

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Temperance lives and landscape: Lady Elizabeth Biddulph, Lady Henry Somerset, and late nineteenth-century Ledbury

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Abstract

This article considers the relationship of two prominent leaders of British women's temperance, Lady Henry Somerset and Lady Elizabeth Biddulph. They were noteworthy for taking opposing sides when the British Women's Temperance Association divided on the question of the political reach of its work. Somerset and Biddulph were elite women, daughters of earls and near neighbours around Ledbury, a centre of cider apple and hop cultivation in Herefordshire. Both made their first temperance pledge in the area. We examine their geographical proximity and consider the importance of local agricultural labour and landscapes to their temperance work.

Introduction

Now no one can live in our county, no one can see our beautiful orchards, no one can come amongst us, without realising that we have in our midst a great evil always at hand – our cider. Herein we have a great enemy facing us constantly, an enemy that we must fight and conquer.

(Lady Henry Somerset, Eastnor, 1885)¹

Place was foundational to the temperance movement. Where temperance happened was not incidental to what happened. This was the popular story of temperance biography and serialised fiction. For the poorest in society, the promise of sobriety was both social and spatial.² Foregoing alcohol could lead to better housing and new standing in communities, and even a fuller form of citizenship. Such narratives often associated drink with urban problems and set temperance in a context of industrial self-improvement. Rural areas such as Herefordshire were sites of agricultural labour and alcohol production. As our epigraph demonstrates, they were identified as places with alcohol problems in their own right and became distinctive arenas for temperance action that united landowners and labourers.

In this article, we examine the role of the small market town of Ledbury in eastern Herefordshire in the temperance lives of Lady Henry Somerset and Lady Elizabeth Biddulph. Ledbury was an electoral division of the county council after its creation in 1889 and the head of the local poor law union, polling, county court, and highway districts. Rider Haggard in his

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Figure 1. H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England: being an account of agricultural and social researches carried out in the years 1901 & 1902*, Volume 1 (London, 1902). Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

agricultural survey of 1901 and 1902 strongly emphasised the importance of hops and cider to the local economy (Figure 1).³ Jakeman and Carver's 1890 directory gives the population of Ledbury as 4,276 in 1881 and lists 32 farmers, 3 agricultural implement manufacturers, 6 blacksmiths, and 3 wheelwrights in the parish of 7,706 acres. It described Ledbury's 'principal commerce' as depending on 'the produce of the neighbouring orchards and hop-grounds, the hops from the adjacent district being of excellent quality'.⁴

The rural context of Ledbury, we argue, marked the turn to temperance work by Lady Henry and Lady Elizabeth. Lady Henry is a noteworthy exception to David Fahey's observation that 'historians have rarely written about England's temperance women'. Both promotional stories from the period and subsequent biographies document her work as president of the British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA) and international travel in the cause of temperance.⁵ Our focus is from the period when she returned to her estate at Eastnor, less than two miles east of Lady Elizabeth's home in Ledbury, in 1883. Lady Elizabeth took her pledge at Ledbury, and Lady Henry took hers amongst her tenants at Eastnor.

Rural matters preoccupied a range of reformers, from Octavia Hill, whose interest in rural protection was a corollary to urban improvement, to Daisy Greville, Countess of Warwick, who funded agricultural education for women in the final years of the nineteenth century.⁶ Lady Henry and Lady Elizabeth brought a distinct rural focus to their social reform work and their leadership roles within the temperance movement. Women's temperance work developed from religious and moral framings of respectability into what Gemma Outen terms a 'complex space of female-led philanthropy and charity'.⁷ Such a focus on charity – on roles deemed distinctly feminine – suggests a practical demarcation of women's work as an extension of their feminine responsibilities.⁸ Take Frank Prochaska's assessment, for example, that 'Christianity confirmed what nature decreed: women had a rightful and important place in the charitable world'.⁹ Aristocratic women, it seems, were tasked with maintaining the rural social order. Yet the broad nature of rural work points to the limits of such a reading. Women were often closely involved in the detailed management of estates and investments in land, for example.¹⁰ Jessica Gerard has argued that in rural settings landed wealthy women exercised clearly defined charitable roles. These brought greater freedoms than in their urban work as they were more likely to know the people who lived and laboured on their estates.¹¹

Through her inheritance of Eastnor, Lady Henry could reinterpret the traditional responsibilities of the lady of the manor over the economic and social life of the estate. These included housing and home life, the patronage of parish churches with the power to impose a 'pet parson', and various institutions of care and tutelage.¹² All were inseparable from concerns about drink. In the next section, we introduce Lady Elizabeth and Lady Henry, exploring their connections to Ledbury – including to religious practice and the influence of Nonconformist traditions of temperance. We then discuss the agricultural history of the area, demonstrating how cider and hops were associated with local landed estates, and examine how both women translated their earlier work in London to rural Ledbury at a time of broad agricultural decline and the advent of industrial cider manufacture. We consider how their commitment to temperance then found expression in their local work and their relationship to one another – particularly as Lady Henry pursued a broader political agenda on issues such as women's suffrage. This led Lady Elizabeth to join the breakaway Women's Total Abstinence Union (WTAU), becoming its second president. Finally, we weigh the legacies of their work on this agricultural community.

Lady Elizabeth Biddulph (1834–1916) and Lady Henry Somerset (1851–1921)

Lady Elizabeth and Lady Henry – both daughters of earls and hence titled ladies in their own right – moved to the Ledbury area in the early 1880s. They belonged to a small group of families that dominated local affairs, and their ideas, wealth, and status ensured they were prominent figures in the district for at least the following twenty years.¹³ Marriage played very different roles in their being in Herefordshire. In 1877, Lady Elizabeth married Michael Biddulph MP (1834–1923). The Biddulph family had owned Ledbury Park since the seventeenth century, with 'the grandest black-and-white house in the county' occupying a dominant position in the town centre (Figure 2).¹⁴ The Biddulphs traced their wealth to London banking: Edward Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, had an account with Biddulph and Cocks 1877–1910.¹⁵

It was Lady Elizabeth's second marriage. She had first married the Liberal MP John Adeane of Babraham Hall, Cambridgeshire, in 1860. They had three children and the family travelled in France and Italy. She was widowed in 1870 and later appointed as a member of the Royal Household and a Woman of the Bedchamber (Figure 3). She engaged in charitable work in London's East End and was concerned with the dangers of alcohol. Her physician Sir Andrew Clark had refused to prescribe her with alcohol during an illness, with positive outcomes.¹⁶ In August 1880, she opened the first coffee house in Ledbury at 25 The Homend and ceremonially drank its first cup.¹⁷ In a family memoir from 1910, she recounted how her father's experiences of



Figure 2. Ledbury Park. Godfrey Bingley Photographic Archive, MS 1788/57/40, 1907. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library.

the impact of drink in the Navy ‘made him very careful’ when at the family’s Wimpole estate.¹⁸ Her brother ‘Champagne Charlie’, 5th Earl of Hardwicke, who amassed debts from horseracing, did not inherit such caution, and the collapse of agricultural rents and land values forced the sale of Wimpole in the 1890s.¹⁹

On the death of her father in 1883, Lady Henry became lady of the manor at Ledbury. She was born Isabella Somers-Cocks in 1851, the daughter of Charles Somers-Cocks (who became third Earl Somers in 1852) and Virginia Pattle.²⁰ From 1852, the family’s primary residence outside London shifted from Reigate Priory to Eastnor Castle – ‘a noble castellated mansion’ built in the Norman Revival style by Robert Smirke in 1811–24 (Figure 4). It is two miles east of Ledbury, though the estate extended to the town with an outlying portion of farmland around Little Marcle to the west.²¹ Their London house was in Carlton House Terrace. Lady Henry’s parents frequently travelled, and her father was a keen gardener and collector. A sister, Adeline, was born in 1852 and another sister died from diphtheria aged four years. Afterwards, Isabella and Adeline were closely governed by their mother and Isabella’s childhood ‘was a series of revolts against the powers that never left her alone to do as she pleased’.²²

In 1872, Isabella married Lord Henry Somerset, second son of the Duke of Beaufort. This was seen as an excellent match: in addition to being a Duke’s son, he was Conservative MP for neighbouring Monmouthshire and Comptroller of the Queen’s Household. Yet Isabella struggled as her new home Badminton House lacked Eastnor’s ‘atmosphere of culture and refinement and shelter from the rude facts of life’.²³ She soon discovered that Henry preferred to lead a separate life. The couple had a son, Arthur, but evidence of Henry’s homosexual affairs – news of which led the Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to contact Henry’s mother – forced Isabella to leave their



Figure 3. Lady Elizabeth Adeane, 1873, Royal Household Portraits. Volume 55. Royal Collection Trust © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

London home and then successfully sue for custody of Arthur. The ‘charade of conjugal happiness’ was over by 1875.²⁴

Biographers have speculated about the burden of the separation on Isabella. She continued to be known as Lady Henry Somerset and published under that name (Figure 5). The scandal clearly shaped her outlook and energies in reform arenas.²⁵ The popular children’s author Jennie Chappell noted in 1900 that ‘Sorrow and suffering brought with them a quickened sympathy for others’ needs’.²⁶ Henry escaped to Florence, where he lived until his death in 1934. Isabella retreated from society, first to Reigate. There, deeply affected by the death of her father in September 1883, and mourning a friend ‘who, driven mad by drink, had killed herself’, she

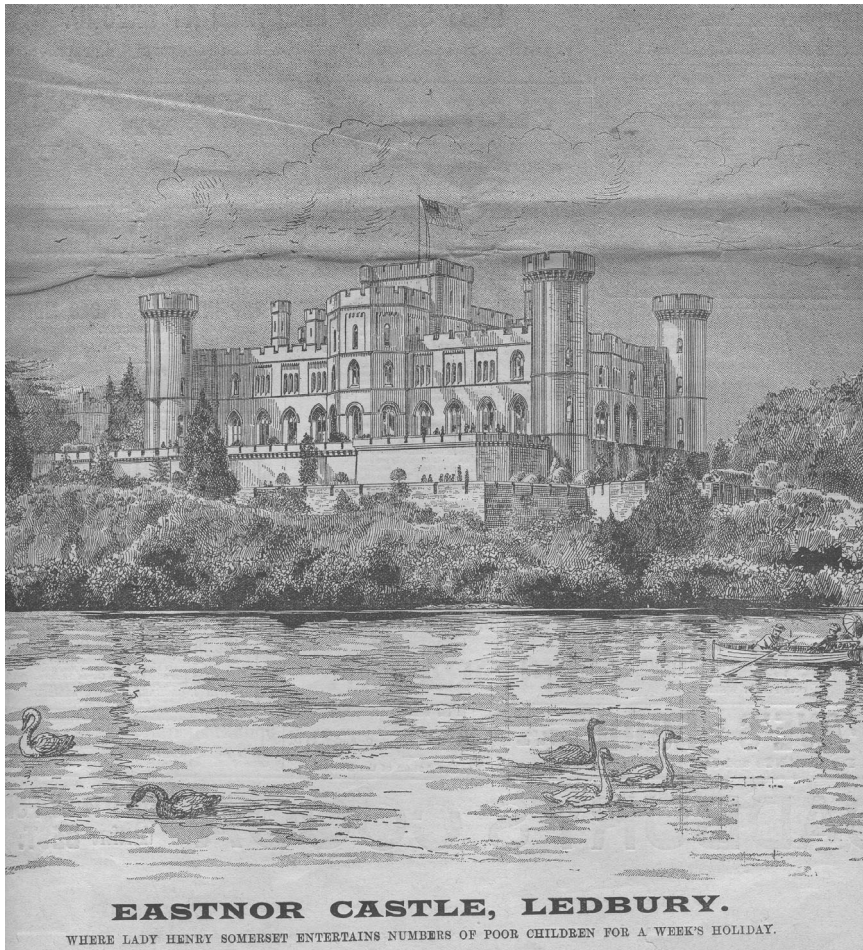


Figure 4. Eastnor Castle, *Temperance World*, 1891. Livesey Collection. Reproduced with the permission of the University of Central Lancashire.

reflected on her lot.²⁷ Seated ‘under a grand old elm, her mind disturbed by doubt, she seemed to hear a voice saying, “My child, *act as if I were*, and *thou shalt know I am!*”’.²⁸ She made the decision to move to Eastnor in 1883, the same year in which Lady Elizabeth Biddulph took the pledge at Ledbury.

A landscape of alcohol production c. 1880–1914

Ledbury was ringed by landscapes that were managed for alcohol production. Visitors to Eastnor, such as the leading investigative journalist W.T. Stead, may have thought the bucolic landscape around the castle ‘like a scene in a fairyland’.²⁹ However, this ‘paradise . . . was not free from the “trail of the serpent”’; for it was ‘cider district’.³⁰ According to the local MP Charles Radcliffe Cooke – the ‘Member for Cider’ – Eastnor even had its own cider and cooking apple, Iazard’s Kernel.³¹ On the face of it, this was not an obvious place for temperance; but as the epigraph from Lady Henry makes clear it became an urgent priority to demonstrate the evil amidst the beauty.³²

Cider making is documented in Herefordshire from the fourteenth century, the earliest record being for 1308 at Upleadon, on a Templar estate. John Beale, a keen cider proselytiser from



Figure 5. Lady Henry Somerset, by Hayman Seleg Mendelssohn, carbon print, published 1893. NPG Ax27631. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Yarkhill near Ledbury, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, argued that ‘few of our cottagers’ or ‘our wealthiest yeomen’ drink anything other than cider.³³ Cider became ‘a normal component of farm workers’ pay in Herefordshire, generally two to three quarts a day’. In Bosbury, cider mills were often mentioned in sixteenth-century wills. Apples and pears were grown, and the ‘hard Barland’ pear mentioned from 1658 was reputed to make good perry. From the late eighteenth century, and especially with the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal in 1798, Ledbury became, with Hereford, ‘the chief cider market in the county’.³⁴

Many new orchards were planted during the Napoleonic Wars, and there was great interest in developing new varieties of cider apple as demonstrated by the publication of *Pomona Herefordiensis* in 1809 by the landowner and eminent horticulturalist Thomas Andrew Knight, and later *Herefordshire Pomona* published 1876–1885 with exquisite illustrations by Miss Alice

Ellis and Miss Edith Bull. The 1905 Select Committee on the fruit industry reported statistics on average acreage under orchards in three-year periods for the start of three decades, and Herefordshire was always first or second (26,944 in 1881–83; 26,345 in 1891–83; 27,221 in 1901–03).³⁵ Those same decades marked the expansion of industrial cider manufacturing, led by makers such as H.P. Bulmer and Henry Weston. Bulmer was son of the rector of the parish of Credenhill, who in 1887 ‘began making cider with the intention of creating a national market’.³⁶ Weston was a farmer at Much Marcle, near Ledbury, where the owner of the Hellens estate Charles Radcliffe Cooke was a keen promoter of cider.³⁷ Cooke argued in 1896 that cider making was a ‘hopeful industry’, with the potential for growth not restricted by foreign competition. But that would require the renovation and replanting of orchards, the control of pests, and ‘instruction in the science of cider-making’.³⁸ National cider production fluctuated in the final three decades of the century, according to one estimate peaking at 33.5 million gallons in 1884; in the 1890s, it was never higher than 27.5 million.³⁹ In 1900, some two-thirds of 24.9 million gallons was retained for farm consumption.⁴⁰

Hops have been an important crop in Herefordshire for over 400 years. The first surviving records date from 1577 with hops being grown on the Bishop’s estate at Whitbourne, and at Bosbury near Ledbury in 1610. By the second half of the seventeenth century, hops are frequently recorded, especially in the east of the county. Hop growing flourished through the nineteenth century and in 1894 there were over 7,500 acres of hops in Herefordshire. Hop poles from coppiced woods were advertised for sale in local newspapers – their cutting evidence of how the production of alcohol reinforced broader landscape practices through to the end of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ The *Victoria County History* (1908) considered that ‘Probably no branch of agriculture has shown so much progress during the last sixty years as hop-culture’.⁴²

Such an account of progress was at odds with the deep impact of agricultural depression and continuing rural poverty.⁴³ Ledbury experienced population decline from 5,598 in 1861, 4,473 in 1871, to 4,276 in 1881.⁴⁴ While the 1861 figure was historically high because of the presence of navvies working on railway construction, Joan Grundy calculated migrational change of –14.0% for Ledbury and the adjacent Yarkhill sub-district between 1861 and 1890.⁴⁵ The 1908 *VCH* commented, ‘From the evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1893, it appears that rents in the county had been reduced from 20 per cent to 30 per cent since 1879’.⁴⁶

Ledbury landowning families engaged in extensive charitable work, frequently in the form of new building. Michael Biddulph funded Ledbury Cottage Hospital, which was opened by Lady Elizabeth in 1891, to mark the coming of age of their son. This was built in a picturesque black-and-white style similar to the extension they had added to their home Ledbury Park in 1886. The Biddulphs and Lady Henry were also on the committee responsible for building the half-timbered Barrett Browning Institute. Opened in 1896 by the agricultural writer Henry Rider Haggard, it celebrated the connection of the town with poet Elizabeth Barrett who had grown up at the nearby Hope End Estate. In 1910, the Biddulphs supported the building of a School of Domestic Science known as ‘Elizabeth Hall’ in The Southend which had a ‘half-timbered upper floor with four gables’.⁴⁷ These new picturesque buildings helped to provide a convincing veneer of prosperity to the town. Many local tied cottages provided by tenant farmers for their workers, however, were in deplorable condition.

In an investigation of the relationship between intemperance and agriculture nationwide, John Abbey linked the neglect of buildings and land to the time and money lost to drink, and challenged the provision of beer to labourers in the harvest field. Over 100,000 copies of Abbey’s pamphlet were sent to landowners, estate stewards and farm bailiffs.⁴⁸ In 1884, Abbey became organising secretary of a new Special Agricultural Department of the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS).⁴⁹ Reformers also looked to the direct effects of the part-payment of wages in cider.⁵⁰ For example, a debate at Thornbury in Gloucestershire, home of Liberal MP and CETS member Sir Edward Stafford Howard and Lady Rachel Howard, considered the rights of workers to opt out of receiving payment in beer or cider.⁵¹ Peter Davies, farming 475 acres at Dean Park, north of Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, offered his workers the option of two quarts of cider a day or 1s.

6d. per week. However, because of the ‘tyrant’ of customary practice, cider was the most popular choice on his farm.⁵²

By this point, the 1878 Truck Act had prohibited the payment of wages in alcohol, yet in Herefordshire it was ‘widely ignored by farmers and men alike’ until the First World War.⁵³ Emphasising the scale of the ‘cider difficulty’, the Reverend W. Kipling Cox told the Hereford Diocesan Branch of the CETS in 1885 that it was ‘almost the absolute rule in Warwickshire for the farmers to give their men money instead of cider, but in Herefordshire it was *vice versa*’.⁵⁴ In addition, there was the seasonal inrush of hop pickers and although it was claimed that ‘their housing is much better attended to than it used to be, when they were often huddled together like pigs’ the quality of the accommodation in tents, sheds, and barracks remained poor well into the twentieth century.⁵⁵ In Ledbury itself, the squalor of housing crammed into the mediaeval burgage plots was well known. The poet John Masefield (1878–1967), whose family were leading local solicitors, emphasises the poverty of some of the townspeople in *The Widow of Bye Street* (1912). In *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), he vividly focuses on the prevalence of squalid pubs and drunkenness amongst local men and visiting hop-pickers:

‘From drunken man to drunken man
The drunken madness raged and ran . . .’⁵⁶

Taking the pledge

Biddulph and Somerset did not plant temperance in Ledbury, though they helped it root. The Ledbury Temperance Society was formed in 1837 and at its second meeting fifty signed the pledge – although the *Hereford Journal* reported ‘uncourteous interruptions’ by a local vicar.⁵⁷ Later, it took out an annual subscription to the National Temperance League, which resulted in visits from its touring lecturers including the transatlantic celebrity John Bartholomew Gough in 1860.⁵⁸ His Damascene-like conversion, following the death of his wife and child, was worthy of any temperance tale.⁵⁹ By 1860, the Society took ‘encouragement’ from ‘large accessions to their ranks, among whom are reckoned a goodly number of ladies of the upper classes of society in the town’.⁶⁰ The following year a ladies’ visiting committee was formed.⁶¹ Such developments showed how temperance changed over the century, with early pioneers graduating to the middle classes and the pledges of wealthier classes having local impacts.⁶²

We can also see the influence of Nonconformity in Ledbury, specifically the work of congregational minister Reverend Cuthbert Y. Potts (1825–1909), who signed the pledge in 1839.⁶³ Potts encouraged temperance meetings and missions, tapping into the spread of American-style ‘Blue Ribbon’ or Gospel Temperance. From the late 1870s, this evangelical outlook connected to the ‘spiritual and material well-being of the lower classes’.⁶⁴ Nationwide, organising committees built coalitions of ‘influential citizens’ and staged charismatic mission meetings with addresses, singing, and a chance to take the pledge. Within a decade, ‘Lords and Ladies, Earls and Countesses wore the teetotalers (sic) ribbon along with paupers in the workhouses’.⁶⁵ So it was that in Ledbury, a Gospel Mission in 1883 vitalised temperance efforts.

Potts had already championed a variety of causes, including the Ledbury Coffee House Company of which he was an early director and the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁶⁶ He was also honorary secretary of a new Ledbury Temperance Union. With the Western Temperance League, it organised nineteen separate meetings between the 14th and 24th October 1883. These were instrumental in Lady Elizabeth’s commitment to temperance. Local papers report her attendance at a meeting where local farmers – including W.J. Grant of Hope End Farm and Frederick Wetson of Massington Farm – were told to care for the moral strength of their labourers by avoiding part-payment with drink. They needed ‘men who would do a good day’s work and take care of their master’s property’.⁶⁷ Temperance was not an abstract commitment here; the discipline of sobriety would bring orderliness. This ordering of labour also worked as a metaphor

in temperance literature for the landscape itself. At another meeting, Lady Elizabeth ‘donned the ribbon’, receiving it ‘at her request’ from the Reverend Potts.⁶⁸ Not long after, Potts was presented with a testimonial of £120 by the people of Ledbury in recognition of his public work, one paper noting he reached across ‘religious, political, and social bodies of every shade’.⁶⁹

The framing of politics is useful context for the way Lady Elizabeth discussed her own commitments. She later described taking her pledge at Ledbury on 1st October 1883, ‘at a Gospel Temperance Mission to help the town, where much drinking and pauperism existed’. As ‘a new comer’, she ‘hardly knew how to dispense my charity satisfactorily. There were twenty-seven public houses in Ledbury to a population of about 3,000. I have never regretted the step’.⁷⁰ She immediately involved herself in the Ledbury branch of the BWTA. It had formed with enthusiasm in 1882, Cuthbert Potts chairing its first public meeting at which 83 pledges were made – ‘the number being limited by the filled pledge-book’.⁷¹ And yet in that first year they struggled to appoint a president, and the following year the secretary and treasurer resigned. ‘Our chief difficulty is want of workers with leisure and means’, reads their entry in the BWTA’s 1882–3 annual report. The Gospel mission in 1883 gave them ‘renewed life’. With the ‘sympathy and zeal’ of Lady Elizabeth as president, by 1884 they had 60 members and associates. The latter included Lady Henry and her sister Adeline.⁷²

The BWTA helped promote temperance in Ledbury. They divided the town into divisions for visiting work and campaigned in support of relevant restrictive legislation. In 1884–5, this included collecting 402 signatures to support a bill for the Sunday closing of pubs, which they forwarded to their MP Michael Biddulph (Figure 6).⁷³ At this time, Sir Wilfrid Lawson’s permissive bill – simply put, that local people should decide on whether to have pubs in their neighbourhoods – was a main parliamentary strategy for temperance reformers. Biddulph supported Lawson in the voting lobby, and the pair would later sit together on the parliamentary Select Committee on the Hop Industry in 1890. Lawson visited Ledbury in 1884, greeted by Biddulph at the railway station. They were accompanied by the 4th Battalion of the Shropshire Regiment to an industrial exhibition and temperance meeting in Ledbury Park. All entrants had to be total abstainers. Prizes were awarded for handiwork and an essay on the organisation of temperance work. Introducing Lawson, Biddulph acknowledged that ‘he was not a total abstainer’. The same was no longer true of his wife Elizabeth, who presented Potts and the Ledbury Temperance Union with a banner and spoke with hope of ‘a great national reform’. ‘Men and women worked together’, she said, ‘divided by neither creed nor politics, and they believed that the day of victory would come, the day when temperance should reign in the land’.⁷⁴

This sense of unity and even political neutrality was ultimately threatened by Lady Henry’s leadership of the BWTA. Lady Henry had joined the Ledbury branch of the BWTA as an ‘associate’ before taking the pledge. This she chose to do at Eastnor among the people of her estate. Returning from London for the meeting, scheduled for 1st December 1885, she changed trains at Worcester. ‘I hurried to the refreshment room and had two glasses of rich fruity port. Just that one more drink!’ In E.F. Benson’s words, it was a story she ‘recounted with peals of the most delicious laughter that ever came from human mouth’.⁷⁵ Lady Henry gave an address and then took the pledge, prompting others to do the same. Lady Elizabeth Biddulph attended with her daughters.⁷⁶ Jennie Chappell describes the speech as her ‘first essay at public speaking, and her earliest effort at temperance work’.⁷⁷ To conquer her shyness, she practiced by ‘stationing her maid in the gallery of the castle, to raise a handkerchief whenever her tones were too low to be heard’.⁷⁸ She trained her voice at Eastnor, and then within five years was BWTA President.

Together for temperance?

Lady Henry was drawn to the mission and direct message of Ledbury’s Methodists and in particular to a woman called Mrs Ridley who ministered to the needs of the sick and hungry of Bye



Figure 6. Michael Biddulph, 1st Baron Biddulph, by Sir Leslie Ward, chromolithograph, published in *Vanity Fair* 25 July 1891. NPG D44552 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Street. They made visits to the poor of Ledbury together and Mrs Ridley often addressed Lady Henry as ‘my wench’ rather than ‘my lady’.⁷⁹ The Anglican church in Herefordshire lacked the ‘salt of reality’ that Lady Henry required – perhaps because, as Olsen notes, ‘clerical teetotalism’ was apparently rarer in more socially stable rural areas, with comparatively higher church attendance than in cities.⁸⁰ This did not necessarily mean rural salvation was any easier⁸¹ – either for those who laboured on her estate nor for Lady Henry herself. Katherine Fitzpatrick notes the importance of Miss B—. ⁸² This might have been Miss Evelyn Bateman who managed the Ledbury mission. ⁸³ Miss B pleaded with Lady Henry to consecrate herself to God and even passed on

messages from God: 'she told me the message for me was that I was to go into great temptation and the Devil was preparing a snare to drag me back – it made me wretched although I did look up and pray and pray'.⁸⁴ Or again, in September 1887, visiting the site of the Gospel Hall in Ledbury, behind the coffee tavern, Miss B 'probed down into the very depths of my heart and told me my boy was my idol and he would be taken from me – that she foresaw months of agony before me'.⁸⁵

How did this conversion affect life on her estate? The poor, she recorded in 1887, are 'my great happiness', a frequent source of 'fresh courage' with which to face her trials.⁸⁶ In Ledbury, Lady Henry opened facilities on Bye Street for the provision of penny dinners for the working class: the menu offered Irish stew or minced meat, with potatoes and bread, and also puddings. Reportedly, Lady Henry was not above helping with the cooking and conduct of the institution, which was providing for upwards of 100 people a day. She arranged 'Evangelistic meetings' at the mission hall she had opened at the hamlet of Hollybush and also opened a reading room for working men.⁸⁷ Her interest in the education of village children is shown by the publication of *Our Village Life*, with her own illustrations in 1884 (Figure 7), the proceeds from which were used to train and support girls from poor backgrounds. She established St Mary's Home for Girls on Clencher's Mill Lane in Eastnor.⁸⁸ In 1900, she passed the home to the Church of England's Waifs and Strays Society.⁸⁹

Lady Henry made various improvements to her Eastnor estate. She built better quality housing, although one 'indignant gentlemen' complained she had 'disfigured the country with new cottages'.⁹⁰ Cottages in the village, c. 1886, were probably designed by the arts and craft architect James MacClaren, who was also responsible for extending the Biddulphs' Ledbury mansion.⁹¹ There were also new farm workers cottages in outlying parishes on the estate such as Little Marcle and Aylton. In 1898, she presented a well with 'good terracotta reliefs' of her own design on Eastnor village green. The images include the woman of Samaria asking Jesus 'Sir Give me this water that I may thirst not[,] neither come hither to draw'.⁹²

When listed in a parliamentary return as the owner of public houses, Lady Henry explained that she had to wait for the expiry of leases before could she change the use of properties that she had inherited.⁹³ At Eastnor the village inn, the Somers' Arms, which had been the only public house on the estate, was turned into a coffee tavern named the Somers' Arms Temperance Hotel and boarding house, run by Mrs Fanny Hodges.⁹⁴ The *Rechabite and Temperance Magazine* reported in February 1890 that 'To meet the great difficulty of the manufacture of cider in Herefordshire – every cottage on the property having its orchard and cider-mill attached – Lady Henry allows her head gardener to supply grafts of the best table fruit' to her tenants. This was to encourage them to stop making cider and to grow apples as table fruit.⁹⁵ A local paper put things more strongly: 'she prohibits the planting of cider-orchards'.⁹⁶

Biddulph and Somerset worked together closely for almost twenty years in Ledbury, the surrounding villages and further afield. Lady Elizabeth chaired the BWTA's Temperance Home committee. She also addressed the annual meeting of the CETS's Gloucester Diocesan Council in January 1890, demanding the Church 'stimulate the magistrates with regard to the licensing business'. It was, she said, 'special work' that could not be done by Nonconformist or Rechabite societies – 'societies amongst the people themselves'. She argued that the Church should exercise its influence to challenge the scenes at their railway stations during the hop-picking season. In Ledbury churchyard she had seen women 'in a state of hopeless drunkenness'.⁹⁷ The Rechabite reference is particularly interesting, because in 1889 Lady Henry was chosen to represent the Hereford and Radnor district of Rechabites at the High Moveable Conference at Nottingham.⁹⁸ Biddulph was made an honorary member of the Rechabites in the same year.⁹⁹ At the Nottingham conference, 85 districts sent representatives, Lady Henry and her friend Gwennlian Morgan (Brecknockshire) being the first women to take such roles.¹⁰⁰ The following year Somerset and Morgan prepared a guidebook for visitors to Eastnor castle.¹⁰¹

In September 1890, Somerset welcomed temperance societies, including the Good Templars of the West Midland Counties to Eastnor. Excursion trains brought people from Wolverhampton,

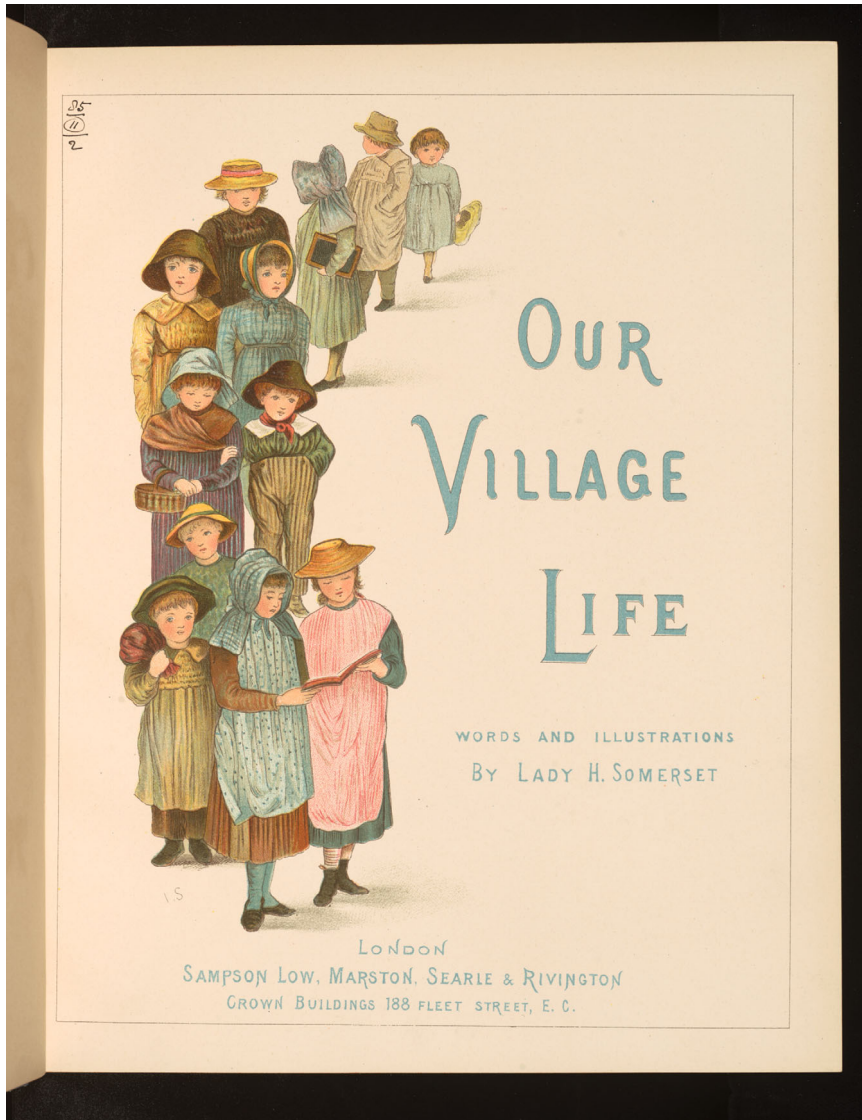


Figure 7. Lady Henry Somerset, *Our Village Life*, 1884. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Cardiff, and Swindon to Ledbury. They marched in lines to the castle, accompanied by temperance bands. Somerset stirred the crowd to understand that their progress against the drink traffic to date was really only 'skirmishing'. It was a powerful opponent, she said, 'but they must all remember that greater battles had been fought, citing as an illustration the slave trade in America'.¹⁰² And she reflected on what it meant to welcome them at Eastnor. 'I know no greater pleasure than that the beauties of the home which God has given me should be shared to-day by such a goodly assembly'.¹⁰³ She also opened the gates to groups of poor from the 'slums of Soho' – the link being the Methodist urban missionary Hugh Price Hughes.¹⁰⁴

At a meeting in Ledbury in January 1891, with Lady Elizabeth in the chair, Somerset announced that she had accepted the position of president of the BWTA. She 'hoped to have strength to carry on her work, for she wanted to nationalise women's work'.¹⁰⁵ The American

Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911), a Quaker who embraced evangelical spiritualism, was instrumental in her candidature. She had moved with her husband Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1898) to live in Britain in 1888.¹⁰⁶ In London in the summer of 1889, Whitall Smith met Lady Henry's sister Adeline, now the Marchioness of Tavistock, alongside Mary Benson, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury E.W. Benson. She later met Somerset, when Lady Henry was preparing to speak at a meeting in the East End during a dockworkers' strike. The following February Whitall Smith visited Eastnor for the first time and was persuaded that Somerset would be a worthy successor to the late Margaret Bright Lucas as president of the BWTA. She pressed Somerset to accept the nomination, her rivals for the post being Lady Sebright, Lady Rachel Howard, and Lady Elizabeth Biddulph.¹⁰⁷ Lady Henry was elected president on 22nd May 1890. The cause, she said, 'embraces a wide sphere'; their end was 'to fight for all right'.¹⁰⁸

Somerset's addresses repeatedly connected temperance to broader causes. Her campaigns took her beyond Eastnor and Ledbury. She sailed for America with Hannah Whitall Smith in October 1891, to visit the World's WCTU first convention in Boston. She met the influential temperance reformer and suffragist Frances Willard (1839–1898). The visit was one of a growing series of Anglo-American exchanges between reform-minded women.¹⁰⁹ The previous BWTA president Margaret Bright Lucas had served, from 1885 until her death in 1890, as the first president of the World's WCTU.¹¹⁰ The Boston convention elected Willard to succeed Lucas, with Lady Henry Somerset as vice president. The pair proceeded to St Louis, where Willard hoped a meeting of backers of different so-called third parties would unite to support prohibition, female suffrage and economic justice. Not even her preferred Prohibition Party, which Willard had angered WCTU members by backing so publicly, took up the cause.¹¹¹ The row foreshadowed the battle Somerset would have through the BWTA when she returned to Britain.

Lady Henry was warmly welcomed back at Ledbury in May 1892 by the local temperance societies. At the Mission Hall, they presented her with an elaborate address on vellum, designed by Mr W.G. Davis of Hereford. It showed Eastnor Castle, Ledbury Town Hall, the ship *Teutonic*, in which she had crossed the Atlantic, and the English and American flags – a celebration of geographical ties made by temperance. Cuthbert Potts invited a young member of the local Band of Hope to offer Lady Henry a bunch of flowers. Potts presented a laudatory address and read a formal welcome signed on behalf of the Ledbury Temperance Union by Lady Elizabeth Biddulph – who was absent – and heads of the local temperance organisations such as the Good Templars, the Band of Hope, and the local Y (youth) Branch of the BWTA whose head was Maud Adeane. Somerset declared that 'The Mother Country could well afford to learn from her great daughter' and pledged support for legislative reform, specifically local option. To applause, she declared that 'she believed the day was coming when the woman's vote would more potently aid the temperance cause than any other means'.¹¹² Earlier statements about women's work and women's rights were formalising in a specific demand for the vote. There was important national context too. In the first instance, Sir Albert Rollit had laid before Parliament a Women's Suffrage Bill on 27th April, prompting politicians of the age to declare their views on the franchise. Lady Elizabeth Biddulph was in the ladies' gallery to see MPs reject Rollit's motion by twenty-three votes.¹¹³ In the longer term, July 1892 brought a general election. Lady Henry delivered thirty-six speeches in fourteen days in support of the Liberals, whose radical Newcastle programme committed to local option legislation.¹¹⁴

This prominence of female suffrage within temperance led Somerset to clash with Biddulph at the next BWTA annual meeting. Lady Henry Somerset presented a resolution that the BWTA should actively campaign for women's suffrage through a dedicated department. This had been the WCTU's model for organising dedicated campaigns. Now that women were able to vote in municipal elections, Somerset noted, so education 'on the responsibility of the ballot' was important, and 'no subject [was] more vital than just views on the subject of the woman's vote'.¹¹⁵ With more than a thought to her own experiences, Somerset compared the home to 'the larger home circle which we call a nation, no government is complete in which the woman's voice is not

heard in council with the man's'.¹¹⁶ She saw her election to the presidency of the BWTA as a mandate for leadership, and now she proposed a resolution 'That all class legislation is unjust, and that, therefore, responsible women should participate in framing the laws by which they are governed'.¹¹⁷

Lady Elizabeth Biddulph was charged with 'leading the opposing forces in opposition' to Lady Henry's plans for a suffrage department.¹¹⁸ She argued that the association was importantly non-political and non-sectarian and agitators for women's suffrage remained perfectly free to join societies committed to it. Lady Elizabeth proposed an amendment: 'That it is undesirable and indeed inadvisable to join an expression of opinion on Woman's Suffrage to the work of the B.W.T.A'.¹¹⁹ Lilian Shiman notes 'hisses, cheers and cries' from delegates.¹²⁰ Apparently concerned by the number of delegates who feared their branches would break up should Somerset's resolution pass, one delegate made a counter resolution that it was unwise to push the move at the time. This was rejected by fifty-one votes to forty, then Biddulph's resolution was lost by sixty-six to thirty-nine.¹²¹ Lady Henry's resolution was put to the conference late in the day: it passed by sixty-three votes to thirty-six and Biddulph was defeated. Over 240 women had been at the meeting, however; at best, this was minority support.¹²² Temperance periodicals carried public disagreements and recriminations about the suffrage policy, the actions of the Somerset camp, and by extension reflections on the nature of women's work.¹²³

In the New Year, the BWTA executive disaffiliated from the World's Women's Christian Temperance Union. This was a snub to Somerset, especially as the decision took place while Somerset was in the United States. Her opponents objected that the BWTA was being turned into a more overtly political American-style body.¹²⁴ Back in Britain, Somerset and Willard based themselves at Reigate and made a multi-city tour during which Somerset pressed the case for female suffrage. They visited Ledbury in January 1893, tying in with a temperance mission that featured the American speaker J.G. Woolley. The hot ticket was for the Sunday night meeting with Somerset and Willard. The hall was 'crowded', but a heavy cold kept Lady Henry away. With Lady Elizabeth Biddulph in the chair, Willard took the floor, and said 'the men had their Shaftesbury, and the women had their Lady Henry Somerset'.¹²⁵ This was a suggestion firmly repeated by W.T. Stead, who wrote that Lady Henry had assumed his mantle.¹²⁶

Where that left Biddulph is not recorded, but it seems that relations remained cordial. Willard wrote later that year that the 'white-Ribbon leader' [Somerset] had secured them access to the 'Ladies' Cage' above the House of Commons chamber to watch as chancellor Sir Vernon Harcourt brought forward local option legislation. They were joined by Lady Elizabeth and Lady Harcourt and Lady Lawson.¹²⁷ This was the bill's first reading on 27th February.¹²⁸ The BWTA crisis came to a head at the 1893 annual meeting. Delegates debated Somerset's leadership style and the 'Do Everything' policy to which she was committed, as well as the relationship they should have with the World's Women's Christian Temperance Union. When the idea of adopting the broader platform was put to a vote, Somerset's team won by 262 votes to 193 and she went on to be re-elected as president. Lady Elizabeth declared that, as a 'lover of order', she would respect the result.¹²⁹ While the organisational impact of the split is registered in temperance histories, the personal cost founded on such local relationships is easily overlooked. The following morning, the defeated party, led by Mary Docwra, announced their departure from the organisation. But not, at this point, Lady Elizabeth. Kathleen Fitzpatrick records: 'A delegate who passed her chair whispered excitedly, "Oh, Lady Elizabeth, isn't it splendid that we still have our President?" Lady Elizabeth replied sternly, "Your brilliant President will wreck the Association"'.¹³⁰

Speaking to the Ledbury Temperance Union in 1894 about her work in London, and the prospects for local option legislation, Lady Elizabeth said 'Good had come out of the split'. Both sides were energised, and 'women's societies were increasing all over the country'.¹³¹ The breakaway WTAU held its first conference in May that year. Lady Elizabeth ultimately became its second president in 1896. The BWTA survived the split, claiming 1,100 branches and 100,000 members by 1900.¹³² Lady Henry Somerset was its president until 1903. The smaller WTAU

numbered 310 associated groups by 1900.¹³³ The Ledbury women's branch is listed in neither the BWTA nor WTAU annual reports, perhaps suggesting it avoided taking sides. The 1897 *Tilley's Ledbury Almanack* lists Lady Elizabeth as president of the Ledbury Women's Temperance Association, a post she held until 1899.¹³⁴ Her youngest daughter Maud Adeane was president of the Y [youth] branch of the BWTA.¹³⁵ It seems Lady Henry assumed the titular role after Maud married in 1895.¹³⁶

We have followed a political fissure in the national organisation of the BWTA, noting how Lady Henry and Lady Elizabeth publicly opposed one another ultimately over the connections of temperance to other political agendas. Importantly, we can trace such tensions over political issues in Ledbury life, linked to Lady Henry's role as landowner. When the long-established Rector of Eastnor William Pulling died in 1893, Lady Henry presented the living to James Dennis Hird. Pulling had chaired the editorial committee of *Hymns, Ancient, and Modern*.¹³⁷ Hird, by contrast, was a member of the Social Democratic Foundation and had published works such as *Health, Wealth and Temperance* (1890). Following a dispute with Bishop Frederick Temple, he resigned as secretary of the London diocesan branch of the CETS.¹³⁸ His decision to accept Lady Henry's patronage was fodder for satirists.¹³⁹ But it also caused political ripples. Hird joined the Ledbury Liberal association, accepting the position of president, with Cuthbert Potts and another clergyman J. Harper as vice presidents.¹⁴⁰

At the 1895 general election, Lady Henry promoted a radical Liberal candidate, Arthur Withy, against the sitting MP Michael Biddulph. Biddulph had moved to the Liberal Unionist benches after Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill in 1886. The Biddulphs had had their carriage stoned when travelling home from a Unionist meeting at Much Marcle in 1890.¹⁴¹ At Ross in July 1895, both Lady Henry and Frances Willard addressed an election meeting for Withy. She then appeared with Hird and Potts at meetings in Ledbury, where Withy campaigned on land reform and the vested power of the House of Lords.¹⁴² Rider Haggard was in the audience and took issue with Hird's claim that 'Jesus Christ was a Socialist'. He told a Biddulph campaign event at Much Marcle that he had 'never attended' a 'more disgraceful meeting'. The MP Charles Radcliffe Cooke challenged Lady Henry for writing to her tenants to vote for Withy and said of Hird 'it was time that clergymen of that type should cease to be connected with the Church of England'.¹⁴³ Other newspapers reported Lady Henry's appeal. According to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, she believed that 'great social reforms are at stake'. 'Although I am large landowner and a considerable contributor to the rates, I have no vote to cast. I, therefore, look to my tenants, who have always been my friends, to cast their votes for me' – here in favour of Withy.¹⁴⁴ The intervention was not enough, and Biddulph was returned with a majority of 1745.¹⁴⁵

Hird was ultimately forced to leave Eastnor. He had planned a series of Advent sermons on topics such as 'Jesus the Socialist'; these proving controversial, he shifted their delivery to Lady Henry's Ledbury Mission Hall.¹⁴⁶ Hird was then accused of promoting polygamy in a book called *A Christian with Two Wives*.¹⁴⁷ Periodicals such as *The Sketch* now openly challenged Lady Henry to speak out.¹⁴⁸ Lady Henry ultimately withdrew her patronage – Hird later renounced his orders, and became Warden of Ruskin College Oxford (established 1899).¹⁴⁹ He had come to Eastnor with a record of practical temperance action in London which appealed to Lady Henry. This type of commitment inspired her friendship with the Methodist social reformer Hugh Price Hughes, and her confidante Frances Willard also explored Christian socialism. Broadly, then, Lady Henry's patronage of Hird as vicar of Eastnor mirrored her own explorations in faith and politics.¹⁵⁰

These explorations led Lady Henry away from Eastnor as her concerns widened to include the fate of Armenian refugees and the regulation of prostitution in India. She endorsed a system of licensing, putting her at odds with Josephine Butler and many in the BWTA. Further pressure followed her appearance before the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing.¹⁵¹ She admitted that she did not believe that drink was inherently wrong, an interesting contrast to her description of the workings of the Duxhurst Inebriate Farm Colony that she had founded on 180 acres she had purchased near Reigate.¹⁵² It merits comparison with William Booth's ideas for farm colonies, for

residents would work the soil or turn to the loom. At its centre, she designed a system of thatched, half-timbered cottages for the residents.¹⁵³ She then built a substantial half-timbered house for herself, which emblematically she also called ‘The Cottage’.¹⁵⁴ In 1900 she established the White Ribbon Settlement House in London which was supervised by Miss Evelyn Bateman who had previously overseen the Ledbury Mission. Lady Henry had decisively moved her focus from Ledbury and Eastnor and in 1902 the Castle was let ‘for good’; indeed by 1905 The Cottage had become her ‘main residence’.¹⁵⁵

Lady Elizabeth’s work also continued to reach beyond Ledbury. She remained a regular speaker, and the WTAU energetically campaigned on drink licensing. This included campaigning for restrictive licensing legislation, such as for the abolition of grocers’ licences, and they were active at licensing sessions.¹⁵⁶ When local women inaugurated a South Herefordshire branch of the National League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage, they invited Lady Elizabeth to act as their president – she being also ‘a leading member of the Westminster branch’.¹⁵⁷ She died aged 82 in 1916.

That same year, on 28th November, 1,606 acres of outlying portions of the Eastnor estate at Little Marcle were sold at auction at The Feathers Hotel in Ledbury – a prelude to the changes in land ownership that followed the First World War.¹⁵⁸ Older directories provide context for three villages where land was sold, Aylton, Little Marcle, and Pixley. At Aylton, two of the six farmers listed in the 1890 Directory called themselves ‘farmer and hop grower’ with one being ‘farmer, cider and perry merchant’; at neighbouring Little Marcle, four of the six farmers were listed as ‘farmer and hop grower’.¹⁵⁹ In Kelly’s directory for 1913, five of seven farmers at Aylton were now in the business of hops and or cider; five of six farmers were ‘farmer and hop grower’; farming the ‘stiff clay’ at Pixley, the number recorded growing hops increased from 2 in 1890 to 3 in 1913.¹⁶⁰ The enduring record of hops and cider might suggest the failures of temperance reformers, but such a view would obscure the impact of rural improvers like Radcliffe Cooke and the emergence of a retail market for cider in the early twentieth century.¹⁶¹

The 1916 sale particulars underscore the importance of the land for fruit cultivation, cider mills and presses, and recent investment by tenants of ‘long standing’ in the infrastructure of hop growing. The largest, Pixley Court (283 acres), had ‘about forty statute acres of hops’ with 15 acres that could also be put to hops, ‘three modern hop kilns, brick built and tiled’. In addition, there was ‘an implement shed with six rooms for hop pickers adjoining’ and a ‘cider mill house with mill and press’. Knapp Farm, Pixley (217 acres) had ‘two hop kilns (one modern)’, Priors Court at Aylton (164 acres) ‘two modern brick-built square hop kilns’. There was also a ‘hop-pickers’ cook-house’. Lillands Farm at Little Marcle (212 acres) had a ‘newly built range comprising cider house with cement floor . . . Two square hop kilns, bagging room’. Laddin Farm in Little Marcle (187 acres) is the only one that hints of any shift *away* from alcohol, with ‘a choice selection of young table fruit trees just coming into full bearing’. However, it still retained various hop and cider facilities. Little Marcle Court (192 acres) had 10 acres of hops and with a ‘modern hop kiln’ and ‘A hop-pickers’ house’. Finally, The Brook Farm, Little Marcle (199 acres) had 10 acres of hops with a cider mill house and a ‘range of three hop kilns – one a square modern one’. All seven farms had cider houses with cider mills and presses.¹⁶² All seven grew hops and had their own hop kilns, many with recent investment. Several had buildings to accommodate hop pickers, whose seasonal mobile labour elsewhere attracted the attentions of temperance groups.¹⁶³

Conclusions

In this paper, we have examined the roles of two elite women, Lady Elizabeth Biddulph and Lady Henry Somerset, in the development of temperance at local and national levels in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. Both made their temperance pledges in the Ledbury area, which was famous for its production of cider and hops. We show the links between their

temperance ideas and local identities and note the ways they were inspired and even directed by women such as Miss Evelyn Bateman and Mrs Ridley.¹⁶⁴ Together with clergymen such as Cuthbert Potts, they provided the infrastructure for temperance missions to take root in a period of uncertainty in agricultural communities, and they were part of the social pressure that encouraged Lady Elizabeth and Lady Henry to don the temperance ribbon.

It was important that Lady Henry and Lady Elizabeth's private actions were consistent with their public pledges. Temperance marches through the streets to Eastnor Castle or exhibitions at Ledbury Park demonstrated and combined elite patronage with powerful public and collective action.¹⁶⁵ Their work was restaged in newspaper reports, demonstrating a distinctive rural articulation of women's temperance work, which can be seen through discussions of Lady Henry's patronage of Reverend Dennis Hird. Both valued their Herefordshire homes and celebrated the local landscapes and architecture. But they were also shocked and motivated by the poverty and squalor they found in farm cottages and in poor parts of the market town of Ledbury. In 1894, Lady Henry Somerset defined *idealised* rural homes as 'wayside cottages nestling in green fields and flowering orchards'. Yet she was clear that 'it is not only in the city slum that blots our civilization that we find want and misery. The history of the tillers of the soil in their old age is well-nigh as desolate'.¹⁶⁶ Lady Elizabeth also compared urban and rural life. In her first address as president of the Total Abstinence Union, she expressed hope for legislation to prevent women from 'haunting the public-houses' with men. It was 'one of the most disastrous features in our village life as well as in towns'.¹⁶⁷

Rural landscapes of alcohol production were targets of temperance action in their own right. At Ledbury, Lady Elizabeth became 'dissatisfied with the way my charity was being used'.¹⁶⁸ The temperance movement provided a clear outlet, and the BWTA the 'neutral platform' to tackle rural poverty. Defending that view led her to join the WTAU. After a meeting in London, she told the Ledbury Temperance Union in 1894 that they must, as Nelson had ordered at Trafalgar, nail their colours to the mast. They had three colours: 'never to be lowered – of temperance, of duty to God, and duty to their neighbour'.¹⁶⁹ For her Herefordshire neighbour Lady Henry, temperance provided a means to push at the boundaries of women's work. The example of her work in the 1895 election demonstrates a novel attempt as a landowner, with no vote, to influence her tenants on the matter of social reform. Lady Henry and Lady Elizabeth understood drink to be something that connected urban and rural and demonstrated those ties through the reform causes they championed. In drawing out such connections, we learn how they made sense of their charitable work at Ledbury and together helped to test the limits of temperance as a reform movement.

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