

The Reinvention of Sweden’s “Gothenburg System” in Rural Australia: The Community Hotels Movement

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Abstract

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a dozen small towns in rural South Australia began a unique social experiment: they imported an alcohol control model from Sweden designed to curb drunkenness, reform the pub and distribute profits for the benefit of the community. The innovative idea of local citizens owning and governing their hotel by committee, and doing away with the drive for personal profit, was an adaptation of the Swedish Gothenburg system. In Australia, it was put into practice in 1897 in the temperance town of Renmark on the River Murray, and other like-minded communities in South Australia followed suit over the next 50 years. This article tells the little-known history of these hotels and explains how and why ideas about the cooperative management of alcohol were found to be particularly compatible with the social and cultural history of South Australia. These Gothenburg experiments connected rural Australia with alcohol policies advancing the municipalisation and improvement of the public house and with progressive ideas of planned towns and garden cities that were being implemented in Sweden and Britain at the time.

Keywords: alcohol reform; social enterprise; licensing; wine production; hotel governance; temperance

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council under grant DP0772382.

In June 1895, the editor of a newspaper in a small River Murray town in South Australia published an article proposing that the community abandon its status as a “dry” temperance town and open a hotel licensed to sell alcohol. Not only this, but he suggested that it should be a hotel owned by the people, run for the people—claiming that it would eradicate undesirable traffic in “sly grog” and its associated drunkenness, create a monopoly over sales under local control, and devote its profits to improving local amenities.

Chris Ashwell’s revolutionary suggestion triggered a unique social experiment that connected the otherwise unremarkable town of Renmark in South Australia with progressive alcohol policies being rolled out in the 19th century across Scandinavia and Britain, including what was known as the Gothenburg system. Ashwell’s editorial resulted in a string of small-town communities in South Australia—along the Murray, in the Barossa Valley and further afield—deciding to buy their own hotels. In the process, this region of Australia became part of the “improved public house” movement that was in full swing in Britain by the 1920s,¹ designed to make pubs more respectable and drinking more civilised. In the first half of the 20th century, these reformed Australian hotels became community centres around which progressive, even socialist, ideas of communalism and social improvement flourished. In some instances, as well as sponsoring the local ambulance or library, their profits supported Australian versions of the garden cities movement then underway in Britain, while others contributed to planning for postwar reconstruction in the 1940s. The Gothenburg-style hotels of South Australia were embraced by local politicians, denounced by temperance advocates, and widely debated in the media across the country. Some of them have survived to the present day.

In this article, I will explain how it was that alcohol control measures designed to deal with binge-drinking in a Swedish city-port found their way to the southern hemisphere in the late 19th century, how they led to the birth of the “first community hotel in the British Empire”, and then, by a process of the social diffusion of an innovative idea, how it spread further afield.² Drawing on a mixture of fieldwork-based research and the historical record, and by using several hotels as case studies, I will describe how and why this model of hotel ownership and community governance began to circulate around like-minded towns of the

¹ David W. Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives: Reinventing the Public House in England, 1896–1960* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

² Y. M. Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel 1897–1997: The First Community Hotel in the British Empire* (Berri: J. Irving & Co, 1997); Maggie Brady, *Teaching “Proper” Drinking? Pubs and Clubs in Indigenous Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017).

irrigation regions of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers. This is a fascinating and relatively unknown history that has been neglected by Australian historians of pubs and policy. Neither the classic history of the Australian pub first published in 1966 by J. M. Freeland nor more recent histories by Diane Kirkby, Tanja Luckins and Claire Wright mention community-owned pubs.³ Ross Fitzgerald and Trevor Jordan's 2009 popular history of alcohol notes the existence of the Gothenburg system but fails to register its implementation in South Australia.⁴ Milton Lewis's otherwise thorough study of alcohol policy history describes the Labor Party's brief flirtation with nationalisation (including tobacco and alcohol) in the early 20th century, but it does not mention South Australia's community pubs.⁵ In a 1988 publication on the dialectic of drinking in Australian life, sociologist Robin Room comments on Renmark and the Gothenburg system while discussing the temperance movement.⁶ This article, then, provides an original contribution to research into the community pubs phenomenon and fills a gap in scholarship by examining a number of questions about it. Why did these community ventures flourish in South Australia rather than elsewhere in the country? How were they connected to international progressive ideas about alcohol controls and town planning? Why, when they were designed to reduce insobriety, was the temperance movement so opposed to community hotels? And were the original Gothenburg ideals maintained over time?

Renmark: From a "Dry" Colony to a Licensed Hotel

In 1891, the colonial government of South Australia had agreed to an unusual demand: it amended the *Licensed Victuallers Act* to enable the creation of an alcohol-free region of several thousand hectares of land adjoining the River Murray. The land had been granted in 1887 to two Canadian engineers, brothers George and W. B. Chaffey,⁷ to create an irrigation scheme that would open up the country to agriculture, as they had done in similarly arid lands

³ J. M. Freeland, *The Australian Pub* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966); Diane Kirkby, Tanja Luckins, and Chris McConville, *The Australian Pub* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010); Diane Kirkby, *Barmaids: A History of Women's Work in Pubs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Claire Wright, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003).

⁴ Ross Fitzgerald and Trevor L. Jordan, *Under the Influence: A History of Alcohol in Australia* (Sydney: HarperCollins ABC Books, 2009).

⁵ Milton Lewis, *A Rum State: Alcohol and State Policy in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Services, 1992).

⁶ Robin Room, "The Dialectic of Drinking in Australian Life: From the Rum Corps to the Wine Column," *Australian Drug and Alcohol Review* 7, no. 4 (1988): 424.

⁷ George Chaffey, 1848–1932; W. B. Chaffey, 1856–1926.

in California.⁸ The Chaffey brothers were supporters of temperance, and in their efforts to attract a reliable and devoted labour force, they believed that the irrigation colony would thrive if it were alcohol-free. The Chaffey family skilfully spruiked the attractions of the scheme, describing two immense areas of land “upon the banks of the finest river in Australia” near Renmark in South Australia, with Mildura just over the border in Victoria. It would be a grand scheme of farming and of “cultural settlement” with “no promiscuous and enticing vending of intoxicating drinks”. The settlers the Chaffeys wanted to attract were to be of “the right sort, namely, the industrious, temperate, thrifty, intelligent, skilful, cleanly, and good living of all classes”.⁹

However, there was to be no interference in the *private* consumption of wines and spirits; this settlement was intended to exemplify the original meaning of the term “temperance” and to eschew the extreme version that expected its adherents to practise abstinence from *all* intoxicating liquors. The cultivation of the vine as well as wine drinking were seen to be inherently civilising, even transformative, activities that bore middle-class aspirations, which helps to explain the apparent anomaly wherein some supporters of temperance grew wine.¹⁰ The irrigation system inaugurated by the Chaffeys made it possible for grapes to be grown for winemaking and distillation as well as for dried fruit. Indeed, the Chaffeys’ promotional “Red Book” (complete with gilt lettering and hand-drawn sketches) nominated winemaking as being of prime importance to the venture.¹¹ By 2020, the Riverland was home to nearly a thousand wine grape growers, was producing more than one quarter of Australia’s crush, and had developed a reputation (somewhat against temperance principles) for producing large volumes of cask wine.¹²

Although over time Renmark attracted a high calibre of settler (some of whom had university degrees but no horticultural experience),¹³ the original plan for a relatively alcohol-free community of clean-living settlers and obedient labourers was compromised by the River

⁸ Jennifer Hamilton-McKenzie, “Utopos?: A Consideration of the Life of Irrigationist, George Chaffey,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 2 (2013): 63–80.

⁹ James E. Mathew Vincent, *The Australian Irrigation Colonies on the River Murray in Victoria and South Australia* (London: Chaffey Brothers Ltd., 1888), 2, 18. George Chaffey eventually overextended himself financially and geographically (Hamilton-McKenzie, “Utopos?,” 63).

¹⁰ Julie Macintyre, “Adam Smith and Faith in the Transformative Qualities of Wine in Colonial New South Wales,” *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 194–211.

¹¹ Vincent, *The Australian Irrigation Colonies*, 25.

¹² Jessica Schremmer and Anita Ward, “Riverland Wine Region Pushes to Make Mark on Labels, as Growers Shrug off Industry Stigma,” *ABC Rural*, 23 May 2020, abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-05-23/riverland-wine-region-pushes-to-make-its-mark-on-the-label/12225412.

¹³ Ann Ryan, Renmark Hotel Board, personal communication, 4 November 2019.

Murray itself: paddle steamers carried kegs of beer that could easily be rolled off, allowing for an illicit club “under every ti-tree”.¹⁴ Soon both Renmark and Mildura, further east along the river, had a sly grog and drunkenness problem and were seeking solutions to it. Clearly, despite local support, the prohibition experiment was “too drastic for the Australian sentiment”.¹⁵ Some leading citizens had heard of a scheme underway in Sweden that provided a compromise, a middle path between prohibition on the one hand and illicit drunken swilling on the other. It was known as the Gothenburg system. Perhaps this would be the answer.

The underlying logic of the Scandinavian system was to decrease drunkenness by eliminating the profit motive from alcohol sales. The licensees’ desire for profit was seen to “push” sales, resulting in excess consumption. The Swedish solution was to establish semi-private trusts made up of local citizens and to employ respectable managers or shopkeepers on a salary, thereby eradicating their pecuniary interest in pushing sales. This came to be known as “disinterested management”. The manager could take only a five per cent profit, and the local municipality took any remaining profit for local needs and charities. In 1865, the Swedish government gave the first *bolag* (company) a charter to improve and supervise the public houses, eradicate private profit from sales of spirits, and pay net profits to the municipality. The idea was to subject alcohol to local control, improve licensing arrangements and minimise alcohol-related problems, as well as eradicate any political influence on the trade.¹⁶ The president of Mildura Shire was interested in the Swedish scheme, and in 1894 the residents voted overwhelmingly in favour of trying it out.¹⁷ Mildura and Renmark (140 kilometres apart) had close connections and rivalries,¹⁸ so it was natural that Chris Ashwell of the *Renmark Pioneer* had heard about Mildura’s vote for the establishment of premises “on somewhat the same system as that known as the Gothenburgh [*sic*]”. A trust would employ a manager “who would have no interest in pushing the sale of

¹⁴ Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 8; Alice. M. Lapthorne, *Mildura Calling* (Melbourne: Bread and Cheese Club, 1947).

¹⁵ Joseph A. Alexander, *The Life of George Chaffey: A Story of Irrigation Beginnings in California and Australia* (Melbourne: Macmillan & Company Limited, 1928), 184.

¹⁶ Joseph Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell, *British “Gothenburg” Experiments and Public House Trusts*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903); Robin Room, “The Evolution of Alcohol Monopolies and their Relevance for Public Health,” *Contemporary Drug Problems* 20 (1993): 169–87.

¹⁷ The results of the informal vote in Mildura in 1894 were as follows: Continuing the existing system—9; an ordinary hotel system—77; Gothenburg system—284; total prohibition—15 (*South Australian Register*, 1 August 1894, 5). The Mildura Club was established in 1890 with W. B. Chaffey as vice-president. See Jennifer Hamilton-McKenzie, “I Need a Drink. The Mildura Temperance Legacy: A History,” *The Dura* 3 (2014): 18–21.

¹⁸ Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 17.

drink and the net profit might be devoted to improving the roads in the settlement”.¹⁹ Ashwell’s editorial entitled “A Hotel Wanted” was published in his newspaper on 15 June 1895, proposing such a hotel for Renmark. “It was all very well for the promoters of the settlement to start it on temperance principles,” Ashwell wrote, “but now a large number of settlers have taken up their permanent residence here there is no reason why the opening of a licensed house should be prevented.”²⁰

It is not surprising that news of the so-called Gothenburg system²¹ had found its way to Australia. The scheme had attracted international interest especially from Britain and America, where it was vigorously debated and investigated by politicians, statisticians and temperance reformers.²² Like Sweden, these countries were confronting the stalemate between the drinking public and the liquor trade on one side, and the ardent prohibitionists on the other, which made the idea of municipal or local control over sales attractive: *reform* of the public house, rather than its abolition. Several American states had instituted municipal alcohol control schemes in the late 1800s, so it is likely that by the time they came to Australia from California, George and William Chaffey themselves already knew of the Gothenburg principles. They were clearly supporters of it; the younger brother, Charles Chaffey (who lived in Renmark at his homestead *Olivewood*), later became chair of the Renmark Hotel board. By the time these discussions were taking place in rural Australia, variations on the Gothenburg theme had already been put into practice in Britain and promoted by social reformers and politicians such as Liberal Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), who was one of a stream of interested parties who travelled to Gothenburg to see for himself.²³ Several years later, Joseph Rowntree—the confectioner, Quaker capitalist and temperance advocate—revived and refined his ideas.²⁴ Public house trusts were developed in Britain, such as the People’s Refreshment Houses Association (PRHA) in 1896, designed to increase the number of public houses managed with limited profits: the PRHA acquired

¹⁹ Chris Ashwell, “A Hotel Wanted,” editorial, *Renmark Pioneer*, 15 June 1895, 2.

²⁰ Ashwell, “A Hotel Wanted,” 2.

²¹ It came to be known as the Gothenburg system despite having been first used in the town of Falun in 1859.

²² J. M. Wilson, “The Scandinavian Plan [of Regulating the Liquor Trade]: A Sermon Preached on Temperance Sunday, Nov. 18, 1894,” LSE Selected Pamphlets, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60222451>; James. B. Brown, “The Temperance Career of Joseph Chamberlain, 1870–1877: A Study in Political Frustration,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies* 4, no. 1 (1972): 29–44; E. R. L. Gould, *The Gothenburg System of Liquor Traffic: Fifth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor* (Washington: Government Printer, 1893); Robert. C. Pitman, *Alcohol and the State, a Discussion: Or the Problem of Law as Applied to the Liquor Traffic* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1877).

²³ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815–1872* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), 329, 285.

²⁴ Rowntree and Sherwell, *British “Gothenburg” Experiments*.

licences that implemented disinterested management, offered shares to the public, and provided temperance drinks and food as well as beer.²⁵ Rowntree and Sherwell's data-rich 1903 study named and reported on the "inns" operating in the UK under PRHA/Gothenburg principles. They believed that the system allowed for the "release of local progressive sentiment", together with the appropriate state legislation to prevent "local cupidity" in the disbursement of profits.²⁶

Back in Renmark, a vigorous debate followed Ashwell's June 1895 editorial. Ashwell proposed that their embryonic town would be a municipality one day, residents would need proper facilities, and a trust hotel would provide profits that could be used to improve the roads and other amenities. Some readers agreed that a well-conducted hotel with police supervision would decrease drunkenness, but religious and temperance objectors saw such a hotel as a poor alternative to prohibition. Two weeks after Ashwell's editorial, the Methodist Reverend Corly Butler responded briskly (in a letter pointedly headed "Hotel Not Wanted"), reminding readers that settlers had come to Renmark "in the hope that they and theirs would be free from the temptation of strong drink". Butler claimed it was yet to be shown whether the said hotel was "wanted" for the public good "or to ensure the easy gratification of a harmful craving".²⁷ Nevertheless, a Renmark Progress Committee was formed (with Chris Ashwell as secretary) to promote the plan, and the owner of Meissner's accommodation-only temperance hotel agreed in principle to sell her business. Mrs Jane Meissner was by then a widow, having moved from Darwin with her husband to be part of the Chaffey's new settlement.

Amid some dissent in parliament, Ashwell travelled to Adelaide himself to lobby the government to repeal the 1891 dry area declaration. A bill was passed in December 1896 allowing that a publican's licence could be granted to a business conducted for and by the community should a majority of the surrounding householders vote in favour of it.²⁸ The vote took place and was carried. A local station owner provided the funds, and in March 1897 the Licensing Bench granted the licence to Mrs Jane Meissner, who became the manager of the first "trust public house" in Australia. It was not unusual for a woman (or for a widow) to be

²⁵ John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A Study in Policy-Making* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Rowntree and Sherwell, *British "Gothenburg" Experiments*.

²⁶ Rowntree and Sherwell, *British "Gothenburg" Experiments*, 130.

²⁷ "Hotel Not Wanted," letter, *Renmark Pioneer*, 29 June 1895, 5.

²⁸ Clause 47 of the *Licensed Victuallers Further Amendment Act 1896*; P. F. Young and A. J. Secker, *Review of South Australian Liquor Licensing Laws* (Adelaide: South Australian Department of Public and Consumer Affairs, 1984), 574.

the owner or licensee of a pub in 19th-century Australia in general, as well as in South Australia.²⁹ It gave them “indisputable autonomy”, as Claire Wright points out, but despite this there seems to be no evidence that these (clearly independent) women participated in any broader social reforms. They were not “political bedfellows”.³⁰ Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that South Australian women won suffrage in 1894, only three years before Jane Meissner became the licensee of the Renmark Hotel.

A hotel committee of five approved landholders residing in the irrigation colony was elected (the first chairman was the Anglican vicar), with the main proviso being that the “committeemen” (there were no women on the committee until 1960) should have no financial interest in any retail business associated with the sale of alcohol,³¹ in keeping with a key tenet of the Gothenburg model. However, the manager was entitled to 10 per cent of the net profits of the *accommodation* part of the business at Renmark.³² This entitlement reflected arrangements at some British trust houses that allowed the manager to receive the profit made from food, mineral waters and tobacco, on the assumption that they would encourage the consumption of these items as well as (or instead of) alcoholic beverages.³³

Civilising Drinking

After the business had been licensed for two years, Charles Chaffey, the second chairman of the hotel committee, reported to the premier that while previously Renmark had been “infested” with sly grog sellers, now there was very little drunkenness, and the business had remained independent of brewers and liquor merchants. Chaffey articulated the crux of the Gothenburg’s principle of compromise when he noted that, “although in the nature of things there will always be some people ready to find fault, as for instance some rabid total abstainers, who object to our selling liquor at all and on the other hand, the old sly grog sellers, who complain that we have ruined their trade, the members of the Committee consider that upon the whole the establishment of the Gothenburg Hotel has been beneficial

²⁹ Alison Painter, “Adelaide’s Hotels and Temperance, 1860–1930,” in *William Shakespeare’s Adelaide 1860–1930*, ed. Brian Dickey (Adelaide: Association of Professional Historians, 1992), 94.

³⁰ Wright, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge*, 5, 159.

³¹ Renmark Hotel, *Regulations as Approved by the Honorable the Treasurer* (Renmark: Murray Pioneer Print, 1951).

³² Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 14.

³³ Rowntree and Sherwell, *British “Gothenburg” Experiments*, 23; John Greenaway, “Policy Learning and the Drink Question in Britain 1850–1950,” *Political Studies* 46, no. 5 (1998): 903–18.

to the place, it has supplied a great want and has tended to discourage and diminish drunkenness”.³⁴

The Reverend Corly Butler begged to differ. Writing in the *West Australian* newspaper in 1899 (he had moved from Renmark to Perth), Butler claimed that as he “saw it worked in Renmark, the [Gothenburg] system did nothing more to lessen drunkenness than any ordinary public house would have done”.³⁵ Initially, the profits were modest, and the first donation to the community (in 1907) was only £10; the following year, the hotel donated £175 to the institute, the district council, the racing club and the bicycle club.³⁶

Encouraged yet again by Chris Ashwell, the hotel also funded the development and cultivation of gardens along the riverfront in order to capitalise on its surroundings. In 1915, in a project organised by the town council, Renmark schoolchildren engaged in a mass planting of palm trees along the river, to raise funds for the French Red Cross and in memory of the “brave boys” from Renmark who had died at Gallipoli.³⁷ Members of the hotel committee assisted. Planted with lawns and palm trees, rose bushes and geraniums, the hotel gardens near the river were soon declared to be the beauty spot of the town and became part of the hotel’s portrayal of itself as a stylish middle-class establishment offering refined and dignified service. Apart from their earlier memorialising function, palm trees signified “the good life”; they also had aesthetic appeal and exotic, oriental qualities evoking the promenades at Nice and Cannes beside the Mediterranean, and the art deco houses of Miami.³⁸ By the 1930s, the hotel featured bellboys in livery and maids in black-and-white pinafores, and the Red Lounge included red leather tub chairs.³⁹ A third storey was added in 1937, completing its impressive art deco frontage. Many Australian hotels had an “architectural splurge” following the Depression.⁴⁰ A promotional leaflet of the time reads as follows: “From the first surprise of coming upon this massive, modern structure on the sweeping bend of Australia’s great waterway ... Hotel Renmark completely claims you. Its luxurious appointments offer you real comfort and pleasant relaxation—its restful, well-kept gardens soothe you ... spacious lounges, sunny balconies, smart and modernly [*sic*] furnished

³⁴ Charles F. Chaffey to the Right Honourable the Premier, 26 June 1899, cited in Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 20, 67.

³⁵ Reverend Corly Butler, “To the Editor. The Gothenburg System,” *West Australian*, 24 January 1899, 3.

³⁶ Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 43.

³⁷ “Renmark’s Arbor Day,” *Murray Pioneer*, 16 September 1915, 6.

³⁸ Fred Gray, *Palm* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 135.

³⁹ A selection of historical pamphlets and hotel equipment is on display in the hotel lobby and in a small museum on the first floor (as at November 2020).

⁴⁰ Freeland, *The Australian Pub*, 180.

bedrooms or suites with private bath and telephone ... electric elevator, lock-up garages, library.”⁴¹

Guests could use a nine-hole golf course or play bowls or tennis; they could also go duck shooting or kangaroo hunting in the back blocks. The tenor of the hotel’s publicity echoed ideas surrounding the improved public house movement in Britain (which had its roots in the Gothenburg system) with its reforms of the drinking environment and curbs on drunkenness, thus introducing the moderating influence of middle-class mores.⁴² The emphasis on the hotel’s gardens (and its financial support for them) was imbued with 19th- and early 20th-century temperance thinking, as alcohol historian Brian Harrison reminds us: providing public parks, arboreta and libraries was intended to change peoples’ recreational patterns (especially those of the working classes), offering pastimes other than drinking. Temperance reformers often campaigned for public parks.⁴³

Both before and after its inauguration, temperance advocates including the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union had been critical of Gothenburg ideas in general and of the Renmark Hotel in particular, questioning its supposed success in curbing alcohol abuse.⁴⁴ It is possible that some of their criticism was justified because the local Total Abstinence League and the Labor Party had to complain persistently about drunkenness to the hotel committee. Recognising the deterrent value of alcohol pricing, even in 1908,⁴⁵ the committee raised the price of bottled wine and stopped selling cheap draught wine over the bar; at least one committee member was a tee-totalling member of the Rechabites. Fifty years later, however, it could be six deep at the bar on Friday nights, and there were regular fights.⁴⁶ In 1957, the hotel opened a large island bar with 20 taps, claimed to be the longest (62.5 metres) in the southern hemisphere—a strategy to maximise the number of customers during the years of pressured drinking due to six o’clock closing. The hotel opened a drive-in bottle shop in 1964.

⁴¹ Ernest Hall, manager, *Hotel Renmark on the Murray* (pamphlet), n.d. (Hall was manager between 1923 and 1945.)

⁴² James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 181; David Gutzke, “Progressivism and the History of the Public House, 1850–1950,” *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 238.

⁴³ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 312.

⁴⁴ Brady, *Teaching “Proper” Drinking?*, 51; E. H. Woollacott and C. P. Hughes, *Investigation into Community Hotels at Renmark, Berri, Barmera, Loxton, Nuriootpa, 31 March–7 April 1948* (Adelaide: Temperance Alliance of South Australia, 1948); Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 364, 381.

⁴⁵ Minimum unit pricing of alcohol is today a harm-reduction policy endorsed by the World Health Organization.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Renmark Hotel*, 175.

An Innovative Idea Circulates

Reports of the evident success of the Renmark Hotel soon spread, diffused by word of mouth, extensive newspaper coverage, radio, local politicians, and even temperance advocates who travelled around the country.⁴⁷ Renmark seeded the idea, and within a few years other towns in the vicinity were discussing community hotels. Waikerie was one of these, 80 kilometres west of Renmark. It had a core population derived from families who had been part of a (short-lived) Waikerie Village Settlement Association established in 1894, one of the communal colonies peculiar to South Australia; later it became one of the Soldier Settlement Scheme locations. Like Renmark, Waikerie had a problem with sly grog thanks to the riverboats, and in 1909 this problem led to a proposal for a community-owned hotel, initially unsuccessful. The pub finally became community-owned in the 1960s, and it is now a prominent feature of the town.

In the 1930s, there was a renewed flurry of interest in cooperatives of various kinds, community ventures and community purchases of hotels.⁴⁸ Barmera, for example, another soldier settlement and grape-growing area on the river 30 kilometres southwest of Renmark, was without a hotel, but in 1932 local residents obtained a loan of £10,000 from the Oakbank Brewery and had their own hotel built on a wide tree-lined street leading down to Lake Bonney. Only a few years later, a second storey was added; like the Renmark Hotel, it features an art deco design. The residents became members for one shilling, and profits were intended to maintain the premises as well as to promote art, science and literature. The hotel's lounges became a social centre and meeting place for local bodies.⁴⁹

Even closer to Renmark, only 18 kilometres away in the town of Berri, five local men raised bank loans and in 1937 made the existing Riverside Hotel into the Berri Community Hotel. Berri was not part of the Chaffey land, nor was it a dry colony, but grog was sold off the riverboats to anyone who would buy it, which began to cause concern. The town soon gained something of a reputation for its vineyards and as a hub for community enterprises

⁴⁷ The travelling Methodist Reverend Corly Butler, for example, had procured a steam launch called *Glad Tidings*, which conveyed him and his mission work to many different settlements along the Murray. Jean. N. Nunn, *History of Waikerie: Gateway to the Riverland* (Berri: Waikerie Historical Association, 1994), 89; Brady, *Teaching "Proper" Drinking?*, 45.

⁴⁸ "Growing Interest in Community Hotels," *Recorder* (Port Pirie), 5 January 1939, 1; Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, "Rochdale Consumer Co-Operatives in Australia: Decline and Survival," *Business History* 54, no. 6 (2012): 986–1003.

⁴⁹ "Grit, Determination Shown in Building Barmera Hotel—Present Chairman," *Murray Pioneer*, 26 November 1982, 11; Woollacott and Hughes, "Investigation into Community Hotels".

and cooperatives. Once the Berri Hotel was purchased (for around £33,000),⁵⁰ it was consciously modelled on Renmark, with a stated policy to discourage extreme drinking. A committee was appointed, and membership of the hotel was for people on the electoral roll who lived in the area. Donations were made to schools, the Berri Hospital and the community centre, as well as to maintain the riverfront gardens.⁵¹ Like the Renmark Hotel, the Berri Hotel is still community-owned today.

In 1934, the citizens of Loxton discussed buying the freehold of their hotel, inspired by the example of Renmark. The town had been founded in 1907 by Lutherans who moved east from the Barossa Valley; like Berri, the town was created very much by the citizens themselves, without the leadership or financial support of the Chaffey brothers or the government; there were cooperatives and soldier-settlement blocks. A hotel was opened in 1908, frequented by a mixed clientele from upright Christian townspeople to the “doubtful characters” and itinerant workers who camped by the river.⁵² Women were allowed to sit upstairs and have a meal; indeed the amateur ethnographer and journalist Daisy Bates took her tea there, reportedly sitting on the top balcony to watch the fights in the street below. In 1937, she was camped at Pyap, just 10 kilometres away.⁵³ Eventually, in 1946, local supporters succeeded in buying the Loxton Hotel, their motivation for the purchase being primarily financial, driven by the desire to benefit associations and community amenities. Daisy Bates herself had commented on the “fine community spirit” in the town that worked “for the good of the whole”.⁵⁴ By 1960, the hotel had disbursed something like £12,000 of profit for the benefit of the district and charities.⁵⁵ Today, the hotel is used by community organisations for meetings. It has a board of six directors, who may not engage in the sale of wine or spirits and who decide on donations, and employs 85 local people. The objects of the hotel’s company include providing facilities for social intercourse, doing benevolent work in Loxton and district, and assisting recreation, education, art, science and literature.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Option Committee, *Report of Option Committee to Representative Meeting Held in the Berri Institute, on Monday January 11th, 1937*, mimeo, Berri Library, South Australia.

⁵¹ L. M. Andison, *Berri: The Hub of the Upper Murray* (Berri: For the Berri Branch of the South Australian Country Women’s Association, 1953); Woollacott and Hughes, “Investigation into Community Hotels”.

⁵² M. R. Casson and W. R. C. Hirst, *Loxton District and Town* (Berri: J. C. Irving & Co., 1988), 74.

⁵³ Daisy Bates’s time at Pyap in 1937 followed her better-known years (1919–1936) at Ooldea, South Australia. Bob Reece, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007), 131; Robyn Cusick, Loxton Hotel, personal communication, 15 March 2008.

⁵⁴ Reece, *Daisy Bates*, 131.

⁵⁵ Casson and Hirst, *Loxton District*, 76.

⁵⁶ Information provided by the hotel manager, Robyn Cusick, in March 2008.

By the late 1930s, five towns along the Murray, linked by their irrigation and soldier-settlement origins and their Protestant (often German Lutheran) affiliations, had purchased their own hotels. All of them owed their existence to the example set by Renmark, and over the following decades, the idea reached towns further afield. In 1937, the town of Nuriootpa, in the rich agricultural and wine-growing Barossa Valley region, was the next to purchase an existing hotel and make it into a community enterprise. In the far west of the state and the Eyre Peninsula, three more towns—Ceduna, Kimba and Streaky Bay—purchased their hotels in 1949, 1951 and 1965 respectively. The region had also been settled by German migrants. The most recent town in South Australia to buy its own hotel is Parndana on Kangaroo Island, with a licence granted in 1994.

Nuriootpa: An Australian “Ideal Town”?

Of all these manifestations of small-town collaboration, the case of Nuriootpa was perhaps the most remarkable. In the 1940s, its community-owned hotel became the lynchpin for a utopian vision of an ideal or model town. With the hotel profits, the people hoped to provide for themselves the “social amenities and cultural environments that will lead to a fuller life for all, and in working and planning for these objects they believe they will begin to understand one another more fully and thus learn to live together and fight together for that better way of life for which we all strive and pray”.⁵⁷

Nuriootpa was one of the so-called German towns of the Barossa Valley that had been first settled by Lutherans escaping religious persecution in Europe, while later German settlers migrated for political or socioeconomic reasons. This shared cultural background was said to give the inhabitants a common focus and a sense of community⁵⁸ that was, however, undermined by World War II. A community unity movement endeavoured to heal the discord, one example being the town’s participation in a progressive, left-leaning social movement based in Adelaide called the Common Cause, designed to uplift the people and

⁵⁷ “The Community Movement,” souvenir program from the official opening of the Nuriootpa War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool, 24 February 1945.

⁵⁸ A. Aeuckens, “The German Towns: The Role of Industry and Commerce,” in *Terowie Workshop: Exploring the History of South Australian Country Towns*, ed. Anthony F. Denholm, Susan Marsden, and Kerrie Round (Adelaide: University of Adelaide and History Trust of South Australia, 1991), 129–42; Arthur Reusch, “Community Development in the Barossa Valley, S.A.” (seminar at the Nuriootpa War Memorial Community Centre, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1956), 1; Elfrida Jensen, *Barossan Foundations* (Nuriootpa: Nuriootpa War Memorial Community Centre Committee Inc., 1969), 169.

reinvigorate social progress.⁵⁹ The cooperative enterprises of Nuriootpa became part of the process of reconciliation and renewal, including the hotel.⁶⁰

Led by the local doctor, in the 1930s a group of Nuriootpa citizens decided that the town needed a first-class hotel for the travelling public and that a community enterprise in the form of a hotel would make enough money to provide funds to advance and improve the town. Unlike in Renmark, there was no mention of a need to manage insobriety or inculcate civilised drinking habits. It was all about the income “because of the wonderful financial success of the Renmark Community Hotel”.⁶¹ Keeping its plans quiet (fearful of being gazumped by the SA Brewing Company, which already owned another hotel in the town),⁶² the group raised £18,000, visited Barmera to solicit advice from the manager there, and in September 1937 successfully made the purchase.⁶³ A board was elected (including the doctor, the pharmacist and a local benefactor) for the renamed Vine Inn, “owned by the people, controlled by the people”.⁶⁴ By the mid-1940s, the Vine Inn was making a small profit, which encouraged the community to go ahead and purchase the town’s general store as well, run as a cooperative based on the ideas of the Rochdale Pioneers.⁶⁵ Together, the proceeds became the commercial basis for a community development movement that would benefit the whole town and commemorate the men who had died in World War II, through the War Memorial Community Centre.⁶⁶ The profits from the hotel would be donated to the centre, which meant that income tax would not be chargeable.

Thanks to the Common Cause group, a town plan was drawn up by visiting architects; all these developments prompted many laudatory stories about Nuriootpa. The Melbourne

⁵⁹ S. Mitchell, “The Common Cause Movement,” *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 16 (1988): 38–45; A. M. Ramsay, *A Township Starts to Live: The Valley of Barossa, South Australia’s New Community* (Adelaide: A Common Cause Publication, 1945).

⁶⁰ Peter Fuller, *Barossa Vintages: A Wine History from 1842* (Tanunda: The Barossa Wine and Tourism Association, 2011), 29.

⁶¹ Reusch, “Community Development,” 46.

⁶² Since the 1870s, breweries had moved into the hotel business in South Australia and tied houses to their products, which deprived publicans of the freedom to decide which products to stock.

⁶³ J. R. Robbins, “Community Development in Nuriootpa: The Search for a Model,” in *Beyond the City: Case Studies in Community Structure and Development*, ed. Margaret Bowman (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), 144–86; F. W. Hoopman, “The Nuriootpa Community Hotel” (seminar, Barossa Valley Community Developments, Sydney, University of Sydney, December 1956).

⁶⁴ *Community* (Vine Inn monthly newsletter) 1, no. 12, Nuriootpa Public Library collection, South Australia. The Vine Inn was an appropriate name to choose: the region included major wine-growing entities such as Orlando, Hardy’s and Yalumba.

⁶⁵ By paying 20 cents, any resident of the valley could become a member, under the classic Rochdale scheme: Jensen, *Barossan Foundations*, 170; Peter Fuller, “A History of Community Service: The Community Cooperative Store, Nuriootpa 1944–1994,” *Leader* (Angaston), 26 October 1994, 43.

⁶⁶ Elfrida Jensen, *Barossan Foundations* (Nuriootpa: Nuriootpa War Memorial Community Centre Committee Inc., 1969), 166.

Argus enthused that—surrounded by lawns and with a pleasant beer garden—the completed community hotel would be a model for country hostelryes.⁶⁷ It would serve the town from its profits, but “never would the quest for profits become its dominant aim”. “Is there another hotel in Australia where the takings from the dining room exceed those in the bar?” asked a Queensland newspaper in 1944 (“a town where dreams come true”).⁶⁸ In 1947, the National Film Board made a flattering documentary about the town, noting that the community’s purchase of the Vine Inn had been the catalyst for the town’s cooperative ventures.⁶⁹ Inexplicably, the pivotal role of the hotel was entirely overlooked in a recent business history of Nuriootpa’s “Rochdale”-style cooperative store.⁷⁰

Despite all the rhetoric, it was reported that things did not always run smoothly. Profits were variable in the first 20 years, and the largest in those decades was £5000 in 1952.⁷¹ The directors frequently had difficulty finding appropriate managers and staff, and there were other disappointments along the way. However, the hotel was instrumental in establishing the swimming pool, running a community dairy and a bus service, supporting the employment of a town gardener, and donating to the Community Centre Committee. The Vine Inn is still community-owned today, employing dozens of local people. Like other community-owned premises in Renmark and elsewhere, the names and photographs of board members and managers are displayed in the foyer alongside lists of the recipients of the hotel’s donations. A sign inside the Vine Inn thanks customers for supporting their community-owned hotel.

From the Murray to the Murrumbidgee

In the 1930s and 1940s, there was a renewed groundswell of interest in opening community-owned hotels from politicians, local aldermen and the prominent citizens of towns further afield.⁷² It appears that the settlers of the irrigation towns themselves acted as channels for the diffusion of the Gothenburg hotel idea, taking it eastwards across the state border into the

⁶⁷ Geoffrey Hutton, “Little Nuriootpa Is Community Model,” *Argus*, 29 May 1948, 3.

⁶⁸ “Have You Heard of Nuriootpa? The Story of a Town Where Dreams Come True,” *Pittsworth Sentinel*, 20 September 1944, 1.

⁶⁹ The film *The Meeting Place* (1947), directed by Catherine Duncan, National Film Board Production, shows Nuriootpa people “rolling up their sleeves for the common good” and refers to the adult education activities fostered by the Common Cause: National Film & Sound Archive, File No. 13959, Canberra.

⁷⁰ Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, “The Outsider Consumer Co-Operative: Lessons from the Community Co-Operative Store (Nuriootpa), 1944–2010,” *Business History* 57 (2015).

⁷¹ Hoopman, “The Nuriootpa Community Hotel,” 55; Jensen, *Barossan Foundations*.

⁷² “Growing Interest in Community Hotels,” *Recorder*, 5 January 1939, 1.

Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) of New South Wales. Leeton and Griffith shared connections with Renmark and Mildura through their origins as irrigation settlements and were imbued with similar traditions of local cooperatives.⁷³ They had previously been prohibition areas (between 1914 and 1924) and had suffered similar sly grog consequences. But the New South Wales government of the day was opposed to community-owned and state-run hotels,⁷⁴ and the MIA towns decided to lobby for them. In March 1944, a newly formed Griffith Community Hotel and Liquor Reform Association organised a public meeting of over 350 people, who agreed to petition the government to amend the *Liquor Act* and permit the establishment of community hotels in the MIA. Speakers in Griffith used the examples of Renmark and Berri hotels as models of outstanding success. The Berri Hotel, one speaker said admiringly, “had only been in existence seven years and had maintained a park and provided scholarships of several hundreds of pounds. The Government of South Australia evidently recognised that irrigation areas foster community interests ... Here on the Murrumbidgee irrigation areas they have been fighting for matters of community interests over many years ... in no other part of the State were there so many cooperative societies as on the M.I.A. They were used to battling for community interests”.⁷⁵

A month later, a team of speakers from Griffith addressed a public meeting in Leeton, reasoning that community hotels would foster civilised drinking in proper facilities and create funds for community purposes. They would be “controlled by the public for the public benefit”. There was unanimous agreement,⁷⁶ and 3,000 signatures were collected on a petition to parliament.⁷⁷ The owners of the Hydro Hotel in Leeton (a fine art deco property) offered to sell it to the Shire Council so it could become the community hotel. The acting premier was said to be in favour of these reforms as they “place public interest and social service before profit and gave the local people a large measure of control”.⁷⁸ Ultimately, however, the lobbying from these MIA towns was unsuccessful in bringing about the necessary changes to NSW legislation.

⁷³ The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area was developed in the early 1900s (the Renmark Irrigation Colony was established in 1887).

⁷⁴ In 1923, a local newspaper had reported that state- and/or community-owned hotels were against the policy of the NSW government, and this was still the case 20 years later. See “Hotel Licenses Approved,” *Murrumbidgee Irrigator*, 9 October 1923, 2.

⁷⁵ “Agitation for Community Hotel,” *Murrumbidgee Irrigator*, 14 April 1944, 2.

⁷⁶ “Community Hotel. Public meeting at Leeton,” *Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga), 28 April 1944, 3.

⁷⁷ R. B. Pickering, Secretary of the Griffith Community Hotel and Liquor Reform Association, letter, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1945, 2.

⁷⁸ “Murrumbidgee May Set up First Community Hotels,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 July 1945, 4.

Why Were the Gothenburgs Adopted in South Australia and Not Elsewhere?

Despite pockets of intense local support for cooperative or community hotels in parts of New South Wales and to a lesser extent Victoria, and the apparent compatibility of Gothenburg principles with the histories and aspirations of the rural populations of these states, community pubs remained almost entirely a South Australian phenomenon throughout the 20th century. They dovetailed with features of its social history and the makeup of its population, with the Renmark Hotel functioning as the “trial run” for the Gothenburg system in Australia. It became the template for other towns to adopt the same innovation.

The guiding principles of Gothenburg-style hotels seemed to be compatible with the historical and social foundations of South Australia—a colony that had been a cradle of experimentation and communalism, with a moderate and tolerant attitude towards alcohol. The colony had been established in 1836 by respectable immigrants, free settlers rather than convicts.⁷⁹ There was to be no denominational norm or Anglican dominance, and the colony was consciously planned to be religious but non-conformist; members of the dissenting sects were open to the new and radical ideas prevailing at the time, including Lutherans who were escapees from religious conformity in Germany.⁸⁰ Each denomination had its own beliefs about the appropriateness or otherwise of alcoholic beverages. Some supported alcohol in moderation, while others (such as the Primitive Methodists, Wesleyans and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union) believed that the only solution to the drink problem was prohibition: they were opposed to both “social” drinking and to the idea of hotels as social centres for the community. The temperance alliances had some success, with local option votes resulting in the de-licensing of some hotels⁸¹ and the introduction of six o’clock closing in 1915, but in South Australia, they never really gained the upper hand.⁸² Neither the Anglicans nor most Lutherans (and certainly not the Catholics) endorsed prohibition, and over the years even the Methodists softened their position, saying that the moderate use of alcohol was not incompatible with Christian discipleship.⁸³ Mild-mannered temperance,

⁷⁹ Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), 3.

⁸⁰ Derek A. Whitelock, *Adelaide: From Colony to Jubilee, a Sense of Difference* (Adelaide: Savvas Publishing, 1985).

⁸¹ Local option laws were passed in South Australia from 1877 (allowing local community members to vote to eradicate licensed outlets in their neighbourhood) and in Victoria, where local option brought about the closure of 37 licensed premises in 1902: Milton Lewis, *A Rum State*, 56, 60; Elizabeth Jean Taylor, *Dry Zones: Planning and the Hangovers of Liquor Licensing History* (Singapore: Springer Verlag, 2019).

⁸² Judith Raftery, “God’s Gift or Demon Drink? Churches and Alcohol in South Australia between the Two World Wars,” *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 15 (1987): 16–41.

⁸³ A. D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 395.

rather than absolutist prohibition, suited the social and economic personality of the colony (later the state) of South Australia, and the civilising ideals associated with the Gothenburg principles were congenial even to a religiously oriented population. The hotel itself could introduce middle-class values in behaviour and speech and imbue the drink setting with respectability, in keeping with a growing body of opinion in Britain.⁸⁴ Another relevant factor in South Australia's history was its wine industry, as well as the German settlers who started it. The 1840s saw the beginning of wine cultivation in the Barossa for domestic consumption as well as for commercial sale. By 1883, South Australia was being promoted internationally as a land of corn and wine and oil.⁸⁵ The political and economic realities of South Australia's so-called Mediterranean climate and its associated wine-growing capacity contributed to the support within government and among rural populations for respectable licensed premises.

There were other elements embedded in South Australia's social history that were conducive to the ideals surrounding community ownership, such as prevailing notions of cooperative self-help. From its inception, the colony had been viewed as being self-supporting, with policies of self-help and communitarianism. In the economic downturn of 1893, it allowed small groups of settlers to hold and work land communally in agricultural villages along the Murray.⁸⁶ A local commentator observed that isolated settlements in sparsely populated areas and small blocks helped to "weld the settlers into a definite community, with very strong community interests".⁸⁷ Local histories suggest that the River Murray itself played a part in nurturing these qualities: it moulded the character of the towns along its upper reaches, and people had to cooperate if they were going to exploit the river successfully.⁸⁸ Several of the community hotel towns were also linked through their adoption of visionary schemes for the sort of progressive, well-planned communities that characterised the garden cities movement in Britain, founded in the 1890s by Ebenezer Howard. In Britain, these schemes for model towns often went hand in hand with alcohol reform, even local prohibition. Garden city principles were formally introduced to South Australia between 1916 and 1920 by Charles Reade, who was the first government-appointed town planner for the state. Apart from designing several Adelaide suburbs along garden city lines, he provided a

⁸⁴ Gutzke, "Progressivism and the History of the Public House," 238.

⁸⁵ J. P. Stow, "South Australia: Its History, Productions and Natural Resources," written for the Calcutta Exhibition by request of the South Australian Government (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1883).

⁸⁶ Nunn, *History of Waikerie*, 57; Alan Jones, *Lyrup Village: A Century of Association 1894–1994* (Lyrup: Lyrup Village Centenary Committee, 1994).

⁸⁷ Andison, *Berri*, 116.

⁸⁸ Casson and Hirst, *Loxton*, 122.

design for the grandly named Lake Bonney Garden City on the Murray, which became the more modest town of Barmera. It was one of the early adopters of a Gothenburg hotel.⁸⁹ Mildura and Renmark had been developed as planned and designed towns with institutes and tree plantings; both were known as temperance towns, as were Leeton and Griffith in the MIA, designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1915. News of Renmark's success was widely disseminated, and proponents of community ownership learned the procedures from one another. The Nuriootpa committee visited the existing Barmera hotel, and the Griffith liquor reformers spread the word via public meetings in Leeton and elsewhere in the MIA. While in Britain the People's Refreshment House Association had provided the organisational structure to disseminate its version of the Gothenburg System, in southern Australia, local people did it themselves.

What ultimately made it possible for the community hotels to flourish in South Australia, rather than elsewhere in the first half of the 20th century, was the existence of enabling liquor licensing legislation. Once the initial South Australian dry area had been repealed, the process was facilitated by the *Community Hotels (Incorporation) Act, 1938*,⁹⁰ and until 1967 the Riverland towns had the right to limit the number of licences, allowing a monopoly. Deregulation and a review of South Australian liquor laws in 1984 dismantled these earlier protections against competition.⁹¹ By comparison with South Australia's supportive stance, which lasted for many decades, governments in New South Wales, Victoria and elsewhere took an equivocating approach, meaning that the nascent interest in community hotels gained little or no momentum. An isolated example is that of Theodore, Queensland, part of the Dawson Valley Irrigation Scheme, which in 1948 formed a community cooperative association in order to purchase the Hotel Theodore.⁹²

Another reason New South Wales failed to develop community hotels in the 1940s and 1950s was perhaps the proliferation and increasing popularity of licensed clubs in that state.⁹³ Clubs were institutionalised in New South Wales from 1905 and provided better

⁸⁹ Robert Freestone, *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage* (Canberra: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 124.

⁹⁰ In South Australia, the *Community Hotels (Incorporation) Act, 1938* (no. 2407) validated the earlier incorporation of several of these hotels under the *Associations Incorporation Act, 1929–1935*: <http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/handle/2328/24937>.

⁹¹ P. F. Young and A. J. Secker, *Review of South Australian Liquor Licensing Laws* (Adelaide: Government of South Australia, 1984), 575; Brady, *Teaching "Proper" Drinking?*, 53.

⁹² A reformist Labor government in Queensland (1915–1919) established at least one state-owned public house there. See D. J. Murphy, "The Establishment of State Enterprises in Queensland, 1915–1918," *Labour History* 14 (1968): 21.

⁹³ Nerilee Hing, "A History of Machine Gambling in the NSW Club Industry: From Community Benefit to Commercialisation?," *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration* 7, no. 1 (2006): 11,

amenities than many hotels; they were also allowed to trade outside hotel hours, which was particularly popular during the years of six o'clock closing for hotels. Because they were originally not-for-profit associations with keen local membership, they fulfilled similar functions to—and thus obviated the “need” for—a community hotel. In Mildura, Victoria, for example, the existence of three licensed clubs catering to the different social strata of the town⁹⁴ may also explain why, despite 20 years of debate, the town never did develop a community-owned pub. However, in 1951 a Victorian Committee⁹⁵ inquiring into better tourist facilities in the state was very impressed with what was taking place in South Australia with the community-benefiting profits from the hotels at Renmark, Barmera, Berri and Nuriootpa. The committee recommended that community hotels would be a welcome innovation and concluded that the impediments in existing Victorian legislation that prevented municipal councils from conducting hotels should be removed. In the 2000s so far, residents of several very small Victorian towns have bought their hotels in order to save them from closure, such as Nandaly, in northwestern Victoria, in 2018.

Conclusion: Reinterpreting the Gothenburg System

In some ways, the association between Sweden and Australia is an unlikely one, but historically both countries shared traditions of binge-drinking with spirits, and each had influential (but not dominant) temperance experiences. Importantly, at the time of Renmark's “first community hotel in the British Empire”, Sweden was at the peak of its influence internationally on alcohol policy,⁹⁶ and as I have mentioned, Britain and the United States had imported versions of its municipal control policies.

There were certainly differences in what evolved in Australia. The Swedish system was originally designed to deal with unconstrained distillation in rural areas and drunkenness and poverty in industrialised towns and seaports, whereas the Australian towns were country populations dealing with a relatively small problem of public intoxication and sly grog dealing. Charles Chaffey himself acknowledged that the Renmark Hotel was not run *entirely* on the Gothenburg plan (although people often referred to it in that way). A Chaffey

http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J149v07n02_05. In 1947, a NSW referendum voted to abolish restrictions on the licensing of private clubs, and their numbers rose rapidly (Freeland, *The Australian Pub*, 184).

⁹⁴ “The Gothenburg Hotel: Inter-Lodge Debate,” *Mildura Cultivator*, 10 December 1913, 8; Hamilton-McKenzie, “I Need a Drink,” 18–21.

⁹⁵ State Development Committee of Victoria, *Report of the State Development Committee on Tourist Facilities, Tourist Accommodation and Accommodation* (Melbourne: Victorian Government, 1951), 20.

⁹⁶ Robin Room, “Sweden in an International Perspective: Alcohol Policy and Drinking Habits,” *Alkohol och Narkotika*, 95 (2001): 139–42.

biographer⁹⁷ has claimed that although it was described as such, Renmark was not really a Gothenburg hotel because, unlike the true Gothenburg principles as practised in Sweden, the Renmark management had no special power to regulate alcohol sales. This observation is true, in that in Australia alcohol regulation is managed by the state liquor-licensing authority. Nevertheless, the founding principles were adopted by Renmark and others that followed its example—that is, the manager had no pecuniary interest in the sale of liquor, and the profits from the hotel (after necessary expenses were covered) belonged to the community as a whole. This underlying ethos was perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the Gothenburg system: to eliminate the stimulus of personal gain from a legitimate commercial activity through the mechanism of “disinterested management”.

Some early versions of disinterested management, in Norway and parts of Britain, were characterised by extreme austerity: bars were antiseptic, with “perpendicular drinking” in force designed to discourage lingering.⁹⁸ This thinking is contrary to the stylish decor and comfortable fittings pursued in later years by Renmark and other community hotels, and contrary to present-day policies of harm reduction. Today, most Australian community hotels also own a takeaway bottle shop and gaming rooms: both provide good profits, but whether they are in the community’s interest is debatable. In contrast, gambling and “all immoral accessories” had been done away with in Rowntree and Sherwell’s vision for the Gothenburg system.⁹⁹ The Australian reinterpretation of the original Gothenburg governance made the board members (elected rate-paying citizens) into the decision-makers on the volume and direction of donations—a contrast with the Swedish Gothenburg’s close ties to the municipality. There, any profit above the shopkeeper’s set allowance of five per cent was divided between the municipality, the county and the state.¹⁰⁰ In Sweden today, the vestiges of the 19th-century approach can be seen in the state-owned *Systembolaget* stores, a network of tightly controlled “alcohol supermarkets” that have a monopoly on retail sales of strong beers, wines and spirits. Their profits support subsidiary health promotion organisations,

⁹⁷ Alexander, *The Life of George Chaffey*, 251.

⁹⁸ Greenaway, “Policy Learning and the Drink Question,” 908; David N. Gutzke, “Gentrifying the British Public House, 1896–1914,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 45 (1994): 29–43.

⁹⁹ Rowntree and Sherwell, *British “Gothenburg” Experiments*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, Ian R. Tyrrell, eds., *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003), 603.

alcohol-related research and *Fruktdrycker* clubs that promote non-alcoholic beer, wine and spirits.¹⁰¹

Unprotected by their earlier monopoly status bestowing a relatively assured financial viability, the community-owned hotels of South Australia that have survived must now face competition from other outlets. Nevertheless, they still feature prominently in rural towns as sociable, community-oriented, well-appointed venues with large dining rooms, local produce and, often, some remaining gardens. Their future in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be seen. Historians have disagreed over the question of whether South Australia continued to be a “social laboratory” of innovative social experimentation later than the mid-19th century.¹⁰² The hidden history of its revolutionary community hotels movement demonstrates that such a spirit of experimentation and innovation has indeed persisted, well into the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

I thank the two reviewers for their very helpful and insightful comments and would like to acknowledge the assistance of local historians, hotel managers and board members, particularly Robyn Cusick, Peter and Carla Magarey, Anne Mosey, Ann Ryan and Verity Wyld. Robin Room sparked my interest in this subject and has continued to deepen my study of it.

¹⁰¹ Thanks to Robert Kaskas, IOGT, Gothenburg, Sweden for this information. Björn Lundkvist and Carl-Frederik Johansson, “*Systembolaget*: The Swedish Alcohol Beverage Retail Monopoly,” in *Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems: Evidence and Community-Based Initiatives*, ed. Norman Giesbrecht and L. M. Bosma (Washington: APHA Press, 2017), 161–67.

¹⁰² Susan Marsden, “South Australia”.