831) presentation of village pubs as 'heterogenous constructs' with 'important differences' rather than being concrete and unchanging centres of community attachment, acts as a crucial perspective when analysing how drinking spaces act to form varied socio-cultural identities in specifically rural communities. What this thesis has therefore offered is a review of this theory for contemporary times, whereby significant shifts have occurred, not to disconnect drinking spaces from their central status in creating local identities, but rather in the ways that pubs, at least in their traditional sense of being brewery-owned with beer sales being the primary source of income, have shifted methods of producing capital away from the methods of previous generations. This has offered space in the market for other, less historically typical drinking places to take centre stage in forming local identity, such as in Bramington, a microbrewery and sports clubs, a community pub and a pub/Chinese restaurant. Pubs, and other spaces of drink, have reformed and re-imagined the ways in they stay in business, shifting the way local people see their drinking spaces, and local socio-cultural identity as well.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form (Text)

School of Geography - University of Nottingham
Participant Consent Form

'Spaces of Drink and Contemporary Rural Culture: Exploring a Midland Community'

In signing this consent form I confirm that:

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the research project at any stage, without having to give any reason and withdrawing will not penalise or disadvantage me in any way.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, any information I provide is confidential (with one exception – see below), and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that the researcher may be required to report to the authorities any significant harm to a child/young person (up to the age of 18 years) that he/she becomes aware of during the research. I agree that such harm may violate the principle of confidentiality.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that extracts from the interview may be anonymously quoted in any report or publication arising from the research
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that the interview will be recorded using electronic voice recorder
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that data will be securely stored
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I may contact the researcher if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Officer of the School of Geography,

University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint
relating to my involvement in the research.

I agree to take part in the above research project.   Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix 2: Section of Interview Report (Conclusion of Discussion with Dale and Ashley – 26/02/2023)

Our final topic of conversation was the future of rural drinking. Dale slightly missed the point of my question and went on a rant about dry January which '[he] completely detest[s] because they're just trying to destroy the whole pub business'. Ashley was more to the point, saying that there was a future for rural drinking, as young people, who we agreed were more associated with and enjoyed city centre drinking, 'won't be young forever', noting how for himself he 'always went into towns and cities, but now, but now I prefer here, or go[ing] in the afternoon', adding how there is a 'definite progression' in people's drinking habits as they age.

Overall, this was a very interesting discussion with two people well acquainted with the village and its drinking establishments. Whilst neither offered anything massively out of the ordinary, Ashley's mentioning of the role of drinking spaces for men to talk about their emotions and the kind of 'family atmosphere' you find at the cricket club, were certainly noteworthy, as was Dale's reference to the Dog House as a 'cultural centre' and a place where patrons have an interest and a passion for the product they consume. Also noteworthy, and in contrast to other interviews I have conducted, was the belief that Bramington is both atypical, and also that Bramington's drinking is defined by the village itself, rather than by its relation to other surrounding towns and villages.

Appendix 3: Section of Observation Report (Dog House – 29/01/2023)

'Setting the Scene'

Ostensibly the bar space of the Dog House occupies an old plough workshop at the top end of the village, and as such various old ploughing and broader agricultural relics are situated throughout the bar space. The bar itself is made out of old wooden pallets and is situated on the immediate right as you go through the main entrance, with the barrels of beer up against the wall just behind it, from which the beer is poured directly. For patrons, there is a variety of places to sit and drink, including large beer barrels emblazoned with the Dog House logo with bar stools, large tables with wooden chairs and sofas and 'comfy chairs' surrounding a log fire on the immediate left-hand side as you enter the bar space. Outside, there are similar tables, chairs, barrels and barstools, but very few customers seated themselves out there at any point during my observations, likely due to it being fairly miserable day in January. Although there was a food truck, selling Anglo / East Asian fusion cuisine, which was fairly well supported by the bar's patrons that day.

Observation

Besides the three men present from opening, it was not until 12:25 that any more customers entered the bar, a couple of about 30 or so. They engaged the proprietor and the girl behind the bar (early 20's) for a good 7/8 minutes before seating themselves down in the corner by the log fire. The proprietor then proceeded to follow them and continue the conversation for several more minutes. From then on, footfall was slow but consistent, with a mother and baby joining two men who had been present from the start (12:45), a woman in her sixties buying a pint of 'something light' and a packet of crisps (12:50) before seating herself with the aforementioned young couple, who were additionally joined by an elderly couple and a further elderly group of four – beer for the men, white wine for the ladies. Notable at this point was that almost all patrons were sat in the 'comfy area' around the log fire, and were almost all elderly (60+).