

Hyde Park Barracks Museum

DRUGS: A Social History | 25 October 2003 - 10 October 2004

We sniff, puff, quaff and inject them

Australian doctors once prescribed heroin for the relief of pain in childbirth, cannabis cigarettes were promoted as an asthma cure and opium-laced syrups were sold to parents to calm teething infants. In the 1950s women with 'nervous tension' were advised to have 'a cup of tea, a Bex and a good lie down'.

Attitudes to drug use changed dramatically during the 20th century, with many drugs becoming prohibited or restricted substances, yet two of the most lethal recreational drugs used today, tobacco and alcohol, remain legal and widely available.

In the exhibition, ***DRUGS: A Social History***, curator Inara Walden and Paul Dillon from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, examine our society's love-hate relationship with drugs and challenge existing views about drugs.



The exhibition uses images, objects and film to highlight key episodes in Australia's drug-taking history: from sly grog shops to safe injecting rooms, from Bex to the billboard vigilante group BUGAUP, from opium dens to the Aquarius Festival to rave nation. Both legal and illegal drugs are featured, including tobacco and alcohol, cannabis, opiates, ecstasy, cocaine, LSD and amphetamines.

The reality is we live in a drug-taking society. The choices we make about drug use are strongly bound up with our identity and beliefs. And whether certain drugs are permitted, condoned or banned often reveals more about a society's values than it does about the real risks of drugs, said Inara Walden.

Australians have long been identified as enthusiastic users of all types of drugs. A 1971 Senate Select Committee on Drug Trafficking found that the average Australian took three times as many analgesics as the average English person.

LSD and hippie psychedelia sweeping the Western world had spread to Australia by the 1970s. When the counter-culture musical Hair showed in Sydney, it was enormously popular. The rave or dance party scene, which began in Europe in the 1980s, evolved here from warehouse parties and gay dance parties into a vast popular culture phenomenon. The associated use of club drugs such as ecstasy continues to increase.

Controversy over drugs holds powerful political sway in our society, particularly around election time. There will always be hysteria over drugs. Nevertheless, Australia continues to lead the world in harm minimisation strategies, which aim to limit the negative effects of drug use on the community. Strategies include low alcohol beers, random breath testing, anti-smoking campaigns and free needle exchange services.

This exhibition doesn't pretend to provide solutions to problems associated with drug use in our society but by analysing the social context of drug use and tracing changes in our

attitudes and laws relating to drugs, we hope to unravel some preconceptions, said Inara Walden.

19th century drug use – from medicinal use to inspirational

- Queen Victoria took cannabis for period pain.
- Artists and thinkers like Herman Hesse, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin and Australia's own Brett Whiteley were at times drawn into experimenting with drugs to change consciousness and explore creativity.
- S T Coleridge's lifelong struggle with opium addiction produced his most famous and well-loved poem, Kubla Khan, the first 46 lines of which came to him complete in an opiated trance.
- Writers Flaubert, Baudelaire and Rimbaud became part of a bohemian hash eater's club in Paris in the 1840s. Members dressed in oriental silks to imbibe spoons full of green jelly infused with hashish.
- English philosopher and writer Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859) opened the floodgates of drug literature with his autobiographical account of his 17 year opium addiction.

SUMMARY

What: DRUGS: A Social History

Where: Justice & Police Museum | Cnr of Albert & Phillip Streets, Circular Quay

When: 25 October 2003 - 10 October 2004 | Open weekends only (open daily during January)

10am – 5pm

Cost: General \$7 Concession/Child/HHT Member \$3 Family \$17

Information: t.02 9252 1144 | www.hht.net.au

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