

# Drought: Past, Present and Future

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**Liquid Politics: the historic formation of the water consumer**

Cultures of Consumption Research Programme  
funded by the ESRC and AHRC

# Part 1

## What is Drought? Comparing Past and Present

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	<b>FEATURES</b>	<b>PERCEIVED CAUSES</b>	<b>WIDER DEBATES</b>
1895	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• localised 'water famine', parts of London</li> <li>• Intermittent supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'unusual drought'</li> <li>• investment blocked by LCC</li> <li>• 'imaginary drought' and profiteering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• municipalisation</li> <li>• public health</li> <li>• citizen rights</li> </ul>
1921	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK wide</li> <li>• post municipalised</li> <li>• rationing vs. voluntary restraint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prolonged drought; driest 'since 1788'</li> <li>• 'preventable waste'</li> <li>• complaints against Metropolitan Water Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• central water authority?</li> <li>• sufficient capacity?</li> <li>• commercial losses</li> </ul>
1934	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rural water problem</li> <li>• public health fears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dry winter</li> <li>• privileging of towns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• call for national policy</li> <li>• national water grid</li> <li>• rural apathy and neglect</li> <li>• public works schemes</li> </ul>
1959	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban problem returns: Yorks., Lancs., Midlands, parts of Wales / southwest</li> <li>• no baths and washing machines: 'sponge down'</li> <li>• Teeside industry on half-supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low rainfall: driest summer 'since 1887'</li> <li>• southern areas where large storage OK</li> <li>• lack of national water policy: Labour vs. Conservatives</li> <li>• lack of investment</li> <li>• low water charges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high water consumption</li> <li>• central vs. local control</li> <li>• legacy of war-time economies</li> </ul>

‘Experience and the ... mastery of difficulties develop intelligence and broaden the judgement. When iron pipes and high-pressure engines were introduced a much larger quantity of water was used. The requirements of householders are **naturally and properly always on the rise**: the standard of comfort constantly improves.’

Archibald Dobbs, *By Meter or Annual Value?* (1890), p. 30.