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The sad truth about 24-hour drinking... [1]

Written by **Tom Clougherty** [2] | Sunday 9 March 2008

... Is that is doesn't exist. That was Mick Hume's take [3] in Friday's *Times*, and I think he gets it about right:

> *If there is indeed a problem with our late-night drinking laws, it is that many of us, on the rare occasion we get out, still cannot enjoy a pint after midnight at the weekend. That's what I call antisocial.*

He cites the government's official review, which showed that the introduction of '24-hour drinking' two years ago has extended average Saturday opening times by just 21 minutes. Certainly this chimes with my experience: for all the tabloid furore about the liberalization of the licensing laws, I am constantly frustrated by how hard it is to find a late-opening pub or bar, even in central London.

Indeed, for many pub landlords this 'liberalization' has been nothing of the sort. Licensing was pretty simple in the old days ? you just turned up at the Magistrates court every so often to renew your alcohol license. The process was cheap and easy. But now councils employ full-time staff to oversee the new licensing laws. And bureaucrats inevitably make trouble, insisting on endless inspections and paperwork.

Add this to the smoking ban, and is it any wonder that 1,409 pubs closed down in 2007 (compared with just 102 in 2005)? If only the government would just leave us alone...

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