

FILE#: Z61698. The word alcohol comes from the Arabic 'al Kuhul', but no one knows when it was first used or by whom. Alcohol is believed to be the oldest and probably the most widely used drug in the world.

ALCOHOL: Used as far back as 7000 BC, alcohol has long been associated with many customs and rituals. Historic sketches suggest that Neolithic people knew how to make alcoholic drinks through the fermentation of cereals.

IN PERSIA, the King and his advisers would discuss important issues when drunk, and later review the decisions when sober.

**OTHERS:**

If during both conferences the same decisions were made, the King would act on those decisions. Alcohol has been used as a social beverage, tranquiliser, sedative, stimulant and as an intoxicant. There are also cases of animals experiencing alcohol intoxication. The East African elephants would seek and eat fermenting mangoes and become drunk and boisterous.

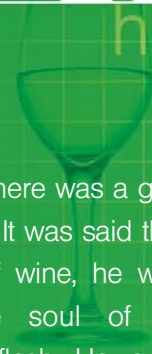
## FACT SHEET

LONG HISTORY

significant ROLE



history of alcohol



FACTS

## HISTORY OF ALCOHOL

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Alcohol has played a significant role in religious ceremonies. The New Testament records Christ as referring to wine as his blood, and wine is consumed in many Christian communities as a symbolic representation of the blood of Christ. Alcohol use varies widely between cultures. For example, the Islamic faith forbids the use of alcohol, and the majority of Muslims tend to abide by that prohibition. In other societies heavy drinking has been built into religious ceremonies. The Aztecs used to get drunk at all major religious ceremonies so as not to offend their gods.

In ancient Greece there was a god of wine – Bacchus. It was said that through the use of wine, he was able to free the soul of all impediments of the flesh. However, the Greeks used wine in moderation. Plato took a strong line

on drinking – advocating that no one under the age of 30 should be able to drink wine, and those over 30 should only drink it to relieve the infirmities of the flesh.

The Romans were more accustomed to drinking vast amounts of wine. Often at all-night banquets, people would try to out-drink each other. By the first century AD, the emperor Domitian was so alarmed about widespread drunkenness he ordered that half the vineyards in Rome be destroyed, and prohibited the planting of any more without his permission.

Wine and beer have long histories. In medieval times, those who could afford it drank alcohol in the form of wine or ale throughout the day. People's diets were generally monotonous and daily existence for most was characterised by hard labour and physical discomfort. Alcohol was used to relieve the drudgery. The manufacture of high-alcohol spirits such as gin and whisky followed the discovery of distillation about 1,000





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significant ROLE



LONG HISTORY

## FACT SHEET CONT.

years ago. Alchemists were most impressed by these amazing new drugs, and they were credited with remarkable properties. They were thought to be an antidote to senility!

In the 18th century, British soldiers brought cheap gin back to London from Holland. This was known as the 'gin epidemic'. At this time the Industrial Revolution had begun in Britain. Conditions were harsh and gin was often used as wages for employees. Gin houses were everywhere, and it was advertised that drinkers could drink for a penny and get dead drunk for two pence. In gin houses the floor was covered with straw so those who were intoxicated could rest comfortably when in a state of drunkenness.

In 1736, the situation was so bad that Parliament introduced the Gin Act, imposing severe restrictions on the sale of spirits. This Act resulted in a series of riots and civil disturbances, and was repealed in 1743.

### PROHIBITION

The 19th century witnessed a tendency towards moderation. In the United States of America in 1873, a movement called the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) occupied the main saloons in town, where the members knelt in prayer and asked the saloon owners to close their establishments. They believed alcohol was sinful. Women all over the country joined the movement and within a few months thousands of saloons had closed, at least temporarily. The WCTU lobbied aggressively for alcohol to be banned and in 1920 they won. As a result prohibition began, meaning alcohol was completely illegal for 13 years.

Prohibition was difficult to enforce. People produced their own alcohol and illegal saloons sprang up overnight. A black market in bootlegging was created and run by gangsters such as Al Capone. In 1933 the Act enforcing prohibition was repealed because it did not work.

### HISTORY OF ALCOHOL IN AUSTRALIA

Alcohol has played a significant part in Australia's history since the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, when Captain Arthur Philip and his officers raised the British flag at Sydney Cove and drank to the King's health. Rum was used as an important commodity for bartering between early non-convict settlers.

It has been reported that the first European settlers in Australia drank more alcohol per head of population than any other community in the history of mankind. No doubt the conditions were extremely punishing, and alcohol was used as a way to escape from the dreadful realities of colonial life. In Perth in 1836 there was a licensed house for every 75 people and labourers were supplied with nearly 12 gallons (54.5 litres) of spirits per annum.

Since that time alcohol use has become so widespread that it is the most commonly used and socially acceptable drug in Australia.

### SOURCES

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