

THE GEOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC HOUSES IN CORK CITY CENTRE

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A pub, by definition is a public house licenced for the sale of alcoholic liquors. However, this rather bare description conveys little of the real nature of the pub or of its importance in Irish life and culture. For most Irish people, the pub is where you go to convene meetings, exchange information, deliberate on problems, make decisions. It is here that rages are soothed, broken hearts mended and humours restored. In its purest form, the Irish pub has grown out of the 'sheebeen', the drinking den of the people in earlier times, its prime function being to supply intoxicating liquors and a place in which to consume them. The pub as we know it today in Ireland, has its roots in the nineteenth century, when brewing and distilling were becoming major Irish industries. At this time, English was replacing Irish as the language of rural Ireland, and in an effort to anglicise Ireland, there was a vigorous campaign against the illegal drinking place in the 1840s, resulting in the consumption of spirits being halved within a few years. With the decline of the sheebeen and the grog shop, the licensed establishment emerged, where the emphasis was on beer and stout as opposed to whiskey and gin, and the new pubs now established themselves as the common meeting arena of the people. In this article, the geography of public houses in Cork city centre will be examined, paying special attention to pub culture as it exists today, both in terms of differing roles and social usages of the public house and also with the culture of the pub interior as manifested by pub decor, games and entertainment.

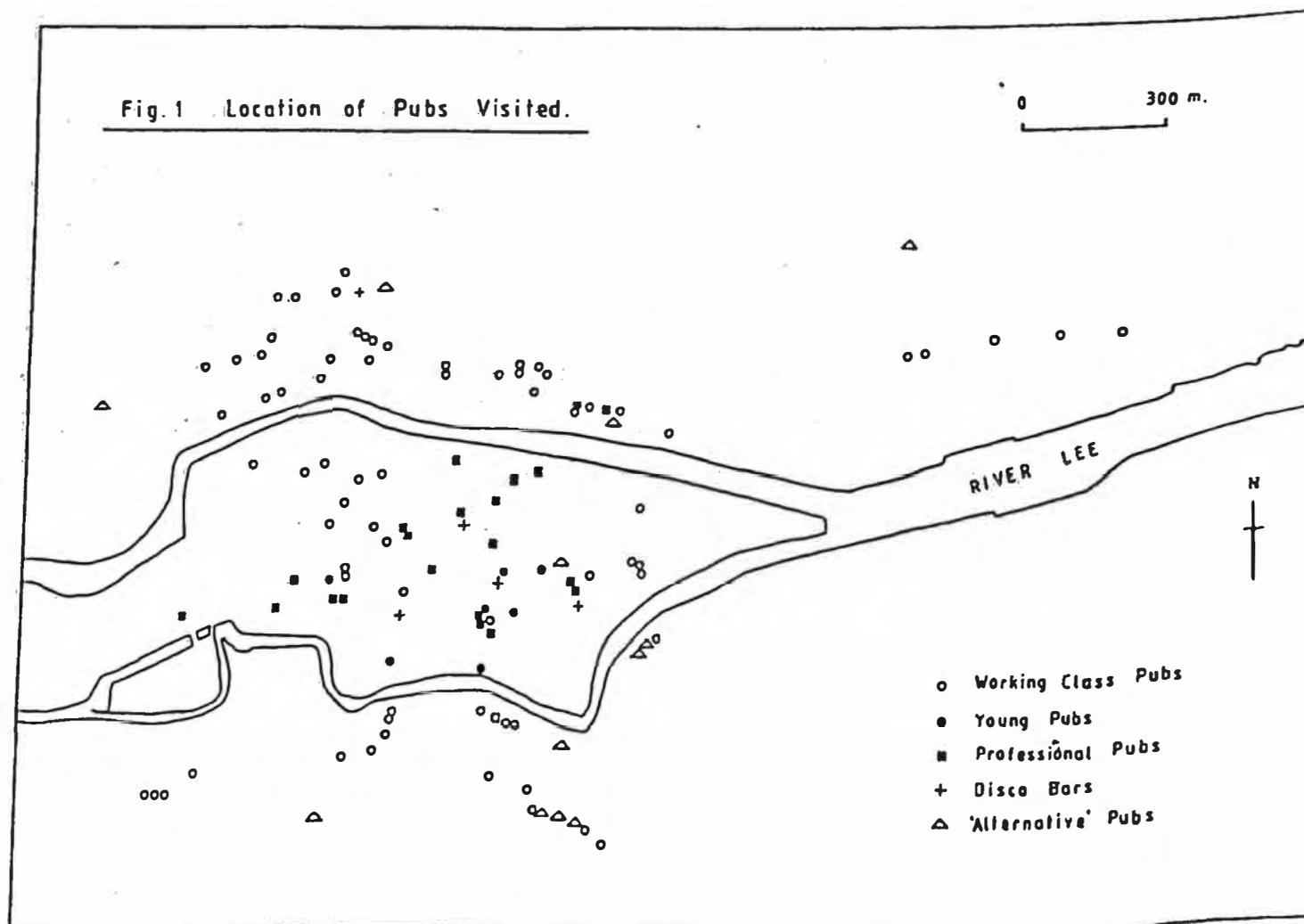
To facilitate a detailed study of Corkonian pubs, a classification of pub 'types' was necessary; and as this article is chiefly concerned with the cultural and social aspect of pub geography, these classifications were based on the clientele frequenting these pubs. The subsequent classifications of pub types arose from brief interviews with the owners of each of the 120 public houses within the survey area (see Fig. 1), during which publicans were simply asked to describe their regular customers in terms of age and social status. From these interviews it was

evident that differing patterns of pub usage by differing social groups existed in Cork and thus the following five-fold classification of pub 'types' emerged:

1. 'Professional Pubs' - frequented by those in the professional/'upwardly mobile' class i.e. lawyers, business people, doctors.
2. 'Working Class Pubs' - frequented by those in working class occupations i.e. trades people, factory/manual workers.
3. 'The Young People's Pub' - used largely by the under 25s.
4. 'The Disco Bar' - similar to the above, but incorporating a disco.
5. 'Alternative' Pub - this classification constituted quite a varied selection of clientele, ranging from punks to motorbikers, to musicians and poets.

It was noted that pubs catering for similar groups were often situated within a short spatial distance of each other i.e.

Washington Street, Shandon Street and Marlboro Street (see Fig. 1). The forms and patterns of pub interiors were also noted with special emphasis on the presence of absence of cultural symbols, such as the dart board, ring board, juke box and on a subjective, personal level, the general atmosphere each establishment exuded.



While the pub can be fundamentally important in producing and maintaining cohesion within a community, it is also true that the public house produces social demarcation and division. Precisely where such drinking contexts are located in major population centres itself affords a clue. Harrison shows in some detail that in terms of pub geography, public houses historically have been concentrated in areas of working class housing and also along nineteenth century commuter thoroughfares. Although no definitive pattern of pub types emerged in Cork city, it may be noted from Fig. 1, that working class pub density largely tends to concentrate in areas of working class housing, south of the city island and more especially to the north of the island, predominantly on Shandon Street, Blarney Street, Coburg Street and the North Mall. In contrast, professional pubs tend to agglomerate within the city island along with the disco bars and the young people's pub. This overall cohesion may then be counteracted by the splintering of urban life into discrete social groupings which use particular pubs as their meeting place.

The most important characteristic of the working class pubs in the sample, was that they were the 'local' pub, with the majority of customers living within a short walking distance of the pub, thus pubs such as "Barretts" in Douglas Street, act as neighbourhood social centres. Thus, the pub was exceptionally important for many of the regulars as their primary meeting place and they went to the pub secure in the knowledge that they would meet people they knew and with whom they would be able to share a common knowledge based on shared characteristics. To paraphrase Hunt and Satterlee (1981) - it did not matter whether John or Mick would be in the pub that night because at least Dan, Tom or Jim would be there. The group's identity arose not so much from its internal structure as from the existence of a further exterior structural feature, that of shared kin. For instance, in 'Jack Rums' in Dominick Street, as in all the working class pubs in the sample, not only did offspring drink with either or both parents, but aunts, uncles and cousins often drank together, particularly at weekends, thus providing the establishment with the additional role of a 'home away from home'. In this respect, the working class pub differed markedly from all other pub categories, thus supporting Allan's view (1979) "Although there is some disagreement about the importance of non-kin neighbours and workmates as sources of friendship in working class

social life, all are agreed that kin generally play a more significant part".

Given these combined factors of shared kin and neighbourhood, it is hardly surprising that the traditional "confessional role" of the public house proved in the sample to be characteristic of the working class pub. As the self described "father confessor" of the "Brown Derby" on Barrack Street put it, "you get told everything here - whether ye'd want to hear it or not". Usually this function also included "knowing or using the customer's name, knowing his or her beverage preference and often having the beverage ready before it has been ordered" (Papham, 1982). On the other hand, while the alternative pubs in the sample, such as "The Cruiscín Lán" in Douglas Street, maintained a close relationship with their respective customers, neither pub functioned as a 'clinic'.

In contrast to this, trade in the professional pubs was more of a passing nature, with drinkers sharing no similar structural features except that of similar occupation and social class. Thus, establishments such as "The Mutton Lane Inn" functioned as an extension of the workplace in that solicitors, clerks and office staff would convene there during lunch breaks before returning to their respective workplaces. However, the primary function of the professional pub was as a possible place to meet friends and to form new friendships which could be developed in other 'outside' contexts such as the theatre, cinema or restaurants. Thus, professional public houses such as the "Wine Vault" and the "Mutton Lane Inn", while catering for very similar groups in terms of age and occupation, served largely as initial meeting places where friends could meet before or after a meal in a nearby hotel/restaurant or an evening at the theatre or perhaps at formal dinner parties in each other's homes. The lone drinker was not a common feature in any of these pubs, with the majority of customers arriving in groups which were usually maintained during the night, conversation topics including business problems and holidays just taken or being planned.

Apart from the increase in female patronage, one of the most significant features of pub culture in the past fifteen years, has to be the increase in young drinkers and more especially the emergence of what is termed "The Young People". That is, establishments where customers are predominantly in the 18-25 age

bracket, and indeed, as the 1986 ERSI Report on Drinking points out, one where underage drinking patterns of the young mirror those of their elders in that they tend to socialise in specific pubs with other young people from similar backgrounds, class and education. "The Washington Inn" on Washington Street is one such example, being almost exclusively a university pub, catering almost exclusively for U.C.C. students. Despite these trends, the common characteristic of the young people's pub in the sample, was that they, like the Disco Bar, provided popular settings for boy-meets-girl situations. In this respect, both the Young People's Pub and the Disco Bar ensemble, the concept of the American 'singles bars' as described by Hathway (1986) - "Singles bars have larger potential clienteles than any other category of the population and owe their popularity to the lack of competing institutions". In both "Sir Henrys" and "The Washington Inn", this aspect is particularly evident on weekend nights, when predominantly single sex groups arrive and during the course of the night interact with other groups in various ways.

Once a pub has been colonised by a particular group of "habitués" (Cavan, 1966), then individuals who do not fit the criteria of the resident group can be excluded by various controls used both by staff and regulars. To a greater or lesser extent this defence of territorial pub space by regulars was evident in each public house in the sample. However, it was in the Alternative Pub types in the sample that such techniques were most marked, and may be perhaps attributed to the differing usages of these pubs by particular groups. "The Cruiscín Lán", for instance, functions almost solely as a base for motor-bike enthusiasts, and thus draws predominantly on a motorbiking, leather-clad clientele. Consequently, regulars bound by a common interest are known to each other in contexts other than the pub i.e. from various biking events throughout the country. It is then, hardly surprising that, to quote the proprietors "that yuppy types don't really fit in... they usually cover in the corner away from everyone else".

In conclusion, the Public House in Cork city has attained the status of being different things to different people. This article has highlighted the ways in which a number of socially and culturally contrasting groups use the public house to establish and maintain themselves as groups. A complex pattern of Corkonian pub culture has emerged from the study. Differing groups operate

independently of each other and their networks rarely cross. But in spite of these differences, they share a common world which is centred around the consumption and exchange of alcohol.

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