

## SLY GROG on the GOLDFIELDS

It was illegal to sell any alcoholic liquor on the Victorian diggings in the early days of the gold rush. It was prohibited because it was thought that drunk and disorderly behaviour could lead to accidents on the gold fields. However, sale of alcohol was permitted on the roads to the diggings and as a result a number of public houses sprang up along these routes. This did not, however, satisfy the demand for grog on the diggings. Sly grog, as it was called, soon found its way on to the goldfields via the many drays and heavily laden carts that arrived each week from Melbourne.

John Chandler, a carrier to the diggings, wrote in his autobiography 'Forty Years in the Wilderness' – *We loaded in Elizabeth Street, at a merchant's named Smithson. Our loading was general stores and grog. The grog was all in 5-gallon kegs, and addressed to different people, for there was no spirits allowed to be sold on the diggings. It was placed in the middle of the dray, and the sugar, tea, etc., packed all round it and over the top, so the troopers could not see that we had any grog on board.*

Sly grog shops were often part of a legitimate business and a number of so-called 'Coffee Tents' also sold prohibited liquor. Grog was sold in a glass known as a 'nobbler' and the selling of sly grog was often a more profitable business than digging for gold. Troopers took great delight in destroying the property of any trader they happen to find who was selling sly grog. They set fire to his tent and burned the contents. For this reason the grog was generally kept in an adjoining tent in which the proprietor resided, who of course knew nothing about this tent. The penalty for getting caught selling sly grog was stock confiscation, a £50 fine or seven months jail.

John Chandler continues – *All spirits over two gallons, found in any tent or store, were seized, and carried to the Commissioner's camp and destroyed. But there never was a law so much evaded, for in nearly every instance, one tent in five was a sly grog shanty.*

Often the diggers would make up their own recipes of illicit liquor, typical of which was as follows.

Half a pint of methylated spirit  
Half a cup of cayenne pepper  
Half a teaspoon of Indian opium  
Two gallons of Jamaican rum  
One gallon of hot water

Stir well and stand for twenty-four hours in a strong crock.

*(Warning. Do not attempt to make this at home. If you do, it will be confiscated and sold as paint stripper!!!!)*

It soon became obvious that the introduction of prohibition on the diggings was creating more problems than it solved, because wherever sly grog was sold, drunkenness and rioting were rife. In 1853, prohibition came to an end and John Chandler observed, *The government ...granted licences, and there was very soon plenty of public houses, for they gave every little shanty with two or three rooms, a licence. They always go to extremes.*

Later the same year, 1853, the first breweries made their appearance in Bendigo.

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