

**New  
Directions  
in the Study of Alcohol**

*Published by the*  
**NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF ALCOHOL GROUP**

Designed and produced by Sheila Raby at Aquarius E•T•C

# New Directions in the Study of Alcohol

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The New Directions in the Study of Alcohol group is a multi-disciplinary forum established in the mid-seventies for people interested in swapping ideas on all aspects of alcohol use and problem drinking. It organises an annual conference and produces an annual publication: the journal. Members are encouraged to contribute to this journal! The content of contributions can be wide-ranging and could include for example early research findings, short case discussions, practical problems relating to treatment, prevention and training, news of local initiatives, letters, book reviews as well as conference papers. In short, anything which may be of interest to members and others in the field. As ever the success of the booklet depends on continuing support from members.

**SUBMISSIONS** to the journal should be sent to the Editor:

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Belvoir Park Hospital, Hospital Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT8 8JR.

Submissions will not be subject to any formal review system although the editors or the committee reserve the right to exclude or edit contributions. The group does not put any limitations on the personal freedom of authors to use material contained in their contributions in any other works.

Submissions should be on PC format disk in any common word-processed application, with a hard copy (double-spaced) on A4 paper. Where **references** are included they should preferably follow the Harvard system: author's name and date in the text; references in full at the end of the paper, listed in alphabetical order. All graphs and diagrams should be clear and appropriately headed, and preferably provided separate to the text.

**Non-members** can obtain information on joining the Group and can purchase copies of the journal by writing to the Editor at the above address.

## **Editor's Note to this Supplement**

The 2001 meeting in Dumfries is the 25th anniversary of the New Directions in the Study of Alcohol Group. In order to mark this important date we have published Doug Cameron's personal recollections of the group as a special supplement to the journal. It was originally a review of the group's first 15 years when we published it in Vol. 18, 1992, and Doug has kindly updated and re-edited it for this supplement.

The article charts the evolution of thinking in the New Directions group. As well as being of historical interest, it is also a cracking good read, written in Doug's typical laconic, easy, literate style.

Twenty-five years on it is quite appropriate that the roadshow we call New Directions has returned to its Scottish birthplace.

**Robin Davidson**

*Northern Ireland Centre for Clinical Oncology, Belfast*



# **MINSTRELS OF THE DAWN II**

## **Still singing after all these years!**

### **PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF 25 YEARS OF THE NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF ALCOHOL GROUP**

**Douglas Cameron**  
**University of Leicester**

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*This is an update of an article presented as an opening address at the New Directions in the Study of Alcohol Group annual conference in Llandudno in 1991. It remains just a story: the story of the group as I have seen it.*

*People frequently ask me about the group and its roots. I wanted to see if I could disentangle some of the threads of the fabric of the organisation because it has been notable how recurring some of the themes are. In some ways I am the right person to try and track the history of this group, in other ways I am completely wrong.*

*I am right because I am unique, being now the only person who has attended every conference of the group since its conception in 1976. 1980 was a near miss: I had to escape temporarily from a hospital bed to put in a brief visit, and therefore could not get more than a snapshot. But apart from that, I have been present and a full, some would say too full, participant in the deliberations. To the best of my recall, I was also at all the Leeds meetings of the Northern Chapter, and have been to one of the Midlands 'warm shed' meetings. For about half of the past 25 years I have been on the committee wearing some hat or other.*

*I am the wrong person because I have not been an objective observer, I have been in it and therefore not watching it. Also, as the sands of time trickle past, my memories become increasingly unclear. Attitudes and feelings govern my recall more than facts and what I still remember are events important to me at the time. I am also the wrong person because the group has been and is of great*

*importance to me. For reasons which will become obvious as I write, this forum has been one that has sustained me in my professional life more than any other.*

*So this account is in the oral tradition rather than in the elegantly documented historical tradition. But I have also used the group's documents. I still have all twenty-three booklets, and copies of our two books. I have also wandered through copies of minutes and other bits and pieces. But it is a personal view I present. Someone else would need to write the objective account and try to place the work of the group in the wider national and international context. I could never do that.*

As soon as I started to address the topic of the history of the group, I thought of Spike Milligan's war memoirs. Milligan was just a private in the British army during the second world war but called his memoirs *Adolf Hitler: My Part in his Downfall*. And I thought perhaps that's it. This group has been a little cog in the huge machinery of change that has taken place in our views of and ways of responding to people with declared alcohol problems. By itself it is of no real significance. But then I became less humble. Some of us: Ray Hodgson, Nick Heather, Ian Robertson, Anthony Thorley, Jim Orford, Robin Davidson, Bill Saunders, among others, have been far from 'privates'. They have written copiously outwith the group's activities and some of their books, like Nick and Ian's *Controlled Drinking* and Jim's *Excessive Appetites* (which he has just reworked into a second edition - a real labour of dedication and love) have been milestones. Others of us have not communicated particularly by writing books and papers. Our methods are verbal: lecture, debate and seminar. I would name David Davies, Ian Cameron, Bill and Margot Kenyon, George Gawlinski, Steve Green, Ron McKechnie, Jean Werner, Trevor McCarthy and me as belonging more in that group. And that was the first thing that dawned on me. The group contains people who communicate in all sorts of ways at all sorts of levels. During this next conference we will no doubt rediscover that. But what it does mean is that to understand the Group's impact, we need to recognise that much of what the group achieves is not tangible. It is alive in many of us all over the world. It has changed us.

I plan to spend more time on the earlier history of the group: later events are better known to many of us. But before I go back to the humble beginnings of the Group in the mid-seventies, I want to take people back to that time and remind them or tell them what the alcohol problems world was like then. To quote Carly Simon, "*It was so easy then*".

People who presented with alcohol problems were alcoholics. The job of the treatment agencies was to convince them of that fact and assist them towards 'recovery' from their disease. That was never a completed task, since it was an inexorable disease that could be arrested, not cured. The way to arrest the disease was to stop drinking. It was as simple as that.

David Davies's classic 1962 paper *Normal drinking in recovered alcohol addicts* had to a great extent been marginalised. Everyone reviewing the treatment literature now quotes it as being a watershed paper. But they did not do that then. Most specialist agencies and generic workers in Britain either did not know about it or ignored it. But David Davies never let it go. Indeed, when he heard that there were a number of folk up and down the country who wanted to get together to talk about controlled drinking, he happily put the resources of the Alcohol Education Centre behind the enterprise. He was Chair of the A.E.C. at this time.

It was not the D L Davies paper that kindled the Group. It was one from Sid Lovibond, whom at that time none of us had met. He, an Australian psychologist, had been doing heretical things in New South Wales. In the late 1960s a number of workers had discovered that normal volunteers could be taught to know their own blood alcohol concentration. This was done by feeding back to subjects what their B.A.C. was after asking them what bodily sensations they were experiencing. Bodily sensations worked better than emotional states. But after relatively few training sessions, these normal volunteers got quite good at that. What was important was that the feed back was given promptly. That was now possible because of a new invention: the Breathalyser. The heresy that Sid Lovibond committed was to train alcoholics to do it, and then he gave them electric shocks if their B.A.C. went above 70 mg%. Not only did Sid Lovibond do this, he also broadcast the fact in an international conference on alcohol and drug problems in Australia in 1970. The paper was published as a technique and with very short follow-up. My first inkling that something important was going on was when Jim Drewery gave me one of those waxy paged photocopies, like an old FAX, of Lovibond's conference presentation and said, "*There might be something in this for you, Douglas*". Only a life's work, as it transpired.

Worldwide, a number of us started trying out Lovibond-type experiments, very covertly and tentatively. Famous names in the United States entered the game:

The Sobells and Mansell Pattison. The game was to reconstitute 'controlled drinking' in people whose drinking was assumed to be out of control. In Dumfries, Mary Spence and I set up a little controlled drinking group which did not use electric shocks, but used education, drinking diaries, spouse involvement and other more subtle coercion. It also involved taking the group members down the pub for 'drinking practice'. I well remember the sense of apprehension that accompanied Mary and me on the first of these. Don't forget, we were committing heresy, we were advocating continued drinking for alcoholics, and we were going down the pub with them to help them to do it. Despite the fact that we had convinced ourselves that it was theoretically possible, we didn't really know. I was bloody terrified. In fact, I also remember that it was Mary and me who really wanted to get the drink down us on the first of these sessions. The clients knew what would happen. We suspected, but we didn't know. We still partially believed the alcoholism movement's propaganda.

We presented the short-term results of this group at the first aggregation of people interested in controlled drinking organised in Dumfries under the auspices of D L Davies's Alcohol Education Centre in early 1976, and discovered that we were not alone. It was because the first meeting was held in Dumfries that we decided to return this year for the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting.

At that first meeting, folk from Newcastle, Norfolk, Cambridge, Glasgow and the Maudsley also chipped in their experiences. Some were using cue exposure, others electric shocks and others simply talk. There was a mixture. Some were simply reporting controlled drinking as a tolerable by-product of abstinence oriented treatment whereas others were trying to institute it deliberately. There was also one member of Mary and my group there, representing the consumer.

There were very few of us, perhaps twenty, and the discussions in the bar of the Swan Hotel at Kingholm went on feverishly. Are there two kinds of alcoholics, the equivalent of the reactively and endogenously depressed? I remember having a disagreement with D. L. Davies about the nature of addiction. He told me that he thought smoking was just as much an addiction as alcoholism was. It is interesting that in the May 1991 edition of the *British Journal of Addiction*, a special on tobacco, Griffith Edwards and Martin Raw's editorial asked "What are the scientific, clinical and policy implications which stem from the realisation that the tobacco habit is nicotine dependence?" What indeed?

Regardless of the intellectual disagreements that we had, an emotional bond formed, the same bond that forms between heretics, between apostles, between people who think they are alone in a hostile world discovering friendly kindred spirits. And the outside world was hostile. I can tell horror stories of going to present the early controlled drinking group results in other settings. A conference in Exeter, I remember particularly. My talk was greeted with absolute, stony silence. Eventually a member of the audience said something like *"Thank you for your presentation, young man. No doubt in due course you will come to understand the nature of the disease"*. Also, after a bit of publicity in the media, an appearance on the Jimmy Young Radio 2 programme, I got letters forwarded. Here's an example:

*"... Will you therefore try to put right the very grave damage done by a doctor's statement on yesterday's (31.12.74) programme, that in HIS opinion, Alcoholics could be trained to be able to drink a certain amount of Alcohol without further damaging their health. All alcohol is poison to an alcoholic. If by some chance this Doctor could in the future prove his point, I think it is highly irresponsible of him to, in the meantime, relax the difficult efforts of Alcoholics who are now trying very hard to win this battle against alcohol."*

Looking back twenty five years, from these days of minimal interventions and self-help manuals and safe limits, it is difficult to believe that was how it was. But what we were doing was attacking a faith, a well established, accepted folk science. No amount of scientific or clinical data coming in from the United States, Australia or from our own work was going to undermine the faith. The only place where I felt safe to discuss these new beliefs and experiments was here, in New Directions Conferences. This view was obviously shared by a number of us. For after that first meeting we reckoned that getting together was a good idea, and the wandering conferences were born. They have always been at the core of the Group.

It was actually about 18 months before the next, which took place in Newcastle in February 1978. This one was the same format as the last. This time there were more of us: 31. We still sat in a circle, very 1960s, and had open discussion during and after the informal presentations. Two stuck out in my mind from that time. One was from the late Jean Werner, who just shared some case studies on some very dilapidated citizens under her care in Cambridge. She was very accepting of their continued drinking and realistic about what could be achieved by and with these folk. In reality, she was advocating what is now

called harm minimisation. More importantly, she was demonstrating continuing commitment despite her patients' continued drinking. The other was from George Gawlinski. He talked about himself, how he had been brought up as a Roman Catholic, and the sense of fear and excitement engendered in him by breaking free of that faith. He said that breaking free of 'alcoholism' was the same process and produced in him the same feelings. George had, I think, read the emotional tone of the meeting perfectly and converted us into disciples of a faith without frontiers. It was exhilarating. We agreed to meet again in six months.

Six months later took us to Birmingham. My recall of that is of a miserable time. In retrospect, the conference organisers made four grave errors. First, we were booked into a temperance hotel, which was cold and unwelcoming. Second, the conference took place well away from the hotel: we had to drive there across the city. Third, a conference dinner was arranged and had been paid for by a drug firm. This meant that half of us refused to go and went out as a group, feeling virtuous and untainted by commercialism. Finally, the seating in the conference room was in theatre style rows rather than in 'our' circle. Eventually, after much debate, we returned to the circle. It is interesting to note that even now, with numbers much bigger, old lags like me will still skulk in to the room and arrange chairs in a circle prior to the final sessions on 'Whither New Directions'. That is a relic of the Birmingham conference.

As is our wont, we do not repeat the same mistakes at the next conference: usually we wait till the one after. Hence the belief that the right conference format was not like the last one but the one before that! Slow learners, us. But the mistakes made in Birmingham were not made in Cromer. We were all together in a big seaside hotel, and that has tended to be the deal since. Not always seaside but usually a big hotel out of season. The Cromer conference, we are now in 1979, was great fun. More people came, more results of our enterprises and reviews of other people's were scrutinised. Anthony Thorley showed us his Venn diagram of consumption/harm/dependence which became so influential, even though it also became known as 'Thorley's balls'. The New Directions Conference was becoming an annual highlight. People would come regardless of the difficulty. At Cromer, Mike Hopley couldn't afford the hotel costs so slept in his van in the public car park. We smuggled food out to him. The Group was establishing great loyalty. We decided that we were not ephemeral but were a sustaining influence. We were here to stay. We would become a proper organisation, register as a charity. Nick Heather, Steven Green

and George Gawlinski followed the suggestion first made at Birmingham further and wrote a constitution.

Over the next year, the constitution was steered through the Charity Commission and a year later, at Southport in 1980, we became a constituted charitable organisation. We had 59 members. George Gawlinski became the first Chairman, Bill Kenyon the first Vice Chairman. Steve Green became Secretary, Guliz Elal Lawrence became Treasurer.

The 1980 Conference in Southport was another notable success. Conceptually, we were moving on. We were still interested in controlled drinking outcomes and studies. Nick presented a report of the four year follow-up of the Rand Corporation's study which, in part because it showed some moderated consumption as an outcome, had been the subject of vehement criticism in the States. But the group took a real swipe at alcohol dependence, or son-of-alcoholism as it could have been called. Three of us, Jonathan Chick, Anthony Thorley and me, produced papers which in their very different ways, highlighted the inadequacies of the concept.

Nick's article became part of his book, *Controlled Drinking* and the other three appeared in more coherent form in the first New Directions book. All four appeared in New Directions Booklet No. 1 which Nick offered to start producing. Bill Saunders's contribution to this conference: '*Treatment does not work*' marked the beginning of something the group has been rather good at: knocking our own and other people's efforts.

The group had come of age. It was properly constituted, forward thinking and creative. In 1980, you could possibly take a shy at alcoholism but not at the replacement, alcohol dependence. Not unless you were at the New Directions conference, that was. Also, interestingly at this time we started to look at ourselves. Nick did a survey of our attitudes and practices, and found that we practised what we preached. We were not reified researchers. We were talking about what we were doing. The tendency to look at ourselves continues. We have, over the years, done multiple surveys. We have looked at our attitudes, our drinking, our clients and at our definitions of normal and abnormal drinking and our current skills and experience.

Not only had we come of age, we had also become visible. I quote from the executive committee minutes of 5 January 1981:

*“George reported that ... he asked Chris Ralph (of the DHSS) if he could have coffee with him just to tell him about the New Directions Group and he found himself facing an hour’s interrogation by a full team of 16. They were particularly querying who was in the group, why wasn’t it affiliated to the Alcohol Education Centre, what was its relationship to other bodies, etc. They then asked what we wanted from them and George was able to say nothing yet but will make a further approach.”*

It is probably that George had stumbled in to the Department at a time when they were formulating plans to dismantle the four non-statutory pillars of the alcohol world: the National Council on Alcoholism, the Medical Council on Alcoholism, the Alcohol Education Centre and the real, beloved, cuckoo in the nest, the Federation of Alcoholic Residential, later Rehabilitation, Establishments, FARE.

I’m not sure if it was because of that encounter or not, but a posse of Departmental officials turned up at our next conference, at Canterbury (1981), and followed us around for the next few years. George Winstanley from the Brewer’s Society Social Problems Committee did the same thing. Canterbury was chosen for our 1981 conference because Terry Spratley and Alan Cartwright were there and we wanted them to engage with us. Many of us considered *Responding to Drinking Problems* to be something of a Bible and we thought our group needed them. They came up trumps, moving us on further. Not conceptually at this point, but in terms of our domestic roles as educators and therapists. Our debates about the nature of dependence continued, unresolved.

The membership of the group continued to change and expand. We now numbered 86. Nick Heather became chairman. But most regrettably, Bill Kenyon died on 5 April 1981, just at the beginning of one of his wonderful Liverpool International Conferences. Bill was a remarkable, charismatic enigmatic man. He had a drinking problem himself at one point and became a long-term abstainer, believing in the disease concept. He grew out of that and became a very occasional light drinker. To the best of my knowledge it was only his immediate family and his pals in New Directions with whom he could share that.

David Davies ceased regular attendance in 1979 when he retired. We asked if he would become our honorary president, a post he held until his death in 1982. The D. L. Davies Prize was instituted in his memory. (George Gawlinski told me

after I first gave part of this account as a lecture at the Llandudno conference in 1991 of the occasion when he went to offer D. L. Davies the presidency. DL said that he thought that the group needed to be much more radical than he could ever be. He could therefore be supportive of the group but not be **of** the group. Therefore he wished to have the title Honorary President rather than President).

1982 saw us go to Bollington, near Manchester. This gave the floor to other long-standing New Directions adheres Tony Ford, Liz Smith and Ken Jones, who followed a tradition of using the first plenary session to update us on what was new on their patch. Again we broke new ground. We looked at community based prevention three years before David Robinson and Philip Tether published *Preventing Alcohol Problems*, and we were not preoccupied with reducing consumption. This may have been related to finding a small village pub staggering distance from the hotel which sold real ale, a constant lack at New Directions Conferences, and which considered itself immune to permitted hours legislation! We also looked at relapse in a symposium organised by Bill Saunders and Steve Allsop. Relapse and relapse prevention was newsy at this time, following the work of Alan Marlatt. And we were there, thinking about it.

Booklet No 4, which contains a number of articles from the Bollington Conference, also contains correspondence from Mark Sobell and Alan Marlatt about the acrimonious state of affairs in the United States where the Sobells had recently been accused of falsifying the results of their classic controlled drinking experiments undertaken in the early 1980s. Since there was the whiff of litigation around, the correspondence was circumspect. But we in the group had to accept that the 'alcoholism movement' was fighting back, and venomously. Mark Sobell said in his letter (August 26, 1982) to Nick ...

*"We, as you, have been outspoken for some time with regard to asserting that the alcohol field is in the midst of a 'scientific revolution'. With the theological zeal that characterises many in the alcohol field, it would appear that the revolution has now escalated to full scale warfare".*

As a result of excellent organisation, the Bollington conference put the organisation substantially into the black financially. We had enough money to organise a really big conference in 1983 in a really big plush hotel in North Berwick, and could afford to invite Robin Room, one of our heroes from the United States, to stop off on his way from Geneva to California and address us.

But for me it wasn't Robin's address that was memorable. It was Ian Cameron's extraordinarily evocative *Moralizing in the Fifties*. It is printed in Booklet No 6. I'll give you just a flavour of it:

*"Psychiatrists raised expectations of cure which they couldn't deliver. They'd oversell psychiatry at dinner parties or on the T.V., where they were in great demand, and then disappoint clients in the clinic looking for lasting solutions to their problems.*

*"Chronic alcoholism was the drinking disease of the 50s - the preponderant causes of which were said by Mayer-Gross, in the first edition of his textbook to be 'environment and social'. But when the alcoholic claimed environmental and social reasons for being the way he was, Mayer-Gross quoted Kraepelin at him. Kraepelin's study of alcoholic excuses for excessive drinking; (included) "trivial rationalisations" like the "example and company of other", "membership of a Club accustomed to meet at an Inn", "visiting a pub to shelter from the rain", "special family occasions", "celebrating passing an examination", or "successful business deals", "Professional meetings", "standing rounds among friends" and so on. Mayer-Gross went on to say that the Chronic Alcoholic never blamed himself (which he clearly thought he should do)."*

(Following an account of hospital-based treatment, Ian Cameron reports):

*"Patients were impressed by all of this because, to begin with, in hospital they had no inclination to drink. They felt good and believed that one of the techniques (narcosis or aversion) had done the trick - when they were asleep perhaps. They had a reasonably interesting time doing O.T. and met the girls from the female wards in the evening. When the family began to visit, and in due course when the patient went home for the day or weekend, things changed, i.e. he discovered that nothing really had changed. Life was still rather more complex than he could cope with. He felt swindled, I think, by his hi-jack to hospital, by the inhuman processes that brought about his submission and by his lack of participation in any of the planning up to now. On returning to hospital from the weekend he'd bring back half a bottle, drink it on the ward - usually with another alcoholic for company and consolation. He would then express some of his feelings about the hospital, bluntly, in front of the staff, confirming their view that alcoholics were hopeless and aggressive. Anger escalated. Blows were struck, reinforcements*

*called and punishment given out or discharge against medical advice prescribed with the recorded comment that the patient's motivation had never been good anyway, or that there was underlying psychopathy of the inadequate or aggressive type."*

There were other gems at the 1983 conference. Ken Roberts talking about alcohol from the perspective of a sociologist of leisure and the late Fred Yates, ever the enthusiast, struggling to make sense of the cultural dimensions of alcohol use. There was also Steve Green and George Gawlinski's complex game which got us all to look hard and work hard at understanding where our little treatment services fitted in, and just how vulnerable they were to political whim. All these themes led to plans that next year's conference should address head-on the concepts of normality and abnormality in drinking.

But there were other currents beginning to flow in the group's stream of consciousness. These were about whether we should incorporate the use of substances other than alcohol into our dialectic. At this time, Ian Cameron was in favour, saying "*that would really be a new direction*". Bill Saunders argued that we should take account of findings from the wider drugs field; and that would be to our benefit. So for two thirds of the life of the group, we have been arguing about the involvement-with-drugs issue, and about whether there were new directions to be found. Second, the importance of the concept of dependence continued to be a powerful undercurrent. Third, as a result of the gentle persuasion of folk like Gillian Tober, Rose Kent and Clare Wilson, gender issues became more central to our thinking.

The circus moved on. In 1984, we went to an odd hotel at Woodhall Spa in the wilds of Lincolnshire. The hotel seemed virtually unchanged since the second world war when it had been the officer's mess of an R.A.F. squadron. Here we looked at normal drinking, including our own. Marilyn Christie reported back on our drinking diaries and coined the phrase "*This was not a typical week*". Indeed it was not, for during the week's data collection, many of us had been at the closing-down party of F.A.R.E., which involved consuming large quantities of alcohol, in the form of Asti Spumante, as I vaguely remember. What on earth would Emil Kraepelin had made of us. Worse was to come. We set up an evening as a controlled drinking experiment, setting limits quite randomly on the consumption of two-thirds of the participants at the conference. Getting round the elaborate system of rules and vouchers became the name of the game. People discovered that bottles of Pils were being given out for only one

unit. All stocks were soon depleted. People cheated, stole, skulked off and behaved very badly. There were bitter complaints about the cost of nonalcoholic drinks. The barman, drawn into the feedback session, claimed that he found it difficult to believe that a group of professional people could behave so badly.

There was a political dimension to all this as well. The group has always contained a preponderance of people of the left, with residual sixties liberalism alive and well. That was why Philip Tether received a rough ride from us. As George Gawlinski wrote in Booklet No. 8:

*“The speakers demonstrated that, if applied properly, we may have the technology to save people from their own problems. The session did, however, raise as many questions as were answered and left me particularly wondering if the risks to civil liberty were worth it, and what kind of boundaries we, as a society, should place on the prevention lobby?”*

In the middle of the Thatcher years, as we then were, it was inevitable that issues of care versus control should come onto the agenda. The Government was putting money into drugs services. Many alcohol agencies for financial rather than ideological reasons were combining, and suppression of an illegal activity had more face validity than suppression of the legal, and much engaged in by N.D.S.A.G. members, activity, consumption of beverage alcohol.

The 1984 conference was highly introspective. It concentrated on us, how we behaved, and how we drank. Some were very irritated by it. Others still smirk about it. Clearly, the next year would have to be different. Anthony Thorley replaced Nick in the chair. Difficult times were ahead.

But before the 1985 conference happened, the group reached another milestone. Our first book was published, under the editorship of Nick Heather, Ian Robertson and Phil Davies. It is still available. To the best of my knowledge it has not been remaindered, and for a few years provided a few quid from its sales into our coffers. I believe that it remains a useful and elegant book. It contains three sections, on dependence, treatment and prevention, and argues the pros and cons of their value and efficacy in a balanced way. As a statement of the preoccupations of the group members during our first seven or eight years, it is still of interest, perhaps now more to historians.

I think the 1985 Conference at the gorgeous Dyffryn House, near Cardiff, was the biggest ever. We now had 158 members. There were loads of newcomers, including newly-appointed members of Alcohol Concern staff, and perforce, the conference format moved away from groupey-experiential towards stand-up speakers in front of more formal audiences.

There was a clear agenda too: now is the time to incorporate other drugs into our conferences. After all, dependence was quite global and it was artificial to segregate alcohol dependence as if it was fundamentally different from other dependencies. And along came Mike Gossop from the Addiction Research Unit in the Maudsley to underline the argument.

This may appear hard, but I think that at Dyffryn, the group was subjected to a selling job, with interest in drugs and the concept of dependence being the goods touted. Whether that was true or not, there was our most acrimonious A.G.M. ever that year for Anthony Thorley to try and contain, with two motions advocating constitutional changes generating particularly powerful emotions. One was *“That N.D.S.A.G. extends its focus to include other addictions”*. The other linked to that was *“That N.D.S.A.G. change its name to the New Directions Group”*. Entrenched positions and vehement debate seemed to be interminable. Hannan Rose, something of a constitutional authority, proposed the motion *“next business”*, a device to suspend any further discussion on the first motion and the second motion rapidly suffered the same fate. And there the matter still stands. Looking back, it seems to me that the storm was not about interest in other drugs, it was about a rejection of the concept of dependence and at that time the two were being intertwined.

And so to Otterburn (1986), in the wilds of Northumberland. This was the second time that the Newcastle gang had organised the annual conference. Fred Yates’s introduction to Booklet No. 11, containing some of the conference proceedings, said it all:

*“Putting together a conference programme for N.D.S.A.G. is rather like one imagines casting a play from a gallery of wayward celebrities - the personae begins to take over the plot. This year at Otterburn I felt that the main theme of research vs. practice survived and brought out the best in the group because it exposed a tender nerve which is inflamed and not often openly debated at our annual meetings. The central debate on the motion ‘This house deplores the rise of psychological imperialism’ captured the spirit of*

*the weekend in an indescribable mix of theatre, genuine passion and, at moments, rationality about the value of research.”*

For me Ron McKechnie’s killer blow in the debate was “*How can psychologists possibly be accused of imperialism when we’ve been trying to give our knowledge away for years?*” That is not only true of psychology, it is also true of the N.D.S.A.G. generally.

Otterburn was also notable for the welcome return of Jim Orford to the group, and for a superb presentation of the pearls contained within his book *Excessive Appetites* which had just been published. It was also notable for the appearance of Colin Brewer and the Antabuse debate, which is a microcosm of the care and control issue. At Otterburn gender issues remained high priority, and the group elected Gillian Tober to its Chair.

With Gillian and Jeff Allison now both in Leeds, a new format was added to the group’s activities. These were the one-day ‘Northern Group’ meetings held in January in that city. These meetings were well attended by members from Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Midlands and North of England. Robin Davidson wrote as Editor of Booklet No. 12, which task he had taken over from Nick Heather:

*“The New Directions Northern Members conference was held in Leeds at the end of January (1987). After all the animated debate over the last couple of years on whether to combine alcohol with other drugs this conference was refreshing in that speakers wandered unselfconsciously into the heroin, tobacco and benzodiazepine fields without any long, philosophical heart-searching ... it does seem that members are now quite happy to draw on information from related areas as should be the case in any mature forum for exchange of ideas.”*

In 1987, the Annual Conference moved to Exeter. The diversity of the content of this conference was striking. We decided we wanted to learn from other fields, so we invited a learned anthropologist who fascinated by telling us about khat usage in the Yemen and the yet to be famous John Banham, later to become Director General of the C.B.I. to address us. Also, we managed to capture Marcus Grant to pay a return visit. The conference format had plenty of small groups, and as a result of the efforts of John Hinsley, a men’s liberation

group put in an appearance, only to be invaded by many women participants! But, for the first time, N.D.S.A.G. membership was falling.

Nick Heather had failed to secure continued support for his unit in Dundee and had been appointed to a Chair in Sydney. We decided to offer him the post of President, which had been vacant since David Davies died in 1982. Nick was surprisingly touched by that: I guess he had failed to recognise how major a part he personally had played in the Group's development and success. Everyone else associated with the group knew. In keeping with tradition, he accepted the post as Honorary President. Interestingly, it was around the time of Nick's departure that N.D.S.A.G. wrote the only lobbying letter it ever did, to the Department of Health decrying the leaking away of talent in the British alcohol field to the Americas and the Antipodes. In retrospect, that was probably a mistake, for the group's strength lies mostly in the fact that it is not a lobbying organisation or pressure group. It is a think tank. But it was at that time a think tank under pressure. And some of our mates were being forced abroad and we missed them.

Around this time, the group suffered a temporary setback in its fortunes. There was a feeling of some staleness, of some lack of direction and purpose. Gillian Tober captured this in her editorial of Booklet No. 13:

*“Charismatic groups must, by their very nature, change. If the ‘cause’ is lost then the group disappears; if the cause wins the group must become part of the establishment just as the cause has done. You cannot keep fighting for something that has been established. And in this country at least - moderation goals in alcohol interventions are well accepted. The language of social learning theory is creeping into the literature and practice. Not always consistent but it's there. So what happens? Charismatic groups usually become routinised - rationalised, bureaucratised. It is this transition that precipitates not only the occasional constitutional crisis but particularly the questioning about the direction of the group. Tricky - when its charismatic nature is reflected in the very name.”*

The organisers of the Cambridge conference in 1988 thus had a particularly difficult task. What happened was odd. We all turned up, like we do. But we had a weekend party. The meticulous and serious content of the conference took second place to having fun together. At the time it was a real laugh, but

what we were actually doing was avoiding the real problems that confronted us. And there was good content there. Robin Bunton's social policy analytical work, Nura Paul's personalised adult children of alcoholics and Tim Kidger's construction of a model of effective treatment. But unforgivably, I think, we returned to old habits: knocking the disease concept of alcoholism as personified by Robert Lefever. Mary Spence, who like me had never missed a conference before, put in a brief appearance and has not returned. Had we but seen it, there were in the Cambridge conference seeds of real new directions. We were too busy having fun. But as a result of the fun, the cohesion remained. In an odd way, our guilt increased the commitment. At the Cambridge conference.

Cambridge brought us back to our senses. So Crieff in 1989 was a much more serious business. The conference benefited from a number of imported speakers from a diverse collection of Scottish projects including community development and community action, housing and AIDS. John Davies put in an important piece about attribution. The conference in its cyclical way put aside much time for group discussion and development, and there was no feeding back from the groups to disinterested participants of the plenaries. Thus our experiences of the conference were all quite different. But the main theme of care versus control was retained high on the agenda throughout. At the Crieff conference, Gillian stood down as chair and I took over.

The 1990 conference took place at a mock gothic manor house in Leicestershire. Again it was a rich and diverse menu, with sessions on health, crime, gender, therapy and ideologies. Thus in keeping with our traditions, all human life was there. Particularly notable, I hear, were Betsy Ettore's '*Is gender an important dimension when considering alcohol problems?*' and Terry Spratley's '*How we damage our clients*'.

In the final sessions, there was still alive and well the feeling of uncertainty about the group and its future. Also, the membership numbers continue to fall slowly and the conference attendance was the smallest for some years.

In 1991 there were two further developments. The bad news was the cancellation of the Leeds meeting because of lack of offers of participation. The good news was the publication of *Counselling Problem Drinkers*, the Group's second book. It was edited by Robin Davidson, Steve Rollnick and Ian MacEwan and used as a structure Prochaska and DiClemente's stages of

change model. It was a very different book from the first, being much more practical and less theoretical.

The 1991 Llandudno conference was another 'hit', notable for a feel of Welsh ethnicity, and an erudite and thought provoking presentation from Mary Douglas, the anthropologist and author of *Constructive Drinking*. How little the group really knew of the anthropology of drinking! It was also notable for having simultaneous translation into and from Welsh. So all looked set fair for the 1992 conference back in Scotland.

The conference was planned around what the organisers (I was one of them) thought was a timely and relevant topic '*Oppression, integrity and survival, in our clients, our agencies and ourselves*'. The programme included personal accounts of being oppressed, in totalitarian states, in prison, by ethnicity, by disability. It included workshops on strategies to survive oppression and on the need to maintain networks. It also included a session on whether it was time to establish a drinkers/drugtakers charter, on the rights and duties of being a user.

But the conference was not to be. This was a time when most of us were feeling under organisational and personal pressure. Our agencies and workplaces were being 'managed' as they never had been before. Some smaller agencies were being closed down with staff, some of whom were N.D.S.A.G. members, made redundant. In the NHS and universities, staff were all being given performance targets and were having to justify how every minute was being spent. Some of us became infested with the virus of managerialism and implemented rigid systems ourselves. These were oppressive times indeed. So much so that many people thought that they could not justify time away from their oppressive workplaces to examine how they were being oppressed. One obvious way in which this was done was by suppressing training budgets. In that introductory year of managerialism, many people's training budgets were simply removed completely.

Whatever the reasons, few people signed up to come. Some said the programme was irrelevant, some said Pitlochry was too far away, some said it didn't have anything to do with alcohol. And the Addictions Forum had been born, and was running, as it still does, a good number of training and educational events which were well subscribed. Thus the 1992 conference never took place. Instead we held an AGM in Leicester in the middle of

England to decide what to do: should we wind up the organisation or try to keep it alive. At this time, as he has done so often, Tim Kidger provided guidance. He had been a very able treasurer for a number of years, and more than anyone else, kept the organisation on a firm financial footing. It was he who suggested that we ran a loss-leading conference, either to wind up the organisation, or to kick start it again. We gave Rose Kent some money and the job of organising the event. And she delivered.

The 1993, 1994 and 1995 conferences all took place in Bowness-on-Windermere in the English Lake District. We did not know on day one of the conference whether the 1993 one would be a closing down party. It was not. Old lags turned up in large numbers and folk like John Davies became regular features. The N.D.S.A.G. bikers chapter was born. The papers and debates were the usual mix of the erudite and the good humoured. Who can forget Mike Hopley allegedly pretending to be acting the role of train spotter, complete with specs mended with sticking plaster, ballpoint pen stains on his anorak pocket and real wild enthusiasm about trains in his eyes, or Jeff Allison the skydiver? Equally, who could forget the debate about the potential risks of brief interventions? And from someone with his fair share of paranoid genes, it was rich to hear Nick Heather say that he'd been to brief interventions conferences all over the world and never before heard any group air the suspicions, anxieties and uncertainties that we in New Directions had aired about the whole ideology behind their implementation.

During these years we also invited people from the 12 steps movements. Not as we had done in Cambridge, to paper over the cracks of our own divisions by lampooning a common 'enemy', but with real humility that these folk might be offering something that we so-called hard headed scientists might not be taking sufficient cognisance of. This year's conference probably had some seeds planted in 1994 beside Lake Windermere. Or on it, for the group hired pleasure craft to experience rather closer the joys of boating on the lake. Or perhaps in the delicious lakeland pub, with delicious lakeland beer, the *Hole in the Wa'* in Bowness village.

The consequence of having conferences three years running in the Windermere hotel was that the group was again cohesive and vigorous. It was time for the travelling circus to move on: to Bromsgrove (1996), Bath (1997) Sheffield (1998), Manchester (1999) and Torquay (2000).

Current members will all have their own particular memories of these past few years. But for me the main themes have been about trying to make sense of and live within the new culture of managerialism. We have often said on planning meetings *"that's a slot for a suit"*. And we have friendly 'suits': Pete Forrester, Geof Cobbe and even Richard Velleman who is both one of us and a 'suit'. That is scary. For we know that we have to do our best to live in the world between 'management' and our clients. And we have statutory reminders of where we might be going: Mike Hough, a 'suit' with Powerpoint talking about controlling drugtaking and takers. It all harks back to the Pitlochry programme - the best conference we never ran. Our language is different: we talk about risk management - as we did in detail at Torquay. But the underlying issues are there.

As ever, there have been spectacular conference moments: the late Fred Yates being an enthusiast - this time about computers. Jim Orford and Alex Copello getting all participants to be family members, therapists or clients. Alex Georgiakis, Pip Mason and Barbara Elliot playing Trev McCarthy's game in Sheffield and saying what it was from the worlds of concepts, colleagues and customers that had most enthused them - just a delight. Robin Davidson, whenever he can be persuaded to speak, and in particular when talking of his ever burgeoning collection of five-stage models was a wonder to hear. And dare we ever put Trev McCarthy, Pip Mason, Robin Davidson and Barbara Elliott on a debating platform together, without ready access to a cardiac resuscitation machine?

We have talked about our attempts to export the ideology of the group elsewhere, notably at the meeting in Bath, and about how hard it is to do. For we are not exporting a marketable package. We are exporting a vision thing, as George Bush the elder called it. But actually all we have on offer is ourselves.

Many of us old lags are now doyens of the field. We are the people that we used to look up to, to resent, to emulate, to be jealous of and in awe of. And yet I feel as lost as ever, as uncertain, as bewildered. I still am bowled over by the quality of the material presented at New Directions conferences. I learn something new at every conference. It is still the best show in town.

## **Yes, but what new directions?**

So that is the New Directions story so far. What sense can be made of it all? What has been going on? What have all these, at times vehement and personalised, disagreements and debates been about? What, if any, are the New Directions?

I've tried to remember what I believed at the time and what sort of response my views created in others and similarly what response others generated in me when discussing these issues.

In 1976, we seemed to be believing that controlled drinking studies were of great value, treatment for people with drinking problems of moderate value and we were neutral about the value of the disease concept of alcoholism. By the next meeting in 1978, we were becoming less convinced of the value of controlled drinking treatment and of treatment generally. We were now hostile to the disease concept of alcoholism which we saw as holding us back. In 1978-79, we were talking about dependence but neutral about it. In 1980, our views were moderately against the concept of alcohol dependence being of value in understanding the nature of people with alcohol problems.

Some views gained a position and stayed there. Hostility to the disease concept of alcoholism has been fixed since 1978, but our hostility to twelve-steppers has abated: these folk might have been on to something after all. The value of the involvement of outsiders in our deliberations started with Robin Room in 1983 and over the next four years became a fixed belief. Outsiders are now seen as a valuable addition to our conference. Similarly, having had our awareness of gender issues raised by Gill, Rose, Clare, Ian MacEwan and John Tinsley, we have never doubted the importance and value of that perspective. Interestingly, controlled drinking studies, having been the *raison d'être* of the group in its early days soon became a matter of indifference. There was a flurry of interest when the alcoholism movement struck back at the Sobells in 1982-83, but when Griffith Edwards published the 25 year follow-up of DL Davies's magnificent seven in 1985 showing them to be doing rather badly, it hardly engendered any comment. By then the floodgates of the feasibility of resumed moderate consumption were already wide open. Within this group the conceptual leap had occurred and was irreversible.

One value, that of making sense of an individual's drinking, varied between neutral and totally positive. In our group it has never been seen as of no value. We had never adhered to Ian Cameron's fifties model here.

Other issues, like 'involvement in other drugs', 'value of treatment' and 'value of the concept of dependence' have veered over the years between positive and negative. These have been the Group's battlegrounds. It is to our credit that we have not maintained fixed positions on these issues. The debate about the value of treatment is finely balanced, with new data shifting our position year-by-year. Similarly, in the mid-1980s alcohol dependence did appear to have some superficial validity. I believe that over the past decade, the Group is moving beyond that. Terry Spratley's comment at the end of the 1990 conference at Harlaxton that "*Dependence is now holding us back*" and his questioning of the received wisdom of withdrawal phenomena, along with Robin Davidson's factor analysis of the significance of dependence as a determinant of drinking were powerful forces shifting the Group's consensus. It is interesting to me that the value of the concept of dependence and the value of making sense of an individual's drinking seem to mirror each other, as one goes up the other goes down. It's obvious, if you think about it.

So, what are the current pluses and minuses in our Group's value system? As usual, we don't like the disease concept of alcoholism, and we may be growing away from alcohol dependence. Controlled drinking studies are *passé*. We currently believe somewhat in the value of treatment and in the sharing of lessons gleaned from the users of other substances. We are very keen on attempts to make sense of an individual's drinking/drugtaking, on cognisance of gender issues and on learning from outsiders to the alcohol and drugs field.

I don't know whether you call those new directions or not. It all seems a bit chaotic really. If only we could get all us huskies to pull in the same direction, then we could really get this sled going fast. But if we wanted to do that, we'd appoint the equivalent of party whips and become unquestioning party hacks. And that was the approach in the alcohol field when it became bereft of new directions in the 1950s and 1960s. The fun for a New Directions husky is to try to get as many other huskies as possible running for as long as possible in your direction.

Finally, why did I call this commentary *Minstrels of the Dawn*? It's the title of an old Gordon Lightfoot song, and for me it characterises what the New Directions in the Study of Alcohol Group actually offers. Like minstrels we wander the country singing songs. The songs we sing, in our various ways, are of the possibility of a new understanding of the nature of substance misuse problems. We'll sing about it but we won't produce it - yet. So we are in a real sense *Minstrels of the Dawn*, proclaiming the possibility of the new. I wonder how much closer to the dawn we'll all end up after this next conference. I don't know. But there is one thing that I guarantee: It won't be boring finding out.

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