

The historical development of problem drinking

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From supply to demand

We are used to thinking of excess *supply* as the cause of problem drinking

- Too much alcohol from too many outlets (i.e. 'on' licenced premises), for too much of the day: clusters or 'alcohol flashpoints'
- Partly because we have a system for controlling supply (licensing). We tend to approach the problem with this in mind.

Do drinkers always respond to greater availability by drinking more?

Demand: why do some people drink?

Assumptions made about 'British culture of drinking',
when consumption varies by terms of region, age,
gender, class

Often founded on equally suspect ideas about
'European drinking' - there are similarities as well
as differences between UK and our neighbours

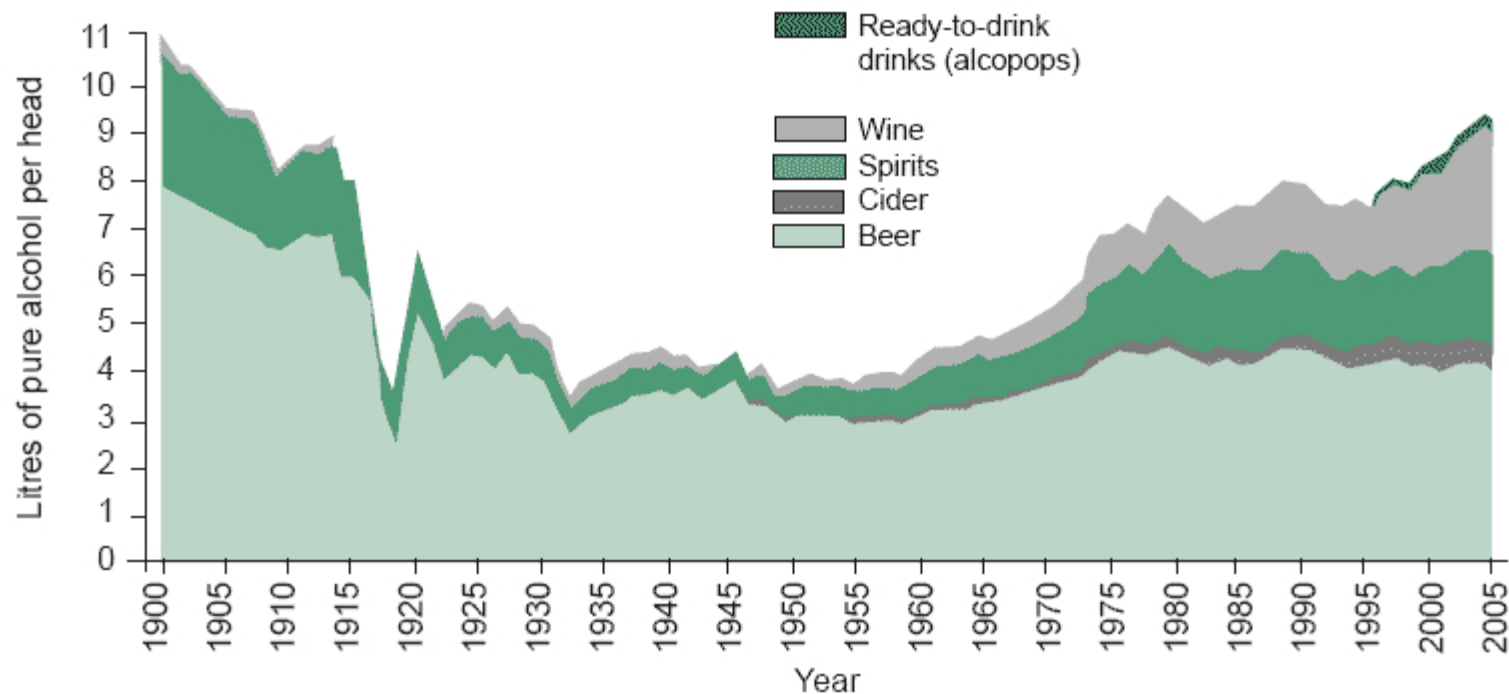
And crucially patterns of demand have *changed*

The nineteenth century

Earlier peaks in drinking (e.g. the 1830s and 1870s)

- Probably reflecting prosperity. But rising incomes often ended up being spent on other necessities and 'decencies' - peaks tend to be short-lived
- Consumption rose as number of 'on' premises fell
- Increasing focus on the home in the eC20th may have helped reduce pub visits, as did holidays etc

Twentieth-century per capita alcohol consumption in the UK (litres of pure alcohol)



Source: *Statistical handbook 2007 (British Beer and Pub Association, 2007)*

And House of Commons Health Committee First Report on Alcohol, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhealth/151/15106.htm>

Key shifts in drinking patterns

Significant rise in per capita consumption of alcohol, particularly after 1975 (well before 2003 reforms)

- Wine consumption almost doubled between 1985 and 2000 (at the expense of beer)
- Increasingly significant role of women's drinking
- Rising numbers of abstainers: ~12% in 1980 and ~18% in 2003

Domestic drinking

More of this drinking happens at home

- The home has become the most important place to drink for nearly half of all drinking adults
- The number of off-licences increased by about 40% between 1975 and 2001, faster than growth of on-licences
- In 2004 supermarkets and other 'multiple grocers' accounted for 65% of the turnover in off-sales

Conclusions

- Important to remember that different ways of thinking about alcohol lead us to different places
- The C20th saw major changes in drinking practices, not simply driven by supply through 'on' premises
- Difficult to say if downward trend of last 5 years is another case of changing taste, or recession
- Have supermarkets changed everything? What are the alternatives to alcohol now?