

Final Report to the
Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation



Organisation:	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU Canberra
Project Title:	Learning to drink then and now: a new approach to understanding and intervening in problem drinking among Indigenous Australians
Researcher:	Dr Maggie Brady

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1. The outcomes of this research

1.1 The research funded by AER Foundation has focused on the research, writing, development and design, and publication, of a plain language educational resource dealing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history of learning to drink alcohol, aimed at a broad readership. It was to serve as a tool of empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and as a contribution toward reconciliation between black and white Australians.

1.2 This resource has been completed. A sample set has been printed and is included as part of this reporting process. It is entitled *First Taste: How Indigenous Australians Learned about Grog. A set of resources in six parts*. It comprises six small books, each designed to stand alone and each deals with a different episode in the history of the introduction of alcohol to Australia and the development of drinking patterns. The booklets are illustrated with relevant historical images (paintings, etchings and photographs) and items of Aboriginal art and material culture. These have been reproduced with the permission of numerous Australian and overseas sources such as national/state libraries and museums, and Aboriginal artists have given permission for their works to be used for this purpose.

1.3 The books are in full colour, with references and points for discussion at the end of each one. The first book 'Aims and Ideas' outlines the origins and purpose of the series, and provides a summary of the commonly-held ideas about the history of Indigenous drinking that are challenged in the books, cross-referenced to the relevant book. There is an index covering all 6 books. The text is written in an accessible way, but it also has explanatory and detailed captions to all illustrations. This provides readers (who may have different levels of reading skills) with different ways of accessing the main points in the material. However the book has been written for the literate secondary or tertiary student or health worker and is not designed for those who may have difficulties with reading.

1.4 *First Taste* has been professionally designed by Mouli Mackenzie of M Squared Design, and she has also taken responsibility for print management with Pirion Pty. We have worked collaboratively on the booklets.

This budget allocation also covered the fees charged by various museums and libraries for high-resolution TIF files of illustrations. The sample set of books has been printed to the quality expected of a full-scale print run, and will be used to fulfil reporting requirements to funding agencies (such as AER Foundation) and to

submit to the Department of Health and Ageing and other potential agencies who may be interested in printing and distributing the resources.

1.5 The grantee has had discussions with Reconciliation Australia, the Australian Principals' Association Professional Development Council, and the Department of Health and Ageing over plans for a full scale print run. All have been highly supportive. Of these, negotiations with the Department of Health and Ageing, Drug Strategy Branch seem to be most promising, with a view to the Department taking up the *First Taste* series as one of their alcohol resources. These are distributed free of charge to any member of the public and which may be ordered over the internet, or by phone. In this way, the resource would reach its intended audience, which is broadly aimed at the following:

- ▶ the 'mainstream' health and alcohol service provider workforce;
- ▶ Indigenous health and alcohol workers;
- ▶ Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduate students in alcohol and drug studies or addiction courses;
- ▶ Students of Indigenous studies and the history of alcohol;
- ▶ Indigenous and non-indigenous non-profit organisations involved in providing counselling and treatment services.

Publication with a commercial publisher would have a number of drawbacks. The books would not be free and therefore not reach into the general community, or the Indigenous community, so widely. Free distribution has created a huge demand for *The Grog Book* (previously produced by this author) so that 47,000 copies have been printed and distributed over three years. For a commercial publication, extra costs would be involved in use-fees to reproduce images (which are free if the publication is non-commercial), and publishers also like to put their own 'stamp' on products. If the Department of Health and Ageing is unable to proceed (and the general election and the election of a new government did delay my negotiations with the Department), then funding will be sought from other, non-government sources for printing and dissemination of the *First Taste* series.

2. AERF Final Report requirements.

As the books included with this Report constitute the 'research thesis' as it is referred to in your listing of Final Report Contents, I will outline below how they deal with each of the issues making up the core of the research project. (I should point out that the research was not for an academic research thesis for a degree, as I already have a PhD)

2.1 *Factors which underlie present Indigenous drinking patterns*

I have argued in the *First Taste* series that Indigenous drinking patterns have developed as a result of inter-locking and multi-faceted historical, social, cultural and environmental influences. In part, the reasoning behind the work was to deflect the emphasis by many commentators and members of the public, on genetic factors in Indigenous alcohol abuse. I make clear in the 'Aim of these books' section (*Book 1* p. 4) what the books are *not* about. They are not seeking to search for causes of dysfunction, nor to analyse the underlying causes that may include poverty, dispossession, trauma etc. but instead they seek to investigate the social history of alcohol in order to understand *how people learned to drink*.

In the opening section of *Book 1 Aims and Ideas* (pp2-3), Aboriginal people voice their own understandings of their patterns of drinking. This section is called 'Not really sensible way'. The Aboriginal speakers point out that Aboriginal people drink differently to non-Aboriginal people, drinking fast, drinking to excess, getting drunk ('like cattle in the trough'), and becoming argumentative. They compare this style of drinking to that of white Australians who, they say, drink slowly, and take one drink and then leave. This leads to some of the questions addressed in the series of books: how did people learn to drink as they do, how did they respond to alcohol, and did they imitate the behaviour of the frontier Australians.

The message to be gained from the series is that drinking behaviour is learned behaviour, and Indigenous drinking behaviours have developed out of historical experiences grounded in, and influenced by, their social and cultural environments. In order to illustrate how the learning process may have taken place the books use key episodes from the history of settlement. The text is written in such a way as to build the argument of the book in a non-didactic manner. The underlying message is that if expectations and behaviours around drinking are learned, as I suggest they are, then they can change and be re-learned. The concluding section of *Book 1 Aims and Ideas* states that cultures of drinking in different societies can, and do change, and that Indigenous societies are no exception to this general principle. By stressing that drinking to intoxication and violence is not carried in a person's genes, but is learned in a social and cultural environment, the books are designed to encourage the view that all societies have it in their power to change their cultures of drinking. The books are designed to turn around the fatalism, blaming and denial that often accompany approaches to the subject. This includes fatalism associated with beliefs (held by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people) in Indigenous biological susceptibility to alcohol, and the unhelpful 'blaming' the arrival of alcohol and all subsequent alcohol problems on European settlement. The books tell the story of how alcohol entered the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through many different routes, and that alcohol came from Southeast Asia as well as Europe.

Book 3 Strong Spirits from Southeast Asia presents historical evidence that not all Indigenous drinking showed markers of dependence or alcoholism. This challenges misconceptions that Indigenous people were 'naturally inclined' to become addicted to alcohol. By examining historical records and oral histories, I show that the strong spirits introduced by Makassan fishermen along the northern coasts of Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory, were limited in volume and periodicity, restricting the damage to occasional drunken outbursts among Aboriginal groups. These first Aboriginal drinkers did not drink enough, nor regularly enough, to develop dependence. Aboriginal people in this region had to learn to enjoy alcohol periodically, during the few months each year when the Makassan supplies were available. I show that the first 'models' of intoxicated behaviour for Aboriginal people in Australia as a whole, were people who came from Southeast Asia who normally drank to excess in periodic binges, rather than Europeans. The Makassans consumed alcohol despite the fact that many were nominally Muslim. Along with opium, tobacco and betel-nut, at home they consumed strong spirits (known as arrack) made in their villages, or commercially produced and imported to Sulawesi from what was then Batavia on the island of Java. This was the distilled drink imported to Australia. The less transportable, lower alcohol-content palm wine and 'toddy' also made in Southeast Asia, and consumed by Makassans, were not introduced to Aboriginal people, for they had to be consumed within a few days of preparation. The voyage to Australia took about two weeks.

The imported arrack (along with tobacco) was voluntarily consumed in Australia by Makassan and Aboriginal men, in a social environment that was largely amicable in nature, in which the alcohol was offered in a 'good manners way' (as one Aboriginal informant put it). It was given as a tribute or payment to the Aboriginal owners of the land and sea in exchange for the Makassans' right to fish and to use the shores as temporary camps for the treatment and preparation of trepang. Aboriginal men actively participated in economic activity as part of this trade and received alcohol, tobacco, rice, knives and other goods in return. The trade pre-dated the arrival of the English at Botany Bay by at least 60 years, and pre-dated the arrival of any white presence in the north by around 100 years. Although the exact dates are uncertain, overall this international trade (and the consumption of alcohol by Aboriginal people) persisted for almost 200 years. The impact of the alcoholic beverages brought to Australia was considerable, being commemorated by northern Aboriginal peoples in language terminology, in ceremonial exchange, and in publicly performed song cycles which are still seen today. The research grant made it possible for me to undertake fieldwork at north-east Arnhem Land to pursue these issues.

A second example of relatively moderate Indigenous drinking is presented in a case study of the diffusion of an alcoholic drink, and the knowledge of its manufacture, from the Philippines to the Torres Strait Islands in the 19th century. Fieldwork was conducted on Thursday Island in order to collect qualitative data on the history of this alcoholic beverage. Filipino workers and migrants to the Straits in the mid 1800s brought with them the techniques of making *tuba*, which was a fermented 'toddy', along with a distilled version that made a stronger liquor which is still known in the Torres Strait today as 'steamed *tuba*'.

The Filipinos discovered that islands in the Strait had coconut palm groves, just as at home, and the drinks were made by tapping the unopened buds of the palms, collecting the juice, fermenting and then distilling it in home-made stills. Islanders soon learned these techniques too and produced fermented and distilled drinks for their own use. The drinks were (according to Islander informants) shared as a form of hospitality to visitors, as a way of earning cash, and to promote conviviality. They were often consumed with food and festive dancing. Islanders even used the fermented mash as a rising agent in bread. Although several Islander authorities tried to ban the manufacture of *tuba*, Islanders continued to make and consume it in a largely non-problematic way during the 20 century when other alcoholic drinks were prohibited to them. Production continued until comparatively recently, and *Book 3 Strong Spirits from Southeast Asia* draws on fieldwork on Thursday Island and interviews with Islanders that were done as part of this research. Although Torres Strait Islanders were later confronted with the heavy drinking behaviour of Europeans, Pacific Islanders and others using 'western' spirits such as rum, their exposure to and use of *tuba* and their involvement in its production meant that its excesses were kept to a minimum. Today, the alcohol consumption rate of Torres Strait Islanders is lower than those of Aboriginal people, but still higher than those of the general Australian population. Social drinking is the norm in the Strait, rather than explosive, high-risk drinking, although no conclusions can be drawn about the role of *tuba*-making in this.

Books 5 and 6 address factors associated with patterns of heavy periodic consumption among Aboriginal people by examining the behaviour of the English in the early colony (*Book 5 Learning to drink from the English*). I argue that the process of 'learning to drink' in sociable and non-problematic ways was interrupted and disrupted by prohibition, and specifically by banning Indigenous people from drinking alongside other Australians in hotels. *Book 6 Struggles over drinking rights* sets out the pervasive, long-standing and damaging influence of prohibition on drinking patterns.

2.2 The history of the introduction of commercially produced alcohol... evidence for pre-contact uses of alcohol

Book 2 First taste of alcohol presents and illustrates the three known instances of Aboriginal groups producing traditional drinks that were fermented. These are reasonably well documented historically, and are confirmed by present-day evidence from living Aborigines that I have sourced during the research. I have also found the Indigenous language terms by which these drinks were (and are) known. The existence of these drinks is important for several reasons. First and most obviously, it is important to set the record straight because it is commonly and incorrectly believed that Aboriginal people had not discovered fermentation. In turn, this belief (widely held by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) is usually linked to damaging perceptions that Aboriginal people are somehow 'hard wired' to become alcoholics because alcohol was completely new to them. While there are many caveats to be made about this—such as the limited number of known instances of the production of fermented drinks and their probable limited capacity to produce intoxication—the historical fact of their existence helps to disperse unhelpful stereotypes. The story of *tuba* production in the Torres Strait is also relevant here (*Book 3*): it is an example of 'indigenous' distillation taking place on Australian soil.

Book 2 also documents stories surrounding the arrival of the First Fleet and the virtually immediate offering of liquor to the people of Botany Bay. In this book, as well as in *Book 4 The story of the bottle*, I describe the way in which European seafarers and colonists offered food and drink (usually alcohol) to Aboriginal people and how these were received. In most documented cases, Aborigines refused to drink or eat with the strangers; in the case of Botany Bay, a remarkable historical Aboriginal account tells of men who had to be persuaded to taste alcohol in exchange for an axe. In this instance and many others, the first response to the taste of European alcohol was nearly always that of distaste and disgust. Once again, this is a significant finding and can be used to counter mistaken beliefs about the 'natives' becoming 'instantly addicted' to white man's poison. In an attempt to counter Aboriginal stereotypes of European ill-intent, I show that for the 18th century French and English, alcohol was not viewed negatively, and that alcohol was offered (initially at least) in an attempt to make friendly contact, along with other goods and signifiers of 'civilization'.

During the research I examined all the relevant original journals of First Fleet diarists and those who documented the early years of Sydney. It is clear that commercially produced and imported alcohol was relatively scarce in the earliest years and that serious attempts were made by various governors to licence and limit supplies. Most early alcohol consumed in Sydney came from Rio de Janeiro (rum) or from Cape Town (wine) when ships called for supplies *en route* to Port Jackson. It is unlikely that alcohol in any great quantity was available to Aboriginal people until the 1820s. By this stage local products were available. Nevertheless, by the 19th century, virtually every visitor to Sydney observed the unusually high number of liquor outlets in the town and surrounds. Rum of course, became an intoxicating currency used instead of cash. It is clear that availability became a major cause of what most commentators referred to as the 'immoderate use' of alcohol among both the upper and lower classes. By the 1830s white Australians in the town were deliberately plying Aboriginal men with alcohol in order to enjoy their public 'combats' (many of which were in fact traditional dispute settlement processes with the addition of grog). There are eye-witness accounts of these activities and *Book 4 The story of the bottle* and *Book 5 Learning to drink from the English* present (in order to provoke discussion more than anything else) some of the lithographs of the day, showing Aboriginal people drinking publicly in the streets of Sydney. Public displays of unrestrained (drunken) behaviour were not condoned in 19th century English society— although consuming a good deal of alcohol was—and the commentators of the day equally condemned the lower orders, the Irish and the Aborigines for such displays.

I have included material on English drinking styles and problem drinking among the English (for example the Gin Craze, and Hogarth's renowned etchings of *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*) because Aboriginal audiences and readers of early drafts of this material found this particularly interesting. Many seemed to be unaware that England in the 18th century was plagued by heavy spirits drinking and that social tolerance of heavy consumption was transported to Australia with the English. I also refer to the early theories about the damaging effects of mother's drinking on unborn children, which emerged in the mid-18th century.

2.3 Historical basis for social learning model of drinking

The most entrenched idea about Indigenous people and alcohol is that heavy drinking is the norm because of a genetic predisposition. Along with the other misunderstandings, this belief affects the way in which Indigenous people feel about themselves, the way in which they look for solutions to drinking problems, and the way in which those in the wider community view Indigenous Australians. They engender fatalism and despair. The *First Taste* series is designed as a whole to show that an emphasis on biological, genetic susceptibility underestimates the influence of social, cultural and environmental factors in the history of Australia. For the purposes of these books, I have grouped these factors under the rubric of 'social learning'.

There is strong evidence in the historical record of Aboriginal mimicry and imitation of both socially graceful and socially graceless behaviours of the English. I use the Eora Aboriginal man Bennelong as a case study to illustrate this (*in Book 5 Learning to drink from the English*). Bennelong is an important individual. He is well-known to most Australians because of 'Bennelong's Point' where the Sydney Opera House now stands. He is also well-known among Aboriginal people, partly because he came to carry the reputation of being the 'first Aboriginal alcoholic', and partly because a famous Aboriginal residential rehabilitation program in northern NSW was named after him. I have used the character of Bennelong to make two main points. Firstly he is an example of a man who definitively 'learned to drink' from the English; and secondly because it seems (on interrogating the historical record closely) that his reputation as an alcoholic is not deserved. This is then, in part, an attempt to reconstitute Bennelong. There is no doubt that he mimicked and learned the mannerisms and etiquette of the English officers with whom he mixed. He became close to Governor Arthur Phillip and dined at the house of the governor regularly, learning something of English cultures of drinking. Specifically, Bennelong enjoyed wine, and learned to toast healths, a drinking ritual that was prevalent in Europe. This was a tradition of formalised, rule-governed and social drinking which nevertheless allowed generous amounts of alcohol to be consumed with meals. It appears that Bennelong's stereotyping as the first Aboriginal alcoholic is based on flimsy evidence, primarily deriving from the wording of his obituary published in a Sydney newspaper.

There are reliable historical sources describing how some Aboriginal men feigned drunkenness in the 19th century, having witnessed and imitated drunken white 'gentlemen'. This demonstrates that they were curious about how people behaved when drunk, and *what to expect* from the state of intoxication. These factors are significant when ranged against the academic literature on alcohol expectancies and learned behaviour.

Book 5 Learning to drink from the English suggests that as the frontier pushed out into Aboriginal land, and people encountered the bush drinking practices of white men, there was indeed a merging of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal drinking behaviours. Good historical sources show that the 'drink and bust' pattern of bingeing began in the Rocks in Sydney in the late 1800s with seamen getting their pay after months at sea, and spread to the inland with pastoral workers. Aboriginal men similarly employed drank like these other men.

Bingeing was brought about by the logistics of sporadically available alcohol and cash. However, Aborigines also witnessed the more restrained drinking of colonial families, the relative moderation of formal dinners and toast-making, and the abstinence of Christians and missionaries. The idea that Aboriginal binge drinking is a merely replication of frontier whites' drinking, while it has some merit, is of course too simplistic a theory as others have pointed out. It also implies that Indigenous societies are somewhat static. I have proposed that the 'learning' took another direction once Aboriginal people began (as a result of prohibition) to drink in segregated groups.

I argue in *Book 6 Struggles over drinking rights* that the process of getting used to grog, and learning to drink in a less damaging way, was interrupted and undermined by the prohibitions imposed under State laws from the mid-19th century. Although these restrictions rankled very early on among Aboriginal people who were in regular association with white Australians, it was in the 20th century that bans on drinking alongside white people came to exert more permanent damage. Memories of these times are still surprisingly raw among Aboriginal people. I propose in *Book 6*, that these bans drove Indigenous drinking in on itself, instead of opening it up to the more recreational, relaxed and convivial environment of the country hotel, the hub of all social life in every town in Australia. So prohibition is not just implicated in the fast drinking of high alcohol-content drinks (which is already well-known), it had a more insidious impact. It encouraged and allowed for segregated, out-of-control drinking, unmonitored and uncontained by any of the socially-accepted constraints that attach to licenced premises. These circumstances of isolation enabled the kin-based demands and conflicts that were a normative part of Aboriginal life, to be concentrated in segregated drinking groups. The resulting pressures to drink, and conflicts over drink, were undiluted by the presence of outsiders, white workmates or bar staff. At this stage, white Australian drinking styles were beginning to change with consumption of high-alcohol drinks such as port declining, and riotous hotels becoming socially unacceptable (in general). Aboriginal drinking styles were not influenced by any of these cultural changes occurring in the wider community because they were excluded from them. I have argued that licenced clubs and canteens in Aboriginal communities today evoke similarly segregated, inward-looking styles of drinking behaviour.

Book 6 also documents the struggles against grog engaged in by temperance activists and by women, both Aboriginal and white Australian. I included this material because it is important for Indigenous readers to know that there was resistance to alcohol, and a considerable involvement in temperance activities, among their own people in the 19th and 20th centuries. (As with the text of the other books—about the active involvement of Aboriginal people in trade for alcohol with the Makassans, their demand for bottle glass for artefacts in Tasmania, and the active production of fermented and distilled tuba by Torres Strait Islanders—writing about the active resistance to alcohol is part of a conscious strategy within the series which is designed to stress that Indigenous people were not the passive victims of alcohol.)

I have written about the vigorous anti-alcohol movement that existed among Australian women in the 19th and 20th centuries (which it is also important to know about in this context) and I have deliberately juxtaposed the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal women's anti-grog movements. Many white Australian Christians and temperance activists were also strong supporters of Aboriginal civil rights, but faced a dilemma when drinking rights became part of the civil rights struggle. I have presented honestly some of the resistance to drinking rights voiced in the 1960s by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spokespeople. The dilemmas associated with the right to drink and the burdens of citizenship are illustrated in *Book 6* through the stories of three prominent Aboriginal men: Len Waters, Albert Namatjira and Charles Perkins.

2.4 Promotion of community education encouraging responsible consumption using the historical evidence of learning to drink

The set of 6 resources has been designed with the goal to promote community education about responsible consumption. They have been read by selected Aboriginal educators. The introductory *Book 1 Aims and Ideas* ends with a strong statement that cultures of drinking can and do change and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait societies have it in their power, as do all societies, to change the way they drink. This position fits well with the mission of AER Foundation. The books have been written to help readers reconsider stereotyped ideas about the past and look at it with new eyes.

It is hoped that the production of this high quality, accessible and interesting material, illustrated with images that will resonate with Indigenous readers, will penetrate not only the Indigenous community, but the wider Australian community. The wider community is appallingly ill-informed about these matters.

Many of the modern artworks by Aboriginal artists shown in the books (particularly in *Book 4 The story of the bottle* and *Book 2 The first taste of alcohol*) are controversial and thought-provoking—they will make discussion topics in themselves in workshop settings. While the text has been written in plain English, it is based on thorough and original research. Every statement in the books can be supported by the evidence. I have provided the full references to important sources used, so that any reader who wishes to can pursue the sources themselves, and there are discussion topics at the end of each book. Each book stands alone, telling its own episode in the historical story, while being part of a roughly chronological sequence. The books are prepared as a set rather than in one volume for several reasons. They are small and non-threatening for less academic readers. They can be read in small 'chunks' of text. A workshop convenor can have (for example) 2 sets of books for 12 students and have students study different books in the same session, then come together for a group discussion on what each person has learned.

3. Book manuscripts

Two sample sets of the 6 non-academic plain language booklets are submitted with this report, fully designed. They are ready to print and await only the insertion of several high—resolution images still to arrive from the National Library etc. and further proof-reading and checking.

An academic book-length manuscript of the social history of alcohol and Indigenous Australians entitled *White Man's Poison* will be finalised during 2008 for commercial publication.

4. Evaluation report

4.1 The significant research findings are given above under 2.

4.2 Research methodologies were entirely qualitative in nature, comprising both fieldwork based research and interviews, and archival and contemporary literature- based research. Interviews were conducted with Aboriginal people and with Torres Strait Islanders, and with several non-Indigenous ex-missionaries and settlement superintendents. I was also helped enormously by anthropological and linguist colleagues with experience in the regions in which [was interested.

Visits were made to significant library collections, notably the Natural History Museum in London (when I was on leave in the UK), and the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, which houses the collection of crayon drawings made of the Makassan trepangers by Aboriginal men. I searched the archival collections of the State Library of South Australia (primarily for information on the temperance movement and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union); the National Archives of Australia (for information on Yirrkala and Aboriginal objections to an early liquor licence); the National Library of Australia (for documentation on early settlement and for 19th century newspapers) and the Mitchell Library (for historical records pertaining to the First Fleet and Sydney settlement). The National Library of Australia was the major source of illustrations although illustrations have been sourced from a variety of other sources. I sought out Aboriginal artists and gained their permission to reproduce their work in different parts of the series.

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