

History of Drug Abuse

Written by **Janet Eferé** – for Trans-Atlantic College, London

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1. Introduction

Thousands of years ago, people were using natural substances such as plants and herbs for purposes as diverse as pain relief, healing or to create feelings of well-being, energy or relaxation. Many of these substances are now considered to be illegal drugs and this paper will explore how the use of some of our best-known illegal drugs has changed over the years.

2. Opium (Heroin)

The history of opium use goes back thousands of years. As long ago as 5000 BC The Sumerians were using Opium and it even had it's own ideogram (Hul Gil) meaning 'joy plant'. The Sumerians passed the plant to the Assyrians, who in turn passed their knowledge onto the Babylonians and from there to the Egyptians. In 1300 BC, Egyptians cultivated opium on a large scale and traded it via the Phoenicians and Minoans across the Mediterranean Sea into Greece, Catharge and Europe.

In 460 BC Hippocrates, 'the father of medicine' acknowledges opium's usefulness as a narcotic in treating internal diseases, women's diseases and epidemics. In 330 BC Alexander the Great introduced opium to Persia and India and in about AD 400 it reached China via Arab traders.

Some key dates in the history of opium use are as follows:

1300s

Opium becomes a taboo subject during the Holy Inquisition in Europe. They considered that anything from the East was linked with the Devil

1500

The Portuguese initiate the smoking of opium as a result of trading along the East China Sea. At the same time, the Chinese considered it to be a barbaric and subversive practice.

1527

During the Reformation, opium is reintroduced (under the name of laudanum) as pills called 'Stones of Immortality', which were prescribed as painkillers.

1600s

Residents of Persia and India began to eat and drink opium mixtures for recreational purposes and the Portuguese merchants carrying cargoes of Indian opium through Macao directed its trade flow into China.

1606

Ships chartered by Elizabeth I are instructed to purchase the finest Indian opium and transport it back to England.

1680

The English apothecary, Thomas Sydenham, introduced Sydenham's Laudanum, a compound of opium, sherry wine and herbs, which was a popular remedy for numerous ailments.

1700

The Dutch exported shipments of Indian opium to China and the islands of Southeast Asia; whilst the Dutch introduce the practice of smoking opium in a tobacco pipe to the Chinese.

1729

The Chinese emperor, Yung Cheng, prohibited the smoking of opium and its domestic sale, except under license for use as a medicine.

1750

The British East India Company took control of Bengal and Bihar, opium-growing districts of India. This soon became a trade of 2000 chests annually. This meant that the British dominated the opium trade out of Calcutta to China and eventually led to a monopoly of the trade. All poppy growers in India were forbidden to sell opium to competitor trading companies.

1753

Linnaeus, the father of botany, first classified the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum* – as 'sleep-inducing', in his book *Genera Plantarum*.

1793

The British East India Company establishes a monopoly on the opium trade. All poppy growers in India were forbidden to sell opium to competitor trading companies.

1799

China's emperor, Kia King, banned opium completely, making trade and poppy cultivation illegal.

1800

The British Levant Company purchases nearly half of all of the opium coming out of Smyrna, Turkey strictly for importation to Europe and the United States.

1803

The German, Friedrich Sertuerner of Paderborn, discovered the active ingredient of opium by dissolving it in acid then neutralizing it with ammonia. The result: alkaloids – Principium somniferum or morphine. It is considered 'God's own medicine' for its reliability, long lasting effects and safety and by 1827 E. Merck & Company of Germany had started to manufacture morphine commercially.

1819 - 1821

Writer John Keats and other English literary personalities experimented with opium and Thomas De Quincey published his autobiographical account of opium addiction, 'Confessions of an English Opium-eater.'

1830

22,000 pounds of opium was imported from Turkey and India by Britain.

1837

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (a renowned poet) became a morphine user.

March 18, 1839

Lin Tse-Hsu, imperial Chinese commissioner in charge of suppressing the opium traffic, ordered all foreign traders to hand over their opium. In response, the British sent warships to the coast of China, beginning The First Opium War.

1840

New Englanders brought 24,000 pounds of opium into the United States. This was spotted by U.S. Customs which immediately put a duty on the import.

1841

The Chinese were defeated by the British in the First Opium War. Along with paying a large indemnity, Hong Kong was ceded to the British.

1843

Dr. Alexander Wood of Edinburgh discovered a new technique of administering morphine, injection with a syringe. He finds the effects of morphine on his patients instantaneous and three times more potent.

1856

The British and French renewed their hostilities against China in the Second Opium War. In the aftermath of the struggle, China is forced to pay another indemnity and the importation of opium was legalised.

1874

The English researcher, C.R. Wright first synthesised heroin, or diacetylmorphine, by boiling morphine over a stove.

1878

Britain passed the Opium Act in order to reduce opium consumption. Under the new regulation, the selling of opium was restricted to registered Chinese opium smokers and Indian opium eaters.

1886

The British acquired Burma's northeast region, the Shan state. Production and smuggling of opium along the lower region of Burma thrives despite British efforts to maintain a strict monopoly on the opium trade.

1890

In the U.S., Congress imposed a tax on opium and morphine.

1895

Heinrich Dreser (of The Bayer Company of Elberfeld, Germany), found that diluting morphine with acetyls produces a drug without the common morphine side effects. Bayer begins production of discetylmorphine and calls it "heroin". It was not available commercially for another 3 years.

Early 1900's

The philanthropic Saint James Society in the U.S. mounted a campaign to supply free samples of heroin through the mail to morphine addicts who were trying to give up their habits.

1902

In various medical journals, physicians discuss the side effects of using heroin as a morphine step-down cure. Several physicians would argue that their patients suffered from heroin withdrawal symptoms equal to morphine addiction.

1905

The U.S. Congress banned opium.

1906

China and England finally enacted a treaty restricting the opium trade.

Several physicians experiment with treatments for heroin addiction. Dr. Alexander Lambert and Charles B. Towns touted their popular cure for heroin addiction. It consisted of a 7 day regime (including a five day purge of heroin from the addict's system with doses of belladonna delirium).

The U.S. Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act requiring contents labeling on patent medicines by pharmaceutical companies. As a result, the availability of opiates and opiate consumers significantly declines.

1909

The first federal drug prohibition was passed in the U.S. outlawing the importation of opium, in preparation for the Shanghai Conference in February, at which the US pressed for legislation aimed at suppressing the sale of opium to China.

1910

After 150 years of failed attempts to rid the country of opium, the Chinese were finally successful in convincing the British to dismantle the India-China opium trade.

Early 1940's

During World War II, opium trade routes are blocked and the flow of opium from India and Persia was cut off. Fearful of losing their opium monopoly, the French encouraged farmers to expand their opium production.

1945-1947

Burma gained its independence from Britain at the end of World War II. Opium cultivation and trade flourished in the Shan states.

1948-1972

Corsican gangsters dominated the U.S. heroin market through their connection with Mafia drug distributors. After refining the raw Turkish opium in Marseille laboratories, the heroin is made easily available for purchase by junkies on New York City streets.

1950's

U.S. efforts to contain the spread of Communism in Asia involved forging alliances with tribes and warlords inhabiting the areas of the Golden Triangle, (an expanse covering Laos, Thailand and Burma), thus providing accessibility and protection along the southeast border of China. In order to maintain their relationship with the warlords while continuing to fund the struggle against communism, the U.S. and France supplied the drug to warlords and their armies with ammunition, arms and air transport for the production and sale of opium. The result was an explosion in the

availability and illegal flow of heroin into the United States and into the hands of drug dealers and addicts.

1962

Burma outlaws opium.

1965-1970

U.S. involvement in Vietnam was blamed for the surge in illegal heroin smuggled into America. To aid U.S. allies, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) set up a charter airline, Air America, to transport raw opium from Burma and Laos. As well, some of the opium was transported to Marseille by Corsican gangsters to be refined into heroin and shipped to the U.S. via the French. At this time, the number of heroin addicts in the U.S. reached an estimated 750,000.

October 1970

Legendary singer, Janis Joplin, was found dead – a victim of an “accidental heroin overdose.”

1972

Heroin exportation from Southeast Asia’s Golden Triangle became a major source for raw opium.

July 1, 1973

President Nixon created the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) under the Justice Department to consolidate virtually all federal powers of drug enforcement in a single agency.

Mid-1970’s

Saigon fell, leading to the fall-off of the heroin epidemic.

1978

The U.S. and Mexican governments eliminated the source of raw opium by spraying poppy fields with Agent Orange. However, at the same time, another source of heroin was found in the Golden Crescent area – Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, creating a dramatic upsurge in the production and trade of illegal heroin.

1988

Opium production in Burma increased under the rule of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the Burmese junta regime.

The single largest heroin seizure ever was made in Bangkok – weighing 24,000 pounds.

It is estimated that between 1980 – 1989 the world opium production tripled from 1,450 tons to a peak of 4,105 tons.

October 31, 1993

Twenty-three-year-old American actor River Phoenix died of a heroin-cocaine overdose.

April 1994

Kurt Cobain, lead singer of the American rock band, Nirvana died of heroin-related suicide.

By the early 1990s, heroin was available world-wide. The drug lords of Colombia and Burma had begun to behave more like independent entrepreneurs and considered possible marketing opportunities for their drugs. They also started to take bold initiatives to expand the markets for their drugs. Importantly, they were able to both produce and export vast amounts of the drug, due to their immense wealth and power and they could make use of established criminal organisations such as the Mafia, who were able to act as brokers for these transactions.

Heroin was fantastically profitable and so was aggressively marketed all over the world, leading to a vast increase in the amount of addicts. In particular, the production of cheaper grades of heroin have encouraged more addiction among the poor.

At the moment, Afghanistan is a major grower, as the impoverished farmers there can achieve more than twice the price for opium than for any other crop they are able to produce.

Part of the problem is that, due to the addictive nature of the drug, it is not effective to curb supply, as addicts will be so desperate to get more, that they will always find another source, even if it is more expensive. Therefore, the global trade in cocaine, merely reacts and shifts and alternative sources are always found.

Many experts believe that consumption will continue to increase, with worrying consequences in terms of organised crime, police corruption and an increase in diseases such as HIV/AIDS as a result of injecting the drug.

3. Cannabis (Marijuana)

Cannabis comes from the plant Hemp and is another drug which has been used for thousands of years – the records show that it was probably used around 10,000 years ago in Central Asia (where the hemp plant comes from). A sweet smelling plant, it was widely used for food, especially the seeds. In addition hemp could be used to make textiles so it was a valuable all-round plant.

At around 2727 BC the first record of cannabis being used as a medicine comes from China. The psychotropic properties are mentioned in Pen Ts'ao Ching (a Chinese pharmacopoeia). However, other civilizations also used it. The Hindu Sacred text Atharvaveda (Science of Charms) referred to cannabis as 'Sacred Grass' and considered it to be one of the five sacred plants of India. It was used medicinally and also ritually as an offering to Shiva. Marijuana was probably first used as an intoxicant in India at around 1000BC and became an important part of Hindu culture.

The ancient Persians were using hemp in around 700-600BC for religious purposes and it was mentioned in a religious text called The Zoroastrian Zend-Avesta, where it was referred to as the 'good narcotic'. It was a valuable intoxicant in Islamic culture, it was an acceptable substitute for alcohol (which was prohibited to the followers of Mohammed).

Cannabis made its first appearance in northern Europe in about 500BC by the Scythians and it spread throughout Europe by about 100BC. The Romans in particular were familiar with it. Dioscorides mentions using it as a Roman medicament and Galen talks of the psychoactivity of confections made from cannabis seed – it was used at parties to promote hilarity and happiness.

In AD 1090 – 1256, in Khorasan, Persia, Hasan ibn al-Sabba (the Old Man of the Mountain) recruited followers to commit assassinations and legends developed around their supposed use of Hashish to make them more ruthless. Indeed, the word 'assassin' is said to be derived from the word 'hashish'. These legends describe some of the inebriating powers of cannabis and are the earliest records of its effects.

By about AD 1200, cannabis had reached Egypt and become popular throughout the Middle East. Within a hundred years, it spread down the east coast of Africa as far as Mozambique. Over the next 500 years it is traceable in Spain, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey amongst others and it had become a major trade between Central and South Asia.

In 1798 Napoleon was in Egypt and he discovered that many of the Egyptian lower classes were regularly using it. He declared a total ban. However, soldiers returning to France took the habit back with them.

During the nineteenth century, worldwide use and production increased and in America, it became possible to obtain medical preparations containing cannabis. The British begin to tax

the trade in India and some countries such as Turkey declared it to be illegal. By the end of the century, some estimate that as much as 80,000kg of cannabis was legally imported from Central Asia to India every year.

In Britain, Queen Victoria's physician Russell Reynolds recommended the use of cannabis for medical reasons – it was said to cure a wide range of ailments (such as labour pains, nausea, epilepsy, hysteria, alcoholism, asthma and rheumatism) as well as acting as a mild euphoriant and it was readily available without prescription. However, the smoking of cannabis remained unpopular with the general population and its use was not wide spread.

It is not clear how cannabis reached America. It could have been from the Spanish in the 16th Century, from the slave trade But it soon became popular. Even from the Asian Indian migration in the late 18th Century. Between about 1842 to 1890 marijuana extracts were the second and third most prescribed medicine in the United States. It was originally cultivated as hemp with no apparent knowledge of its intoxicating properties, but in about 1916 American soldiers in Panama learned how to use it in this way. From 1915 – 1927, the United States began to prohibit the use of cannabis for non medicinal use, as did Greece in 1920, and Britain in 1928, following an international drugs conference in Geneva, when an Egyptian delegate convinced everybody that it was a threat to society and was as dangerous as opium. As various countries introduced controls on Cannabis, the illegal smuggling routes began to develop, in particular Egypt (via Greece, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Central Asia) and The Yarkland region of Chinese Turkestan (into India). While the crackdown continued, alternatives quickly sprang up. The Indian government considered cultivation in Kashmir to fill the void from Chinese Turkestan and Nepal increased it's production. Other sources were Morocco, Afghanistan, Pakistan and The Lebanon.

Recreational use of cannabis began in earnest during the fifties when migrants from the Caribbean arrived in the UK. White jazz musicians playing in clubs in Soho in London were among the first to use it. Indeed, the first ever drugs bust in the UK was in 1952 at the Number 11 Club in Soho. Then in the 1960s – the era of Flower Power, it's use soared dramatically, both in the US and the UK. The authorities clamped down on it, as it was thought to be a 'gateway' drug which would lead users onto stronger and more dangerous drug taking.

In the UK, a Home Office Investigation took place on cannabis, leading to the Wootton Report in 1968. It concluded:

"There is no evidence that this activity is causing violent crime or aggression, anti-social behaviour, or is producing in otherwise normal people conditions of dependence or psychosis requiring medical treatment."

More than thirty years after the Wootton Report, it is still illegal to grow, produce, possess or supply the drug to another person. However, this ban may soon be relaxed after the recent announcement from Home Secretary, David Blunkett, that he may allow it for medicinal use if current trials of the drug are successful.

Today, cannabis is the most widely used recreational and (usually) illegal drug in the world. Indeed, the only mind-affecting drugs which are more popular are caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

4. Cocaine

Cocaine is derived from the coca plant, which is native to the high mountain ranges of South America. Line drawings on pottery dating back to 3000 BC (before the rise of the Incan empire) show that the leaf of the coca plant was chewed by the native Indians. It was considered to be a gift from the gods and was used in religious rituals, burials and other special purposes. The stimulating effect of the drug increases breathing and this enabled labourers to work harder, with

increased stamina in the thin air at high altitudes. It also reduced feelings of hunger, fatigue and promoted a sense of well-being. It was even used as a local anaesthetic. When the Spanish conquered the American continent they initially banned the coca leaf because they considered it to be evil, but their Indian workers were unable to work properly without it, so it was permitted and taxed instead. Indeed, eventually it was cultivated by the Catholic Church and coca leaves were distributed to the workers 3 or 4 times a day during rest breaks.

Returning Spanish conquistadors introduced coca to Europe and it was considered to be "an elixir of life". It soon became a popular medicine and tonic in both Europe and America and was credited with curing a wide range of diseases and illnesses. One of its main medical uses was as a surface anaesthetic.

Cocaine was first extracted and isolated from coca leaves in 1855 by Gaedecke who called it Erythroxyline. Dr Albert Nieman extracted and purified this compound and named it cocaine. It was soon considered a wonder drug. However, the first dangers of its use were becoming apparent, in particular, its addictive qualities. Nevertheless, many famous people took it, including Queen Victoria, Winston Churchill and the fictional Sherlock Holmes.

In 1883, the Bavarian Army were given cocaine because it was found that the drug enhanced their endurance when on manoeuvres. The findings were reported in a German medical journal, which helped to make the effects of the drug more widely known.

Cocaine was sold over-the-counter (it was possible to buy it at Harrods until 1916) and was used in diverse products such as tonics, toothache cures, medicines and chocolate cocaine tablets. One fast-selling product, known as Ryno's Hay Fever and Catarrah Remedy consisted of 99.9% pure cocaine. It was also popular when combined with alcohol, in particular in wines and received wide spread endorsements from prime ministers, royalty and even the Pope.

One of the most famous drinks in the world is derived from the coca plant – Coca Cola. It was invented by the American John Pemberton who originally developed an alcoholic version, but it was the combination of the coca leaf, the cola nut and citric acid which became the famous drink we know today. Pemberton was very aware of the positive benefits of the coca leaf, knowing it was considered a stimulant, an aid to digestion, an aphrodisiac and a life-extender. His drink was originally marketed as "*a valuable brain tonic and cure for all nervous afflictions*". Until 1903, a typical serving of Coca Cola contained 60mg of cocaine, but due to public pressure it was then replaced with caffeine. Today it still contains an extract of coca leaves, but the drug has been removed and it is just the flavouring that remains.

In the UK cocaine was widely used in many tonics, but became illegal during World War I when a panic spread that German-made cocaine was being sold to British troops, turning them into crazy men (one of the side effects of the drug is paranoia).

Up until the 1930s there was no real widespread use of cocaine because of the existing general availability of amphetamines and also because there was a concerted effort to stamp it out.

In America the Pure Food and Drug Act became law in 1906 and it then became illegal to buy either in stores or by mail order, products containing cocaine (it also included morphine and heroin) unless they were clearly labeled. There was documented evidence that American contractors regularly gave their Negro labourers cocaine in order to get more work out of them. Then in the New York Times, (Feb 8, 1914), cocaine was blamed for civil disruption: "*Most of the attacks upon white women of the South are the direct result of the cocaine crazed Negro brain.....Negro cocaine fiends are now a known Southern menace.*" Shortly after this, the Harrison Narcotic Act was enacted, controlling the sale of cocaine, opium and opium derivatives. Cocaine was finally added to the list of outlawed narcotics in America through the passing of the Dangerous Drugs Act in 1920.

A coca leaf typically contains between 0.1 and 0.9 cocaine and chewing the leaves does not usually lead to any medical or social problems. However, it was discovered that if the leaves are soaked and mashed, cocaine can be extracted as a coca-paste which can eventually be 60 –

80 per cent pure. This is the powdered form of cocaine, which is normally taken by 'snorting'. Pleasure seeking users, developed ways of injecting the drug to get a greater 'hit', but injecting is generally a stigmatised activity and instead, a way was sought to smoke the drug.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, cocaine became associated with the rich, famous and glamorous and it began to appear as a status symbol drug. However, due to its extremely addictive nature, users craved more and more drugs to get the same 'high'.

Crack Cocaine

The rumours say that Crack Cocaine was created by Yanqui drugs traffickers in the 1970s as a way of testing the purity of South American cocaine. It first became common in the big American cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Washington and it's use in Britain is still relatively confined to the larger towns and cities.

Crack cocaine is cocaine that has been processed into another form to make it easier to smoke. Crack cocaine is processed with ammonia or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and water and then heated. The term 'crack' refers to the crackling sound made when the mixture is heated up. It is much more addictive than ordinary cocaine, but it widely considered to give a more intense experience.

It is likely that in the coming years demands for cocaine will continue to increase due to its highly addictive nature.

5. Anabolic Steroids

Compared to the drugs mentioned so far, the use of anabolic steroids is very recent. Although they were developed in order to help people stay healthy, they have become synonymous with over use in sport. They belong to a group named steroids, the main types of which are listed below:

1. Corticosteroids

These are hormones associated with the adrenal cortex (which influences or controls processes in the body, in particular the cardiovascular system, the skeletal muscle, the kidneys and other major organs). These steroids are found in both prescription and non-prescription creams and ointments for the control of rashes and itching. Two well-known trade names of these corticosteroids are Cortaid(R) and Lanacort(R).

2. Estrogens and Progestogens

These are the female sex hormones. They are responsible for the development of secondary sexual characteristics in women and they help to maintain the female reproductive system. These two hormones are the active ingredients in birth control pills.

3. Androgens

Testosterone is the androgen which leads to the development of male secondary sexual characteristics and maintains the male reproductive system. It can sometimes be prescribed in the treatment of female breast cancer, androgen deficiency and for the stimulation of growth, weight gain and red blood cell production. These are commonly called 'anabolic steroids' because they promote muscle growth and can be used to help patients recover from surgery or cancer treatment which has resulted in damage to muscle tissue.

Some popular steroids are:-

Masteron (also known as drostanolone propionate) is popular among bodybuilders.

Equipoise (also known as boldenone undecylenate) is a popular veterinary steroids used by athletes.

Deca Durabolin is an injectable steroid derived from 19-nortestosterone.

Testosterone Cypionate is an oil based injectable form of testosterone.

Steroids were first developed in the 1930s. German scientists tested them on dogs and discovered that their use led to an increase in muscle mass. They then used them on prisoners to help them stay healthy when malnourished.

In the 1950s athletes in Russia and Europe started to use anabolic steroids in order to increase their strength and achieved amazing successes in sports such as weightlifting where they shattered previous records, particularly the Russian Olympic team in 1952. Dr Ziegler, an American physician discovered that testosterone was the reason for the improvement in performances and soon after he began to produce Dianabol (also known as Methandrostenolone) in his laboratories. A decade later, all the top steroids were openly available on the market and were being used by both doctors and athletes.

However, nobody knew the correct doses for steroids and so competitors always used the highest possible doses over long periods of time. This resulted in huge gains in strength but other serious side effects also started to become apparent.

A range of health conditions began to appear, some of which were minor, but some were much more serious. For example:

- Acne
- Jaundice
- Trembling
- Swelling of feet or ankles
- Bad breath
- Aching joints
- High blood pressure
- Reduction in HDL ('good' cholesterol)
- Liver damage
- Cancer
- Increased chance of injury to tendons, ligaments and muscles

Dangers to men can include a change in sexual characteristics. Even though anabolic steroids are derived from a male sex hormone, the drug can trigger a mechanism in the body that can shut down the normal functioning of the male reproductive system. Other side effects include:

- Shrinking of the testicles
- Reduced Sperm count
- Impotence
- Baldness
- Difficulty or pain when urinating
- Development of breasts
- Enlarged prostate

Women's side effects can be:

- Masculinisation
- Growth of facial hair
- Changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle

- Enlargement of the clitoris
- Breast reduction
- Deepening of the voice

By 1977, the International Olympic Committee banned the use of anabolic steroids in Olympic competition and today they still are banned. Despite this, the black market grew rapidly as not only athletes, but non-athletes started to use them in order to benefit from the body enhancing properties they had. Today, use is still increasing, with the majority of users in their late teens, but even school children use them in order to improve their performance in school sports.

6. Solvents

Although solvent abuse is often considered to be a modern problem, it can be traced back as far as the ancient Greek and other civilizations, where it was considered to enhance religious experiences. At the Oracle of Delphi, priestesses induced trances by inhaling the vapours from crevices in rocks and then uttered mystical observations.

In ancient Judea, it was considered to be a pleasurable part of worship to inhale the vapours from burnt spices and aromatic gums. Perfumes were widely used in Egyptian worship and the ancient Babylonians and Palestinians burned incense made of aromatic wood and spices. Indeed, marijuana (which we have already discussed) was thrown on bonfires in Africa hundreds of years ago, so the smoke could be inhaled.

Indeed even today, many cultures use vapours such as incense and other aromatic materials are for religious purposes.

In more modern times, some of the substances inhaled include:

Nitrous Oxide

This is also known as 'laughing gas' because it often produces a state of excitement accompanied by loud laughter. It was commonly used for its intoxicating effects throughout the nineteenth century. It was popular among well-known figures such as Coleridge, Roget and Wedgwood and was considered to be a genteel way of getting drunk. The affects were described as good, delightful, intoxicating and relaxing. However, unlike alcohol it had an effect in as little as 30 seconds after being inhaled.

It was also valued as an anaesthetic and was used in dentistry, operations and in child birth to ease pain.

Today, nitrous oxide is primarily used as a propellant, for example in whipped cream dispensers. Interestingly, most cases of abuse today include those who have access to commercial gadgets which produce whipped cream or those associated with dentistry.

Ether

Ether was commonly drunk as a substitute for alcohol in nineteenth century Britain, Europe and America, as well as in Germany in the Second World War. As it vaporises at room temperature, it can be either swallowed or inhaled. The trade name for ether was Anodyne and it was recommended for pains caused by kidney stones, gallstones, intestinal cramps, earache, toothache and painful menstruation. It was recommended that 3 – 12 drops should be taken daily as a tonic on a lump of sugar.

Ether certainly became used for recreational purposes around 1790 when records show that it was taken in public. Throughout the nineteenth century there are regular accounts of ether

taking (either sniffing or drinking) at universities in England and the United States. In Ireland in about 1840, a temperance crusade took place, successfully ensuring that thousands of people gave up alcohol. An alcoholic physician named Dr Kelly, was desperate to find a substitute and he turned to ether. Once his friends and patients found out, ether drinking and sniffing became endemic in his part of Ireland. The spread of ether was further enhanced about 15 years later when the UK government put a high tax on alcohol and the poor turned to ether instead. It had the additional advantage that, should the taker be mistaken for a drunk, the effect soon wore off and the offender would usually be sober by the time the police got them to the police station.

By 1890, Parliament reacted and imposed restrictions of the sale of ether and its use only died out in the 1920s when other cheaper beverages became available.

Ether was also used in the United States during the alcohol Prohibition era (1920 – 1933) as well as in Germany during the Second World War. However, in these instances, it was usually drunk rather than sniffed.

When ether was inhaled, it was popularly supposed to produce mystical or mind expanding experiences (much like LSD). Inhalation was widespread among the upper classes in England in the late 19th Century, especially as a substitute for alcohol.

Although its widespread use has died out somewhat in recent years, it is unlikely that sniffing ether has vanished altogether, particularly among those in the medical professions who have easy access to it.

Chloroform

Along with ether, chloroform was frequently used in medicine as an anaesthetic and it became popular for recreational use at 'sniffing parties', particularly among British and American medical students and those with access to laboratories. Its recreational use can be traced back to 1831 when it was first discovered. Sixteen years later, chloroform was brought to Scotland by Dr James Y Simpson for anesthesia during surgery and childbirth. Immediately it was opposed by clergymen who argued that obstetrical anesthesia violated God's word in Genesis 3:16: *"In pain you shall bring forth children."* Dr Simpson responded by quoting Genesis 2:21 which he interpreted as showing that God used anesthesia before taking Adam's rib to form Eve. *"So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs..."* When Queen Victoria used chloroform during the birth of her eighth child, the controversy was finally calmed.

Recreational use of chloroform continued, although it never achieved the popularity of ether.

Gasoline

It was in 1950s America that the misuse of gasoline first occurred on a widespread basis among young people. There were also some reports of petrol sniffing in Australia, India and Britain too. Generally gasoline produces similar effects to LSD and can result in odd behaviour, hallucinations and temper tantrums.

Glue Sniffing

Glue sniffing was first reported in Arizona and Colorado in America during the 1950s. This spread throughout America and by 1965 most states had become affected. In the UK, the prevalence increased more slowly and it did not become a serious problem until the 1970s.

Present day

Today, there are a wide range of products which can be sniffed. Most of them contain solvents such as:

- Toluene
- Hexanes
- Heptanes
- Ethyl acetate
- Isopropyl acetate
- Acetone
- Methyl ethyl ketone
- Methylene chloride
- Trichloroethane

These tend on the whole to act as depressants and can have other serious side effects. The products which contain these solvents include:

- Hobby glue
- Cleaning fluids
- Lighter fuels
- Nail polish remover
- Paint thinners
- Aerosol products

Between 1971 and 1997 in the UK, 549 deaths were caused by butane gas lighter refills.

Most European, African and American countries are now affected by this problem, as well as Japan.

Conclusion

The perception that drug abuse is a modern day problem is clearly not the case, as many ancient civilizations made extensive use of herbs and substances in order to benefit from the side effects. Indeed, this puts into perspective our current struggle to restrict illegal production and consumption of drugs; if we have been taking them for thousands of years, all over the world, then the human race clearly has a love affair with substances which can alter our perception or experiences.

Self-Assessment Questions

- 1. Which ancient civilization originally used opium?*
- 2. Why do you think the opium trade in the nineteenth century was so important to Britain?*
- 3. What plant is cannabis derived from?*
- 4. What are some of the alternative names given to cannabis?*
- 5. What are some of the illnesses that cannabis was said to help cure?*
- 6. Which plant does cocaine come from?*
- 7. Why did Britain make cocaine illegal?*
- 8. Why is it said that "crack" cocaine was developed?*
- 9. Name the 3 main types of steroids.*
- 10. How did steroids become apparent to the public in 1952?*
- 11. Name 5 types of solvents which people have or still do inhale.*
- 12. List 4 products which people may try to inhale.*