

The Apostle of Temperance

Every century throws up a new icon, be it saint, scholar, soldier, statesman or poet. Nineteenth-century Ireland boasted two such: Daniel O’Connell the Liberator, and Theobald Mathew the ‘Temperance Apostle’. Two iconic figures, who ran parallel campaigns in the mid-19th century, heroes celebrated in song and verse, and commemorated in memorial statues, halls, in the names of streets, bridges and schools up and down the country. They are now part of our story, our heritage - the one as a political reformer, the other as a social reformer.”¹



Between the two of them, Fr. Mathew and Daniel O’Connell had an extraordinary effect on the downtrodden people of Ireland. Centuries of oppression and contempt had crushed them, to the extent that they were sunk in a state of degradation and had for a large part, lost their self-respect. Fr. Mathew and O’Connell brought them to their feet and instilled in them an awareness of their own dignity and with the grace of God, their strength.

175 years ago, on 10th April 1838, Fr. Mathew took the temperance pledge, saying, “Here goes, in the name of God.” In the following decades he campaigned tirelessly for temperance, not only in Ireland but in Britain and the United States. Within nine months, no fewer than 150,000 names were enrolled as taking the Pledge. At the height, of the campaign, just before the Great Famine of 1845-49, his movement enrolled some 3 million people.

The results were dramatic. Between 1838 and 1841 the number of murders dropped by more than half (from 247 to 105); and the incidence of other violent crimes decreased in a similar way. But the restoration of people’s sense of their dignity was the greatest result of his efforts.

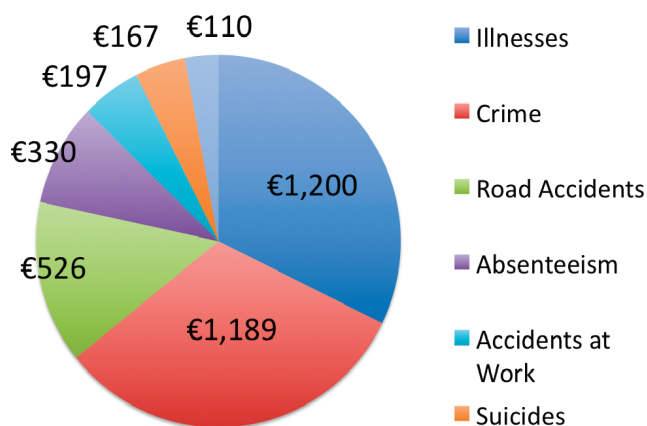
Today we live in a society where —

- 87% of adults aged 18-64 years consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months (13% non drinkers);

- almost 30% of current drinkers consume alcohol in a harmful pattern at least once a week;
- over half of current drinkers engage in binge drinking at least once a month (72% of 18-24 year olds);
- Every seven hours, someone in Ireland dies from an alcohol-related illness
- There are 1,200 cases of cancer each year from alcohol in Ireland
- One in four deaths of young men aged 15-39 in Ireland is due to alcohol
- One in three road crash deaths is alcohol-related
- 76% of all rape defendants had been drinking at the time of the alleged offence
- Alcohol has been identified as a contributory factor in 97% of public order offenses as recorded under the Garda PULSE system.
- One in eleven, or approximately 318,000 of the full adult population, said that they or a family member were assaulted by someone under the influence of alcohol in the past year
- Almost half of the perpetrators of homicide were intoxicated when the crime was committed
- Ireland has the second highest cancer rate in the world. Regular alcohol consumption is listed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) as one of the factors contributing to the high cancer rates.
- The risk of bowel cancer increases by 8% for every two units of alcohol consumed a day

“Here goes once more, in the name of God.”

Estimated costs (in millions) to the Irish economy of alcohol related harm (Source: *Report of Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, January 2012.*)



¹ Br. Brendan O’Mahony: ‘Father Mathew: Social Reformer’. Talk given in October 2006, celebrating the 150th anniversary of Theobald Mathew’s death.

Other Sources: <http://alcoholireland.ie/facts/>
http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/reports/Alcohol_Public_Knowledge_Attitudes_and_Behaviours_Report.pdf
<http://www.dohc.ie/press/releases/2012/20120126.html>
www.fathermathew.ie