

THE LONDON GIN RIOTS



Gin Lane - William Hogarth, 1751

In England in the 1700's heavy duty charges imposed on all imported spirits ignited 'The gin craze'. There was an increase in the popularity of 'home-distilled' Gin produced using poor quality grain which was unfit for the brewing of beer.

Compared to other drinks available at the time, gin was relatively affordable and soon became one of the favoured beverages of the poor (the other being beer) and 'Gin Shops' sprang up all over England.

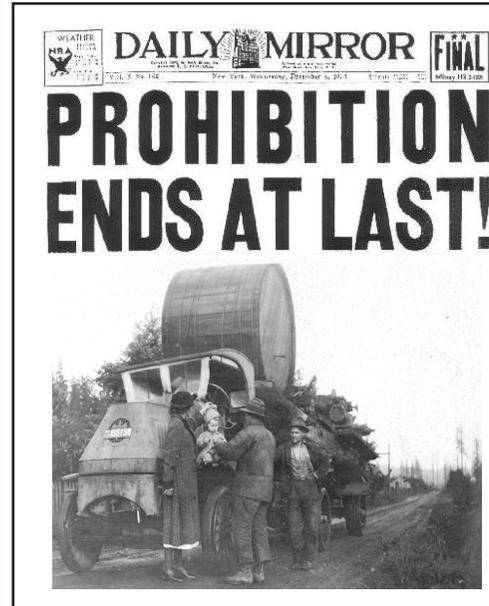
It is thought, that of the 15,000 drinking establishments in London at the time, more than 50% of them were 'Gin Shops' or 'Gin Joints'.

This increase in consumption of beer and gin was blamed for an increase in crime and social and domestic disorder. It is also thought to have contributed to controlling London's population growth, on account of the high rate of alcohol related illnesses and deaths.

This bad situation was illustrated in William Hogarth's Engravings. In the image above Hogarth depicts a drunken mother in the foreground who has dropped her baby. A poem of the time, by an anonymous author, describes "The principal sin, of gin, is, among others, ruining mothers". Which is where the term 'Mother's Ruin' comes from.

In an effort to 'clean up the streets' the British Government introduced the 'Gin Act' in 1736 which imposed high taxes on retailers. This forced up the cost of the poor's favorite beverage and led to the London Gin Riots. As a result, the Government was forced to repeal the act in 1742.

PROHIBITION



Prohibition is the legal act of banning the manufacture, supply and sale of alcohol for purposes other than medicinal or religion.

In the early part of the 20th century several countries experienced periods of prohibition.

Canada	1907-1948
Faroe Islands	1907-1992
Russia & Soviet Union	1914-1925
Iceland	1915-1922
Norway	1916-1927
Hungary	1919-1932
Finland	1919-1932
United States	1920-1933

In the United States of America prohibition sparked the increase in illegal manufacture and supply known as 'Bootlegging' or 'Rum-running'.

Organized crime took over the distribution of alcohol and in the 1920's, rival gangs fought each other for distribution leading to a killing epidemic.

By the mid 1920's Al Capone (a famous Chicago gangster) had full control of the manufacture and distribution of illegal alcohol to 10,000 'speakeasies' (illegal drinking establishments) and also controlled the illegal import of alcohol from Canada and Florida. Earning in excess of \$60 million per year, he used his power to corrupt politicians and even installed his own mayor into office. It is believed that Al Capone ordering the 'St. Valentine's Day Massacre' in 1929 where seven members of a rival gang, suspected of hijacking some of Capone's 'booze-trucks', were shot dead.

During the great depression, prohibition became increasingly unpopular and in 1933 the 21st amendment was added to the American constitution allowing US states to set their own laws for the control of alcohol. In 1931 Al Capone was trialled for tax violations and in 1932 was found guilty and sent to Alcatraz Prison. He served his term and was released in 1939 and died of a heart attack at his home in Florida in 1947.