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**'IF I MUST DIE, LET ME DIE DRINKING AT AN INN': THE  
TRADITION OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN AUSTRALIAN  
JOURNALISM**

**JOSIE VINE**



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Dr Josie Vine  
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## From the editors

This edition of *Australian Journalism Monographs*, contributed by Dr Josie Vine from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, considers what is for many in our discipline a nostalgic issue – the connection between alcohol consumption and journalistic culture. Stemming from her doctoral research completed at RMIT, Vine's contribution examines this well-known but little-analysed part of journalistic norms and practises. The monograph begins its considerations in the 19th century, and looks across a range of eras at the role that alcohol has played in both the personal and professional lives of journalists. Importantly, it brings us to the contemporary industry and notes the diminishing importance of the 'drinking culture' for young journalists who now have their own social networks and lives 'outside journalism' that they may escape to. We look forward to seeing more of this work, and further examinations of this issue in other fora—for now, enjoy this extended discussion drawn from Vine's much larger study.

*Australian Journalism Monographs* is now available as a pdf. Go to the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research website for an electronic version of this volume, <http://www.griffith.edu.au/arts-languages-criminology/centre-cultural-research/publications>. The 2009 issue is also available, and we hope past editions will be digitised soon.

The next issue of *Australian Journalism Monographs* will be published in the second half of 2011. We have already received some fantastic proposals for our next issue and would love to see more. Check the inside back cover for Notes to Contributors, and for abstract and paper deadlines.

## **About the author**

Josie Vine teaches in the areas of journalism ethics and regulation, hard news writing, and feature writing in both undergraduate and graduate diploma levels. She also teaches journalism theory and practice, and Literary Journalism in the Masters of Communication degree. After experience in regional newspapers, local magazines, local radio and television news, and in media liaison, Josie began her career in journalism education in 2001 at Deakin University, and has taught at RMIT since 2006. Her research interests include regional reporting, the sociological development of newsroom practice and journalism culture and history.

Josie recently completed her PhD at RMIT, and has previously completed a Masters thesis by research, an Honours dissertation, a Bachelor of Letters and a Bachelor of Arts at Deakin University.

# **'If I must die, let me die drinking at an inn': The tradition of alcohol consumption in Australian journalism**

Dr Josie Vine

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Although the 'stigma' of alcohol consumption is often applied to Western journalism, there has been very little research into how it operated – or operates – as a micro-cultural value, and its possible professional utility. This monograph uses renowned historian Robin George Collingwood's theory of "a priori imagination" (1946/1993) to investigate the possible cultural significance of alcohol consumption in Australian journalism. The monograph applies Collingwood's theory to biographical and autobiographical material, as well as oral history and analyses of industry-specific publications. Through this means of historical retrieval and interpretation, I build a narrative picture of the supposed relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and Australian journalism's cultural norms and practices.*

## **Introduction**

In *The Walkley Magazine's* March 2010 edition, American journalist Jack Shafer laments the passing of the drinking tradition in newsrooms. His regret appears to be over a supposed connection between the drinking tradition and journalism's self-identity:

Every profession needs what academics call an 'occupational mythology' to sustain it, a set of personal and social dramas, arrangements, and devices ... As hard drugs are to the hard rocker and tattoos are to the NBA player, so booze is to the journalist, even if he doesn't drink (Shafer, 2010: 5).

Shafer even goes as far as to suggest a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism's cultural norms and practices:

By giving the newsroom the opportunity to stand up to him, the wise editor instructs his reporters in the advanced techniques of standing up to CEOs and politicians. The wise editor understands that quality journalism requires a bad attitude, foul words and

sometimes a drink afterwards (Shafer, 2010: 5).

You can almost hear hard-bitten journos grunting in agreement, almost see faces of experience nodding sagely. After all, journalism and drinking have supposedly had a long-term relationship. As journalism academic Dr Lynette Sheridan Burns says of the traditional journalist.

The journalist, accustomed to being an outsider, fears no one and cannot be corrupted in the pursuit of truth, whatever the temptation. Always ready to drop everything in pursuit of a 'story', the journalist is always on the move, seldom pausing too long to reflect, and 'tells it like it is', whatever the personal cost ... He is a pub philosopher who likes nothing more than bringing the mighty to account, or championing the cause of society's powerless (Sheridan Burns, 2001: 25).

Although the 'stigma' of alcohol consumption is often applied to Western journalism, there has been very little research into how it operated – or operates – as a micro-cultural value, and its possible professional utility. This monograph investigates the possible implications of taking Sheridan Burns' "philosopher" out of the pub. In other words, this monograph is an investigation into the possible relationship between the supposed tradition of alcohol consumption and Australian journalism's cultural norms and practices.

Because of the vagaries of this job called 'journalism', there are several norms and practices that are seemingly contradictory and not easily understood, let alone easily taught, outside of the internal journalism culture itself. It is therefore unsurprising to find that contemporary journalism education pedagogy believes the subject is best taught as a set of cultural practices. As journalism academic, Dr Michael Meadows, argues, there are "important common practices" required to "make journalism" (Meadows, 1998: 10). The problem is that these "common cultural practices" can appear at odds with journalism's modern 'professional' self-identity, a problem that Columbia University's School of Journalism Professor, James Carey, sees as particularly nefarious:

The great danger in modern journalism is one of professional orientation to an audience: the belief, usually implicit, that the audience is there to be informed, to be educated, to be filled with the vital information and knowledge whose nature, production and control rests with a professional class. The knowledge is defined, identified [and] presented based upon canons of professional expertise over which the audience exercises no real judgement or control. And in this new client-professional relationship that emerges the same structures of dependency are developed that typify the relations of doctors, lawyers and social workers to their clients (Carey, 1980: 6).



So, the challenges appear to be, at least partially, explaining to well-educated, generally morally upstanding professionals (potential journalists) that, as part of their job, they may be required to build affiliation with sources that could include criminals, crooked law enforcers, drug addicts or any number of down-trodden, dubious and possibly dislikeable characters. In a tertiary education environment, it can be a little uncomfortable explaining why it's so important to read that leaked document, or listen to that anonymous source, despite the fact that it could, quite conceivably, land them in dangerous legal waters. Not to mention the difficulties in explaining that gathering information may sometimes require seemingly suspect methods and, when everybody else is running away from that car accident/ bushfire/ tsunami/ bomb blast, it is their job to be running towards it, usually tweeting or filing down their mobile phones at the same time.

And it also seems to be up to journalism educators to assure students that if they do find themselves in trouble - legally, physically or psychologically – there is a whole culture of people who understand, and will support them in, what journalist and academic, Margaret Simons describes as, their “dirty, vital job” (Simons, 2007: 17).

This monograph looks at the possibility that the tradition of alcohol consumption may have acted as a type of mediator between the ‘professional’ self-identity of journalists and Meadows’ “important common practices” that are required to “make journalism”. In other words, that there is a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism’s cultural norms and practices. However, it is important that this inquiry does not merely repeat the anecdotes of a bunch of hard-bitten journos having a yarn around a few beers. On the contrary, it is significant that this inquiry uses a tried and tested, strictly methodological form of cultural-historiography to investigate the possible relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism’s cultural norms and practices.

### ***Cultural-historiography***

That there is a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism’s cultural norms and practices, in this inquiry, functions as an informed, yet provisional, statement of theory; posited for testing using a historiographical methodology that evaluates evidence. That there is a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism’s cultural norms and practices, therefore, functions as a distinct possibility, pragmatically posited, so that evidence relevant to the tradition of alcohol consumption and Australian journalism’s cultural norms and practices may be identified and evaluated. This helps to generate findings about the professional utility, or otherwise, of the tradition of alcohol consumption within Australian journalism micro-culture.

This approach derives from, but is not synonymous with, the “a priori imagination”, noted by renowned historian, Robin George Collingwood (1946/1993: 240 –

249). In *The Idea of History* (1946/1993), Collingwood notes the historian is well advised to begin with “mere theory”, albeit a theory informed by “indications” and capable of being tested:

The hero of a detective novel is thinking exactly like an historian when, from indications of the most varied kinds, he constructs an imaginary picture of how a crime was committed, and by whom. At first, this is mere theory, awaiting verification, which must come to it from without (Collingwood, 1946/1993: 243).

Furthermore:

The historian’s picture of his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities; and if these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each to the next are constructed with due care, always by the ‘a priori imagination’ and never by merely arbitrary fancy, the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data, and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality it represents (Collingwood, 1946/1993: 242).

Here, the “authorities” noted by Collingwood are the documents and other source materials used by the historian to test the cogency of his or her “a priori” statement.

Collingwood’s method is useful in light of the theory of culture developed by British cultural studies scholars Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Collingwood, Hall and Williams, together, provide useful insights into how to discern, develop and test theories using the cultural and micro-cultural factors embroiled in the study of history. The cultural theory of Hall and Williams is particularly useful for showing how an understanding of micro-cultural forms emerges from, and is shaped by, interpretations of historical evidence.

This approach is helpful insofar as it enables this inquiry to move, with Hall and Williams, beyond Ferdinand de Saussure’s somewhat narrow linguistic theory of meaning (1916/1974) into an appreciation of contexts and communities of meaning within macro-cultural and micro-cultural spheres; or in this case, Australian journalism as a micro-culture. In doing so we assume that investigating this micro-culture using historiography can illuminate the professional implications of the tradition of alcohol consumption in Australian journalism.

Here, we understand “tradition” as Williams (1977: 115) conceptualises the term: the construction of cultural power during historical periods, marked by particular macro and micro cultural ideologies and discourses. It is important to note here that “tradition” does not necessarily equate to ‘historical accuracy’ in a positivist

sense, but rather, the norms and practices that members of a community recollect and inherit, or what historian Eric Hobsbawm (1998) describes as “memorial narratives”. These narratives are constructed by communities around shared experience from the existing verifiable facts (Hobsbawm, 1998: 354 – 355). A “memorial narrative” affirms the value or meaning of an event, individual, institution or idea by heightening its more celebrated aspects, while downplaying others. So, in this inquiry into the relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism’s cultural norms and practices, we look at the Australian journalism’s “memorial narratives” in relation to alcohol consumption.

Williams critically clarifies the methodological implications of this approach in his ‘Introduction’ to *Keywords* (1976). His critique helpfully informs the prospect of testing, through historiography, the “a priori imagination”, as a key “memorial narrative” concerning the tradition of alcohol consumption within Australian journalism culture:

Because ‘meaning’, in any active sense, is more than the general process of ‘signification’, and because ‘norms’ and ‘rules’ are more than the properties of any abstract process or system, other kinds of analysis remain necessary. The emphasis of my own analyses is deliberately social and historical. In the matters of reference and applicability, which analytically underlie any particular use, it is necessary to insist that the most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships, and that both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change (in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2000: 79).

Williams’ view on culture and history is akin to Collingwood’s constructivist historiography; thereby helping to generate a methodology that may be fairly called cultural historiography. Williams and Hall focused on the semiotic ‘construction’ of everyday life and the subsequent influence on cultural formation in socio-historical context. Wresting culture from elitist assumptions (that culture could only be interpreted as ‘high culture’) the ‘Birmingham School’ of cultural studies examined, in Williams’ words, the “ordinary” (in Gray & McGuigan, 1993: 5). When Williams spoke of the “ordinary”, he meant key elements of cultural communication or values foregrounded in, for example, newspapers, music, clothes, hairstyles and architecture; in other words, those values that enjoy a consensus concerning their significance, thereby exercising a powerful, yet often unquestioned, influence on cultural consciousness. In this instance, the journalistic values that may be passed from one generation to the next constructed, at least partially, through journalism’s tradition of alcohol consumption.

Within Williams’ general semiological definition of ‘culture’, we understand ‘Australian journalism culture’ as what Romano (2003) calls “micro-culture”. In

Culture and Society (1966), Williams defines culture in the following way:

Culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture (Williams, 1966: 57).

In this investigation into the relationship between alcohol consumption and journalism's norms and practices, the "particular way of life" under investigation is the Australian journalism sub-culture or, in Romano's (2003) terms, Australian journalism "micro-culture".

Here, this paper assumes that journalists can be conceptualised as a micro-cultural group within the wider media culture, as well as within broader Australian macro-culture, or society itself. Further, as Margaret Simons argues, the delineation of journalism from the wider media culture may even be crucial to journalism's norms and practices:

Media and journalism are not the same thing ... 'Media' is the business of selling audiences to advertisers ... News and drama have older and more important purposes than media. [However in] the modern world they are supported by and enmeshed with media (Simons, 2007: 20).

The socialisation process of micro-cultures in general has been articulated by many, and particularly well by Stuart Hall (1978). Yet it is only relatively recently that this notion has been applied to Australian journalism and the crucial 'distinction' between it and media.

These distinctions between 'media' and 'journalism' are furthered by Romano's understanding of journalists as interpretive communities in her study of Indonesian journalism (and its changing culture) during that nation's political shift from dictatorship to a more democratic system (Romano, 2003). According to Romano, the idea that journalists are interpretive communities arises from the theory that journalists' work is "imbued with a distinct sense of journalist collectivity":

Journalists have a strong sense of social identity, so that there is commonly a uniformity of opinion among them about their role in society ... Such self-identity is based on their horizontal relationship with their colleagues who work at the same level, rather than from vertical management or pressure from editors, managers or other figures more senior to them within the newsrooms' hierarchical chain of power (Romano, 2003: 9).

Romano further points out that journalists function informally as a community, even when the formal mechanisms of professional affiliations are “moribund” (Romano, 2003: 9). In other words, when studying journalism, it is wise to not only analyse the formal, standardised patterns of professional association and interaction, but also the “cultural discussion”, or how journalists monitor the appropriateness of their own behaviour through interaction with other journalists (Romano, 2003: 9).

Brand and Pearson (2001) help corroborate this theory of journalism as a micro-culture by observing a “herd, pack or club mentality” among journalists. According to Brand and Pearson, this is a result of journalists “mixing” with each other in social networks or while covering the same news events. Although journalists remained competitive, “often strongly so”, Brand and Pearson identified a “strong common cultural mindset” (Brand and Pearson, 2001: 10 – 11).

Barbie Zelizer also foregrounds the phenomenon of journalism as micro-culture when she argues that reporters, in particular, absorb “rules, boundaries and a sense of appropriateness about their actions without ever actually being informed of them by their superiors” (Zelizer, 1993: 221). Similarly, John Hurst also recognises the existence of a journalistic micro-culture in his anthology of Walkley Award winners:

They’re [journalists] an interesting tribe, with their own strange totems and taboos, a close fraternity apart from, yet part of the crowd (Hurst, 1988: 6).

So, this inquiry looks into the cultural construction of this “interesting tribe”, through an interpretation of a particular “strange totem” – alcohol consumption – within it. In short, the relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption, and journalism’s cultural norms and practices is investigated using a form of cultural historiography. Here, biographical and autobiographical material by or about Australian journalists, industry-specific texts (The Walkley Magazine’s predecessor, *The Journalist*), and oral history from Melbourne journalists will be regarded as historical documents that provide opportunities to investigate the relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and Australian journalism’s cultural norms and practices.

What must be kept in mind, however, is that because of this project’s limited scope, the number of oral history interviewees is also limited. The project’s oral history phase, therefore, treats Melbourne as a microcosm of Australian journalism, and diversifies the data with industry-specific texts and biographical and autobiographical documents relating to journalism Australia-wide.

To vouchsafe a degree of objectivity in the interview selection process, Melbourne journalism’s professional association, The Melbourne Press Club, functioned as an independent outsider to select oral history subjects: ten who were aged under

25, and working as journalists in daily news in 1972; and ten aged under 25 and working as journalists in 2003. Although this exempts those who did not have access to Melbourne Press Club communication, this process does ensure minimal external influence.

Before the interviews began, however, problems of recollection needed mitigation. This was done by integrating extra comments or questions into the interview schedule, somewhat controlling tendencies to glorify or romanticise the past. By using Minichiello's "recursive model" of open-ended interviews (1995: 80), the research design minimises difficulties of recollection, and thereby makes the material more useful than problematic.

### ***Alcohol consumption: An Australian journalism "memorial narrative"***

Despite alcohol's obvious potential as a detriment to professional practice, the tradition of alcohol consumption appears to be one of Australian journalism culture's most dominant "memorial narratives". The journalism micro-culture appears to construct the tradition of alcohol consumption around the shared experience of journalists, with its more celebrated aspects heightened, while its negatives are downplayed.

For example, just listen to Arthur Reid's whimsical affection when he recalls drunkenness among his newsroom colleagues in his 1933 autobiography *Those Were the Days*. His characters include: Billy Clare, a "courteous, imperturbable and bohemian" journalist, who "took a lot to ruffle, but when roused knew how to handle himself" (Reid, 1933: 20); Alf "Smiler" Hales of the *Mining Review*, "always a bellicose chap", and "continually in trouble", but whose "rough exterior and bitter tongue covered a warm heart" (Reid, 1933: 20). Furthermore, there was P.K.M. "Pekoe Crow" Crozier, "always cheerful" with "infectious bonhomie" (Reid, 1933: 45); the "always chirpy" Vic Lincoln, whose "exuberance of spirits and conversation made him popular"; and Vic Risely who had "disregard for personal appearance" and a "hankering after convivial company" (Reid, 1933: 45).

Alcohol and journalism are treated with similar nostalgia in Claude McKay's (1878 – 1972) autobiography about late 19<sup>th</sup> century journalism, *This is the Life* (1961). McKay talks about his first editor, *The Kilmore Advertiser's* George Goode, who could not make it past the pub on his way back to the office from the bank on payday (McKay, 1961:3). Jules Francis Archibald (1856 – 1919), founder of *The Bulletin* with John Haynes (1850 – 1917) in 1879, also recalls his drinking colleagues during this era with fondness. He remembers one of his first editors, the renowned larrikin, Daniel Harrison, who used to get "well inked" on press nights, leaving the junior staff to write and sub the leader (Lawson, 1983: 9).

It is therefore unsurprising to find Archibald quoted as saying: "If I must die, let me die drinking at an inn" (in Lindsay, 1973: 19). Significantly, according

to biographer, Sylvia Lawson, Archibald's "last bills" were for "whisky and newspapers" (Lawson, 1987: x).

*The Bulletin*, indeed, is one of the richest sources of evidence concerning the significance of alcohol in Australian journalism micro-culture. If we listen to contributor Norman Lindsay's (1879 – 1969) recollections, we can discern alcohol's role in facilitating a sense of journalistic community. *The Bulletin*, says Lindsay, was the "established meeting place" on Saturday payday for those in Sydney literary, artistic and journalistic circles: "With the pleasant jingle of coins, the ritual of payday was always terminated by a departure to the pub next door" (Lindsay, 1973: 4).

"Memorial narratives" surrounding interwar journalism draw further "threads" and "indications" between journalism and the tradition of alcohol consumption. For example, in his autobiography, journalist Eric Baume (1900 – 1967) continuously refers to alcohol and drinking as part of Australian journalism culture. Baume reminisces about his editor-in-chief, George Warnecke and his news editor, Vol Molesworth, "having a couple of drinks together", and bringing back bottles of rum to the office as a means of bribing staff to work after hours (Baume, 1941: 111). Baume also talks of R.C. Packer taking staff to a "little hotel" at the King Street corner, and feeding them "far many more whiskies" as an expression of praise (Baume, 1941: 113). There are also anecdotes about editors "always" having a "good stock of liquor" in their offices, which was routinely stolen by those in the lower ranks of the newsroom hierarchy (Baume, 1941: 156).

But alcohol consumption was not necessarily encouraged in newsrooms. According to biographer Pat Buckridge, Brian Penton's (1904 – 1951) *Daily Telegraph* colleague, Syd Deamer (1891 – 1962), was sacked from the editorship, partly over politics, but mostly over alcoholism (Buckridge, 1994: 191). And yet, alcohol consumption appears to go hand-in-hand with the *Telegraph* "memorial narrative".

For example, according to colleague David McNicoll (1914 – 2000), the Penton years at the *Telegraph* were ones of "raffish behaviour of journalists", when drunkenness and bringing bottles into the office was common. They were days when renowned journalist Lennie Lower (1903 – 1947) would sit, blind drunk, on an upturned dustbin and attempt to write his hilarious column. And late night carousals in the Casterleigh Hotel were a feature of life at the *Telegraph*. (McNicoll, 1980: 129). According to McNicoll, however, the days when alcohol was part of journalism culture at the *Telegraph* ceased after Penton's death in 1951 (McNicoll, 1980: 129).

Yet McNicoll's autobiography is full of references to drinking among journalists. There is the photo of McNicoll, author Robert Ruark and fellow journalist, Ken Inglis, looking obviously inebriated after a "long and fairly boozy lunch", and his description of the "Packer waterhole", where his journalists regularly gathered,

including *Women's Weekly* editor, Esme Fenston (McNicol, 1980: 282).

But according to journalist, Monty Grover (1870 – 1943), the 'hard-drinking' reporter of this era was a false perception. Yet Grover qualifies this by saying:

A few of the brilliant men on the reporting staffs of Australian papers have been called drunkards, but the term is really only comparative. The worst of them in other walks of life would be regarded as mere moderate drinkers. Their lives have been Saharas of sobriety punctuated by occasional oases of inebriation (in Cannon, 1993: 71).

As can be seen, so far Collingwood's theory on "threads" and "indications" between "authoritative sources" suggests that the culture of alcohol consumption is put forward in a frame of warm romanticism within Australian journalism historiography. In other words, the culture of alcohol consumption is, indeed, an Australian journalism "memorial narrative". Yet on further investigation, continuing with Collingwood's "a priori imagination" theory, alcohol consumption or, at least, the tradition of it, is inherently entwined with the evolution of Australian journalism's cultural norms and practices, just as Shafer supposes in *The Walkley Magazine* (Shafer, 2010: 5).

### ***Alcohol consumption and championing the underdog***

For example, Australian journalism historiography suggests the tradition of alcohol consumption facilitated empathy between the news media and its audience as far back as 1827, when *Monitor* editor, Edward Smith Hall (1786 – 1860) and *Australian* editors, William Wentworth (1790 – 1872) and Robert Wardell (1793 – 1834) went in to champion the underdog and supported the suspension of the New South Wales' restrictive stamp duty. In return, Sydney's 'under dog' working class openly declared affection for its champions. When London Crown Law Officers suspended the stamp duty there was, as biographer Sandy Blair interprets, an "uproarious state of excitement" (in Cryle, 1997: 25). Public celebrations even extended to the outlying towns of Parramatta, Windsor and Liverpool. For instance, at Campbell Town, a small settlement some distance to the west, houses and businesses were illuminated, guns were fired and celebrations continued well into the night. Here, it is significant that in taverns and public houses, drink flowed, with toasts being raised with heated enthusiasm to journalists, "Monitor Hall" and those "patriots of Australia", William Wentworth and Robert Wardell: "No wonder leading [journalists] such as Wentworth gained a reputation among conservatives as 'drunk public meeting patriots'," notes Blair (in Cryle, 1997: 25).

Further, according to biographer Cyril Pearl, late Colonial journalist, the Sydney *Truth's* John Norton (1858 – 1916), was "often drunk – very drunk", sometimes so much so, that he could not stand to deliver his political speeches (Pearl, 1958:



9). And yet, as Pearl points out, Norton had such a relationship with his audience that he ended up being elected four times as a Member of Parliament and three times as an alderman. As Pearl notes:

He had been publicly denounced many times as a thief, blackmailer, wife beater and an obscene drunkard, without ever refuting the charges [but] people remember him as a fearless reformer (Pearl, 1958: 10).

Norton's public support achieves even more clarity in the reaction of his audience to his frequent alcohol-addled attacks on the British monarchy. In what biographer, Michael Cannon describes as a "fairly typical foray", Norton wrote that Queen Victoria was "flabby, fat and flatulent" and her son, the Prince of Wales was a "turf-swindling, card-sharping, wife-debauching rascal" (Cannon, 1981: 10). In this case, Norton succeeded in getting himself charged with sedition in 1896 (Cannon, 1981: 9). At the trial, the jury failed to reach agreement; the Crown decided to drop the trial and Norton allegedly became the hero of every radical, republican and working-class person in Australia (Cannon, 1981: 10).

Implied in Pearl's 1958 portrayal, Norton's drunkenness is part of an immoral personality. Michael Cannon, his later biographer, is more kind. In *That Damned Democrat*, Cannon writes that history "can not be certain whether the nation lost more a genius than a blackguard" when Norton died in 1916 (Cannon, 1981: 3). After all:

Much of Norton's best work was carried out under the almost intolerable pressure of newspaper deadlines, which still cause many journalists to flee to the bottle (Cannon, 1981: 3).

Despite Cannon's more sympathetic account, *That Damned Democrat* makes it clear that Norton's life was full of "too much journalism, domestic strife and drunkenness" (Cannon, 1981: 4).

As can be seen from the Norton narrative, there is a suggestion that there are several of Collingwood's "threads" between the tradition of alcohol consumption and the sometimes-necessary anti-authoritarian sensibility that underpins journalism practice – recall Norton's "fairly typical" defiance of the monarchical system which, at the time, was not an opinion often heard publicly. Yet further evidence is required before additional assumptions can be made about this "thread". Here, cultural-historiography can turn to one of Australia's most dominant macro-cultural narratives – Eureka!

Believed to be the only civil rebellion on Australian soil (Kirkpatrick, 2004), the 1854 Eureka rebellion has come to represent the downtrodden underdog rising to seize liberty from, what historian Rod Kirkpatrick describes as, an "arrogant and uncaring" authority that "demanded exorbitant" licence fees, and used

“heavy-handed police tactics” to obtain them (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 31).

The chain of events began when Sir Charles Hotham (1806 – 1855), who had replaced Charles Joseph La Trobe (1801 – 1875) as the newly formed Victorian community’s Governor, instituted twice-weekly searches at the Ballarat gold-digging camp that was already deeply dissatisfied with the licensing system. After botched investigations into the deaths of two diggers, one on the fields, and another after a night of drinking, riots broke out at Ballarat’s Eureka Hotel, followed by fighting at the makeshift ‘Eureka Stockade’.

As a bloody battle that left five soldiers and 24 diggers dead, Eureka has come to symbolise conflict between liberty and authority in Australia. Yet, it is incompletely understood as one of the earliest manifestations of championing the underdog in Australian journalism. According to Kirkpatrick, *The Age*, *Argus*, *Geelong Advertiser* and *The Ballarat Times* condemned the administration “as though with one voice” (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 34). As the local paper, *The Ballarat Times* was particularly partisan on behalf of the diggers.

Editor, Henry Erle Seekamp (1829 – 1864) is remembered as one of the key champions of the underdog in the licensing debate. But what isn’t so widely known is that much of Seekamp’s work – like that of John Norton – was written under bouts of alcoholism. We know from Kirkpatrick that Seekamp died from excessive drinking in 1865, aged 35 years (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 40). Although these dates are inconsistent with the Australian Dictionary of Biography’s (copyright 2006: updated continuously) claim that Seekamp died in 1864, aged 45 years, the fact remains that he both lived with, and died from, excessive alcohol consumption.

And yet, Seekamp stands as one of Australian journalism culture’s dominant “memorial narratives”. As his wife, Clara Seekamp is recorded as saying: “if Peter Lalor was the sword of the movement, my husband was the pen” (in Kirkpatrick, 2004: 32).

Indeed, it is in Seekamp’s somewhat hyperbolic pen that it can be discerned how alcohol-fuelled defiance can manifest in anti-authoritarianism and a determination to champion the underdog. For example, Seekamp charged that the twice-weekly licence searches of diggers’ tents were akin to sport among camp gentry, describing it as “hunting the digger” (in Kirkpatrick, 2004: 32). It seems Seekamp, spurred by alcohol, may have been a crusading editor, “angry” on behalf of the “suffering” diggers up against “the corrupt tools of a tyrannical government” (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 31); a yet his “forthright” editorialising “ensured that agitation and the press were spoken of in the same breath” (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 34).

In fact, as a result of his outrageous journalism, Seekamp was jailed for sedition during the ensuing trials. However, similar to Wentworth and Wardell, and Smith

Hall, Australian journalism culture constructs him, not as a drunkard or a criminal, but as a crusading spirit, who martyred himself to champion the underdog. Here Ballarat historian, Peter Mansfield, allows the suggestion that the link between the tradition of alcohol consumption and Australian journalism's norms and practices was effectively anticipated, even instantiated, by Seekamp: "Seekamp and other newspapermen ensured that the political background was much larger and subject to public scrutiny – a process we now take as a natural right" (in Kirkpatrick, 2004: 41).

Further, as Kirkpatrick says, Eureka has "much to say about courageous editorial leadership on behalf of an oppressed people" (Kirkpatrick, 2004: 31), as opposed to much to say about alcoholism.

As Australian journalism historian, Denis Cryle claims, "intemperance and drunkenness" were "common complaints" in many colonial newsrooms (Cryle, 1997: 9) and, according to Lloyd, traditions of hard drinking and irregular lifestyle "lingered" from earlier days in turn-of-the-century journalism (Lloyd, 1985: 25).

In the Australian Colonial journalism narratives so far dealt with, glimpses of the link between the tradition of alcohol consumption and the independent anti-authoritarianism that is often an underpinning necessity of journalism practice can be seen: Norton's aggression towards Queen Victoria and her son, for example, during a time when such opinions were not widely publicised, and Seekamp's determination to champion the oppressed. And it must be remembered that Australia didn't even have freedom of the press until Wentworth and Wardell audaciously started printing *The Australian* in 1824, without government consent. Although, as Cryle points out, the pair probably escaped penalty because the newly instituted legislative council was not yet functioning, once the freedom to print without prior restraint was granted to Wentworth and Wardell, it could hardly have been denied to others. In other words, using Collingwood's "a priori imagination" theory so far, "threads" and "indications" can be drawn between authoritative sources to suggest somewhat of a link between the tradition of alcohol consumption and what can now be termed as a normative journalistic 'sensitivity' involving championing the underdog.

### ***Alcohol consumption and independence***

Despite the fact that later generations of Australian journalists operated under more liberal eras, the emerging culture of alcohol consumption continued developing its establishment as a means of expressing a normative journalistic 'sensitivity'.

For example, in his autobiography, war correspondent (and possibly communist journalist) Wilfred Burchett (1911 – 1983), claims that alcohol was used as a collective sign of independence, when General Ridgeway issued a ban on "fraternisation, consorting and trafficking" between correspondents and

Communist journalists during the Korean conflict. The morning after it was issued, the “whole press corps”, as an expression of defiance, made an “extra ostentatious display of fraternisation, including some drinking of alcoholic beverages” (Burchett and Shimmin, 2005: 386).

Alcohol was again used as an expression of independence, this time on Australian television, in 1967. When the ABC's *This Day Tonight* had just finished reporting on an incident in which a pen on Harold Holt's desk turned out to be a concealed microphone, host Bill Peach (1935 - ) finished the program by saying: “If you have things on your desk, they should do things they're supposed to.” The phone on Peach's desk then rang. He picked it up, poured beer out of it into a glass and wished the audience good night (Peach, 1992: 50).

But rather than being remembered as a bunch of drunks, *This Day Tonight* is recorded as practising breakthroughs in the journalistic craft. For example, veteran journalist, Mungo MacCallum (1941 - ) credits *This Day Tonight* for being an “irreverent” current affairs program, pushing Australian journalism into a more liberal era (MacCallum, 2001: 106). Typically independent and audacious in its anti-authoritarianism, *This Day Tonight* would openly tell its audience when politicians and other public figures refused to appear on the program over sensitive issues – an unprecedentedly disrespectful move at the time (Peach, 1992: vi). It has since been taken up by journalism as an effective way to ensure that politicians cannot easily elude scrutiny in the public sphere, as was seen in August on the ABC's Q&A program when ALP powerbroker, Mark Arbib refused to attend the televised discussion, leaving an empty chair at the panel table (ABC, Q&A, August 23, 2010). As host Bill Peach points out:

TDT took the attitude that politicians were the servants of a democratic nation ... if they refused to appear, we said they had refused to appear. We indicated the empty chair where the minister would have been sitting ... The missing parties found themselves the subject of sarcasm from their Canberra colleagues, who told them, ‘that was a very good non-appearance last night’. It wasn't long before the ministers discovered that their other engagements weren't so pressing (Peach, 1992: 44).

But alcohol as an expression of independence wasn't only used against politicians and military authorities. It was also used as an expression of independence against managerial interference in the newsroom. For example, oral history indicates that, in the 1970s, The Age had a ‘no-drinking’ policy on the newsroom floor. But, according to one former Age cadet, there existed a deliberately ignored “bog bar” in the locker room, where staff could imbibe:

“But it was a benefit, cause if shit hit the fan, you had a pile of half-drunk subs ready to drag out and we would often rewrite the paper with half a dozen subs who should have knocked off hours ago,

and then you had to buy them more beer, but it worked” (former Age cadet, interviewed 2003).

The desirability of having our daily information prepared by a “bunch of half-drunk subs” may today appear dubious. McCallum furthers this point in his autobiography, *The Man Who Laughs* (2001), when he notes the centrality of alcohol in the Canberra Press Gallery’s culture during the 1960s and 1970s:

We ... seldom started our serious drinking sessions much before lunchtime. But drink we did; during non-sitting weeks ... our brisk working lunches frequently dragged on towards sunset. The time, we assured each other, was not wasted; much valuable information was exchanged and many profound insights mused upon. It was all thoroughly worthwhile, or at least, it would have been if anyone had remembered any of it later (MacCallum, 2001: 165).

### ***Alcohol consumption and journalistic self-identity***

Despite McCallum’s sardonic raised eyebrow, he does allude to alcohol consumption’s professional utility as a tool for newsgathering. This suggestion is further borne out in oral history gathered from other journalists from the 1970s, when pubs appeared to be, at least partially, about newsgathering. According to oral history, they were places where journalists met and mingled with sources such as members of the police, and union and government officials:

Oh, you’d mainly go out with other journalists, but you’d also go for a drink with contacts and sources ... the cops were always dropping into the Kilkenny to see what was going on ... in fact, it was sort of a second home for the cops (former Herald cadet, interviewed, 2003).

According to a former Age journalist, certain rounds laid claim to certain watering holes. For example, the Trades Hall round was conducted at the John Curtin Hotel, and industrial reporters “knocked around” with union officials at the City Court Hotel. Further, this “boozy culture” meant younger journalists would “knock around” with those more experienced, and appears to have functioned as a means of developing a ‘journalist’ self-identity. This suggestion is further supported within Australian journalism’s historical narrative.

For example, Burchett implies that imbibing was not only an extension of journalistic newsgathering practice during WWII, but also a means of identifying oneself as a ‘journalist’. According to Burchett, war correspondents were often billeted with army officers, who held rations of alcohol for their guests, the imbibing of which was a method of gaining information. He further suggested that alcohol consumption was a means of building a journalistic self-identity, when he, himself, boasts of being a “good drinker” – as “colleagues who have

encountered me on five continents and innumerable islands can testify” (Burchett and Shimmin, 2005: 431).

The “thread” between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalistic self-identity can also be seen in journalism micro-culture’s historiographical narratives surrounding the Vietnam conflict. For example, correspondent Peter Finn recalls the two main locations for Rest and Recuperation: the AAP suite at the Caravelle Hotel, overlooking the Saigon River; and United Press International’s Head Quarters. From the Caravelle suite’s balcony, journalists were drinking every night to the background noise of war “in comfort”. Journalists even had their own “conditions” of entry: “When you came back for a few days of slumber and booze,” says Finn, “you had to bring back a large 2 litre bottle of gin, bourbon or whisky” (Finn, 1998: 19).

At UPI, after filing stories, the reporters would head for the bar, which was in effect the correspondents’ club of Saigon:

“The girls were, as far as I could see, for decoration and the beer – Balmy Bah – or water buffaloes bile, as it was commonly referred to, was shithouse. Still, we drank it” (Finn, 1998: 20).

Renowned Vietnam correspondent, Neil Davis (1934 – 1985), provides a further “thread” in his biography *One Crowded Hour*, when he recalls the Khmer Rouge takeover in Cambodia:

Each evening the foreign correspondents would attend the press briefing on the war situation ... Afterward, the journalists would go to the Grand Lac Bar on the banks of the Mekong, just below the bridge that the Khmer Rouge blew up so many times throughout the war (in Bowden, 1987: 253).

Davis himself can be seen as a metaphorical “thread” between alcohol consumption and the development of a ‘journalist’ self-identity. According to colleague, Brian Barron, Davis had a great capacity for booze and could drink his way through the night if necessary:

Davis could spend a night drinking beer, topped with a dozen pipes at Madame Choum’s Opium Den, and still make it to the front line by first light the next day (in Bowden, 1988: 261).

It could be argued that the excesses of Vietnam correspondents like Davis were perhaps exceptional responses to what biographer Tim Bowden calls a “constant overdose of human suffering and despair” (Bowden, 1988: x). However, these manifestations of the culture of alcohol consumption can also be discerned as simply acute expressions of what this inquiry is uncovering as an Australian journalistic ‘sensibility’ that not only involves a determination to express

independence, but also a determination to uncover ‘truth’, or verifiable facts, even in the face of danger to personal safety.

### ***Alcohol consumption and pursuit of ‘truth’***

For example, we know that both Davis and Burchett would report from the front lines of battle. We also know that both were willing to go into ‘enemy’ territory to redress the imbalance of opinion in the western media at the time. Although there are questions about Burchett’s motives (both then and now Burchett has been accused of reporting with an ideologically biased point-of-view), it cannot be denied that his excessive risk-taking reporting technique did contribute an alternative perspective to public understanding of the issue. As Burchett himself said in the film documentary, *Public Enemy Number One* (Bradbury, 1980):

I felt there should be a voice from the other side. An experienced Western journalist who’d give the other side’s point of view ... the public had to a great extent been fooled ... people were being kidded along, conned if you like, into going to war (Bradbury, 1980).

Davis (or “Death Wish”, as he became known) provides a similar account for his reportage from the front line:

The unfair thing was that from the time the Americans came into South Vietnam in force in 1965 until they announced a limited withdrawal in 1968, the impression was given to the world that the Americans were doing almost all the fighting, while the inefficient and cowardly ARVN were sitting back doing nothing. This was not true ... that is why I was determined to cover the ARVN fighting effort (in Bowden, 1988: 121 – 122).

According to Bowden, Davis’ attitude to work was “uncompromising”, believing it was the journalist’s job to bring ‘truth’ to the people (Bowden, 1987: 185). Davis himself diarised just before entering Saigon during its fall to the Viet Cong: “Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe I’m going to die. But that’s my decision” (Bowden, 1987: 337). Davis was shot and killed on assignment in Bangkok in 1985.

The “threads” and “indications” suggesting a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and the journalistic cultural practice of skating the periphery of personal safety can further be seen in the events leading up to one of Australian journalism’s most prominent “memorial narratives”; that of the Balibo Five.

Greg Shackleton (1947 – 1975), Tony Stewart (1954 – 1975) and Gary Cunningham (1947 – 1975) from Channel Seven, and Brian Peters (1949 – 1975) and Malcolm Rennie (1946 – 1975) from Channel Nine were in the tiny East Timorese village of Balibo in 1975 to gather footage of Indonesian military ships,

which were presumed to be in Timorese waters waiting to invade. Uncertainty still exists about whether the Australian newsmen were caught in cross fire, or deliberately murdered by the Indonesian military to stop information about the invasion reaching Australia. Either way, the Balibo Five were journalists, and they were killed on assignment, leaving their story as one of Australian journalism's most prominent "memorial narratives". And the fact that alcohol pervades this narrative weaves a further "thread" in this investigation into the tradition of alcohol consumption and its relationship to normative journalistic practice.

The Five's relaxed attitude towards reporting from a country at civil war was apparently a means of dismissing trepidation in what was an obviously dangerous, but also an important, potentially career-enhancing, situation. But of more significance to this investigation, alcohol consumption may have made a contribution to the Five's devil-may-care mask.

For example, take note of the Channel Seven crew's response to the dangers faced in Maliana, a small town 45-minutes away from their destination in Balibo. At nightfall the three were dining in the village when suddenly a silence fell and they noticed an ominous change in atmosphere. In his diary, Shackleton notes:

Maliana during the day is full of troops and there were quite a few when we arrived. But at the end of our meal in deep darkness we became aware we were the only people there. Gary, my cameraman, casually asked in which house we would sleep. Our interpreter suddenly gushed forth the information he had been bottling up for so long for fear of interrupting our meal: 'Oh, we not sleep here. Maliana very dangerous after sun goes down. All our troops hide themselves already.' It may have been the beer, it may have been the absurd situation but we three doubled up with laughter and were driven off still laughing with our headlights off for safety (Ball and McDonald, 2000: 41).

John Whitehall, a doctor who flew with the Channel Seven crew into Dili, later articulated well their mood at the time they were travelling into the unknown: "All of us had a feeling of levity," he says. "We minimised the risks, believing in some way that we were immune" (Ball and McDonald, 2000: 43).

And we know from biographers Desmond Ball and Hamish McDonald that, despite the rough terrain, the Five carried with them days worth of beer and wine supplies into Balibo, because they knew the tiny village was otherwise deserted except for Fretilin fighters (Ball and McDonald, 2000: 43). And of course, there is that indelible footage of four of the five newsmen, lounging with their shirts off, innocently imbibing in what was to be their final drink.

Foolish naivety in hindsight perhaps, yet in the Balibo narrative, we find a further "thread" that adds to that found in the Burchett and Davis narratives, weaving



a link between the tradition of alcohol consumption and a journalistic sensibility, this time involving a tendency to prioritise 'getting the story' over risks to personal safety.

So far Collingwood's "a priori imagination" theory has suggested a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and certain normative practices that are particular to journalism, namely the necessity to affiliate with the public (as opposed to affiliation with 'clients'); the necessity to strive aggressively for independence and the necessity to skirt the periphery of physical danger. But now turning to how this 'sensibility' was instilled in young journalists over generations, alcohol consumption's function in journalism culture can again be seen.

### ***Alcohol consumption and industry training***

For example, a colleague of WWII journalist, George Johnston (1912 – 1970), Greeba Jamison, alludes the informal role drinking had in industry training at *The Age*:

He [Johnston] would burst into the big reporters room ... and the whole place was turned on end ... everyone, men and women, would cluster round and George would tell us with tremendous gusto ... of his exploits in the war ... Usually we would repair to the Duke of Kent hotel across the road in La Trobe Street and the story would continue over many rounds of beer (in Kinnane, 1986: 48).

In his autobiography, renowned journalist, Douglas Pringle (1912 – 1999), also suggests how young journalists were inducted into the industry when he recounts his first day at the Herald office in 1952:

A reporter, whom I had not met, shyly put his head into my office, introduced himself and asked if I would like to have a drink at the 'local rubbity'. I did not know what this was, but guessed that it meant the pub. I agreed and we walked down the street to Aaron's Hotel (now destroyed) where a group of reporters were waiting. They bought me drinks and we chatted amicably. As so often in Australia, this group always drank at Aaron's and had their favourite barmaid, a handsome girl called Nancy (Pringle, 1973: 85).

As Pringle suggests, the tradition of alcohol consumption appears to have played a role in inducting young journalists into the industry's culture. This "thread" becomes stronger when looking at the narrative surrounding commercial current affairs television, 60 Minutes. According to producer, Gerald Stone, to survive a 60 Minutes job interview, any woman would have to prove herself as hard – or harder than – the men she worked with. And this was largely true of Australian journalism in general in the 1970s (Stone, 2001: 187). So when Jana Wendt (1956 - ) joined the very masculine 60 Minutes team in 1982, she faced a particularly

difficult rite-of-passage involving, no less, a “marathon drinking session” with George Negus (1942 - ).

According to Stone, Negus gave Wendt a particularly belligerent reception – attacking her to her face as an amateurish lightweight. The two “fought out” their differences at what was supposed to be a peace-making lunch that stretched on into an early-hours slanging match. “George ended up impressed enough with both her ability to defend herself, and her drinking capacity to send her a conciliatory bunch of flowers,” says Stone (Stone, 2001: 189).

As Stone suggests, in an era when female journalists were mainly considered as very good fashion writers or wedding pages editors, but not much good at chasing ambulances or fire trucks, joining the journalism culture could be achievable through alcohol consumption as a means of proving oneself journalistic material. And this, apparently, is exactly what Wendt did. As Stone says, Wendt developed a “legendary capacity to hold her grog” (Stone, 2001: 196).

The use of alcohol consumption to break down the industry’s gender barriers may, in hindsight, appear highly offensive. But when looking at the oral history, it appears that this aspect of the culture was part of the attraction for female journalists.

One former female Age cadet, for example, recalls going out drinking “at least” three or four times a week and, because of shift work, going out just as people in other professions would be heading home. “So it was natural that the only people we socialised with were other journalists,” she says.

But rather than lamenting the culture of alcohol consumption, she “just loved it”:

I’d just fallen in love. I loved the work, I loved the process. I loved the news ... I was wildly excited by the social milieu and the culture ... It was so raffish! I was just hooked, completely hooked! (former Age cadet, interviewed 2003).

Another former female Herald cadet said on quiet afternoons on the late shift, “it’d be ‘oh bugger off to the pub, we’ll call you if we need to’, and if you didn’t get the call, you’d stay there until you fell down, which I often did ... I mean, drinking was just part of it [journalism]”. And yet, to her, journalism was “just a type of magnet”:

I was completely indoctrinated, in the sense that I was just thrilled to be part of ... the vitality of very long hours, and camaraderie, and the pub (former Herald cadet, interviewed 2003).

This “indoctrination” associated with the culture of alcohol consumption appears to have extended to informal training in the sometimes-necessary ability to skirt

the periphery of legality. According to the oral history, “dozens” of journalists were “risking jail”. These risks ranged from the serious to the mundane – from receiving illegally obtained leaked documents; refusing to reveal an anonymous source before a court of law; signing false names to gain access to office buildings, to speeding; trespassing and lying. And those who got away with it were hailed as “heroes”: “The journalism upbringing was get the facts, and get them right, any way you could,” one former Herald cadet said (interviewed 2003).

Yeah, yeah, we always broke the law,” said another. “But there’s the law, and then there’s the LAW, we would speed, trespass, do reckless things, but only if we thought the story was worth it (interviewed 2003).

But while it appears to have been accepted, even encouraged, to break the law, breaking one’s ethics was clearly out-of-bounds. Although ‘formal’ ethical codes (such as that developed by the-then Australian Journalists’ Association) were not widely known, the informal ones were “sort of” passed down from one generation to the next within the newsroom and, significantly, the pub. And in this informal training, clear demarcations were made between ethics and legality. This was particularly evident in the issue of source confidentiality: “There’d be no question of refusing to reveal your source – you just didn’t do it,” one former Herald cadet said. Further:

Your obligation to your source was always your highest obligation. And that was very much emphasised in the newsroom, just by the way the older journos treated their sources, and by the way they’d talk about it in the pub. We just learnt by their example (former Age cadet, interviewed 2003).

The pub appears to be the place where young journalists were also trained in the quiet, but organised revolts against ‘death knocks’, or approaching relatives of the recently departed for interviews:

I used to go out with a photographer, and I would go up and stand at the door for a minute or two, and then I would come back and say, ‘we knocked on this door, didn’t we?’ and the photographer would say ‘yep’. And I would say ‘and no one was home, were they?’, and he’d say ‘nope’. Then I’d say, ‘well, that’s it for the day, let’s go back and get the shipping news’, and there’d be no more questions (former Age cadet, interviewed 2004).

One former Herald cadet openly admits he would “play dead” on a story, or claim inability to gather information when it called personal ethics into question:

Well, we all played dead on some stories, ‘specially death knocks, you know, not pursuing it to the very end degree, we

all knew we could say 'look, this was the best I could do,' or 'I wasn't able to get hold of him or her or whatever' ... and you wouldn't get ribbed by your colleagues, just looked at knowingly in the pub afterwards (former Herald cadet, interviewed 2004).

In fact, it appears young 1970's journalists obtained the vast majority of their training in the pub:

You'd work pretty hard and get the work out of the way, and then go down the pub and talk about it ... you'd do a lot of learning there, I mean some of the really impressive reporters were big boozers – people who been to wars and things – they'd stand up and start talking about it ... you picked up on the culture and the tricks ... you identified with people who you thought worth learning from at the pub (former Herald cadet, interviewed 2004).

### ***Alcohol consumption and pastoral care***

Drinking appears to be an inherent part of 1970's journalism culture. Certain pubs were mentioned often within the oral history interviews: the John Curtin Hotel; the City Court Hotel; the Kilkenny Inn Hotel; the Phoenix and the Golden Age Hotel, where journalists could be found both in and out of working hours. "Just so long as you could be found, and were ready to rock'n'roll work-wise, well going to the pub was fine," one former *Age* cadet said. But drinking was not really about inebriation. It was more about unofficial training and professional counselling among peers:

We talked bullshit. But good bullshit ... how I got this story, how I missed that one, how my wife doesn't understand me, kids driving me bonkers, that reporter over there is an arsehole ... just bullshit that people need to talk about (former Herald cadet, interviewed 2004).

Further:

'Cause you never took holidays ... You were just 'boom, boom, boom', and you were never tired. You were hung over, but never tired, and it was fantastic, just fantastic ... it was all push, push, push, then go have a drink and talk about the push, push push (former *Age* cadet, interviewed 2004).

Considering the role the tradition of alcohol consumption appears to have had in professional pastoral care, it is unsurprising to find that 60 Minutes executive, Sam Chisholm (1939 - ) used drinking as a means of soothing the wounded egos of his Channel Nine journalism 'stars'.

Apparently, one of Chisholm's mantras was: "Winners have parties, losers have meetings" (Stone, 2001: 217). And, according to former colleague Gerald Stone, Chisholm's Friday night drinks, when executives, producers and stars were invited to his office to let off steam, could rival New Years Eve for drunken exuberance, loudmouthed debates and even the occasional tear of remorse when someone was pressed a little too hard about an alleged indiscretion or inadequacy (Stone, 2001: 17).

Drinks frequently spilled over to dinners at posh restaurants, and dinners into early-hour heart-to-hearts at Rogues, known to most Sydney-siders as an expensive night-club, but to Chisholm as a psychiatric couch for the soothing of frail or wounded egos (Stone, 2001: 217).

Chisholm appears to have fully understood the bonding nature of the relationship between alcohol consumption and journalism. And this is unsurprising when we find that, according to Stone, Chisholm was a "nuggetty, hard-drinking party animal" (Stone, 2001: 228). According to Stone, Chisholm would hold regular "team" dinners. Guests would include Jana Wendt, Ray Martin, Mike Walsh and Brian Henderson, as well as the two biggest names in Sydney Radio at the time, John Laws and Allan Jones, invited along for their advice and support.

"They were amazing dinners and could go on till 3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning," Chisholm told Stone. But of more significance to this investigation into the relationship between the culture of alcohol consumption and journalism, these "amazing dinners" were designed to create camaraderie between his journalism celebrities: "They were fantastic for bonding," Chisholm admitted, "making people feel part of this unbeatable team" (Stone, 2001: 219).

So, Collingwood's "threads" and "indications" have now suggested the role of the culture of alcohol consumption in, not only creating a sense of journalistic self-identity, but also functioning as a cornerstone of journalistic community.

According to biographer Keith Dunstan, early attempts at setting up the Press Club in Melbourne were solely concerned with circumventing Victoria's "grip of wouserism and 6 o'clock closing" (Dunstan, 2001: 1). It was not enough for post-war Melbourne journalists to have the Phoenix and Astoria – known as The Herald and Weekly Times' watering holes; or the Hotel Australia, Hosie's and the Graham – similarly known as The Age's watering holes. Melbourne journalists during this era wanted a "permanent club" (Dunstan, 2001: 1), and were, according to Dunstan, "obsessed with getting a liquor licence" (Dunstan, 2001: 3). This obsession resulted in the establishment of the Melbourne Press Club in 1971, and which, at the time of writing, continues as a place of camaraderie for journalists around Victoria and interstate. At the time of the Melbourne Press Club's founding, there were "unofficial clubs" which provided peer support. Herald journalists met every day for the first drink at the back bar of the Oriental

at 11:30am. This was known as the “Morning Tea Club” (Dunstan, 2001: 4). Sun sub-editors had their own well-stocked fridge in the subs’ room. They went into “action” immediately after the first edition. This was known as the ‘Midnight Tea Club’ (Dunstan, 2001: 5).

The role the tradition of alcohol consumption may have had in creating and facilitating journalistic community during this era can also be seen in the advertisements found in the 1974 editions of The Walkley Magazine’s predecessor, The Journalist.

The vast majority of The Journalists’ advertisements are concerned with publicising hotels. Although this demonstrates the inherent nature of alcoholism in Australian journalism culture during this era, the emphasis is more on camaraderie among journalists than on the alcohol itself. Note the following mode of address – second person – and the warmth of tone to create a sense of fellowship within the journalism community:

“When in Brisbane, you’ll meet your fellow scribes at the Hacienda ... Just a shout from the AJA office” (January, 1974: 2).

And “When in Melbourne, join the scribes at Mr and Mrs Smythes Phoenix Hotel” (January, 1974: 2).

Further, “The Evening Star. The Place in Sydney for people from the Telegraph-Mirror-Australian publications and other media around Sydney Town and from far and wide ... You can barbeque your own steak...” (December, 1974: 5). In the same town: “Wal Delany invites you to his County Clare Inn, at 20 Broadway Street Sydney, for the best food and drink and journalistic company” (January, 1974: 7).

Every Australian capital city is represented in the copious advertisements for hotels in The Journalist, suggesting alcohol consumption as a means of bringing the Australian journalism community together and peer support.

So, using Collingwood’s “a priori imagination” theory, there exists evidence that journalism’s cultural norms and practices have been somewhat constructed through the tradition of alcohol consumption. These norms and practices are cornerstones of the profession, yet they are also seemingly dubious to those outside the journalism culture: practices such as the necessity to build affiliation with the downtrodden; to sometimes defy social authority, and even one’s own management; to skirt the periphery of personal safety, and even legality. These norms and practices are somewhat unique to the journalism profession – it is difficult to conceive many other industries that are riddled with such vagaries.

Despite these norms and practices underpinning journalism’s role, they were not previously taught in any official capacity. They were instilled unofficially –

culturally - and nurtured through the tradition of alcohol consumption. So, the tradition of alcohol consumption in journalism wasn't necessarily about drinking. It was also about unofficial training, pastoral care and developing a journalistic 'sensibility' that made one part of the journalistic community. And it is this that Shafer says we risk losing with the apparent demise of the tradition of alcohol consumption (Shafer, 2001: 5).

***The demise of the tradition of alcohol consumption: fill 'er up please***

According to oral history gathered from more current young journalists, Shafer just may be correct. While young journalists in the past would gain their basic industry training on the job, most current young journalists have completed or are completing a tertiary degree. The difference in education means a corresponding difference in age of entry into the profession. While young journalists of the past would enter the profession aged between 16 and 20, those of later years became journalists aged between 20 and 24. This means that most of the more contemporary young journalists have already established their social network. Contemporary young journalists are also living in a time of consciousness about the hazardous physical effects of drinking and, of course, drink-driving is highly taboo.

This means the social life of journalists has changed significantly. For example, oral history from the 1970s suggests the social group of journalists mainly comprised of other journalists. Meanwhile, although the oral history from later young journalists suggests they "mainly drink" when they socialise with work colleagues, their dominant group of friends tends to be non-drinking and outside the industry. Oral history suggests today's young journalists tend to spend more time with their partners, like to have a "private life" away from work or "just go home and crash" at the day's end. Some deliberately try to have a "good mix" of friends, and others are more focused on sport and their sporting colleagues. Either way, oral history suggests that current journalism is "definitely not a boozy culture".

Some may argue that this is a symptom of the feminisation of newsroom. And yet, Australian journalism's cultural-historiography does not bear this out. Recall the stories of Jana Wendt and her "marathon" drinking sessions with George Negus. And recall the oral history gathered from female interviewees, who "just loved" the "raffish culture" of journalism's hard-work, hard-play credo.

However, as one young contemporary *Herald Sun* journalist points out:

I don't see how [socialising exclusively with journalists] makes you a better journalist ... you become separated from other people and the society in which you live ... how are you meant to see what's going on? I think journalists should get out more – researching things and speaking to people ... not just sitting 'round with other journalists

in an office, and then sitting 'round with other journalists in a pub!  
(current Herald Sun journalist, interviewed 2003).

As suggested by oral history gathered from more modern young journalists, alcohol consumption itself does not necessarily equate to better journalism. For example, socialising almost exclusively with one's own has its pitfalls; after all, journalism is meant to be about telling the stories of others. Further, there is a problem with daily information being regularly gathered by the inebriated, and edited and presented by a "bunch of half-drunk subs".

And yet, if the results of Collingwood's "a priori imagination" theory are correct – that there is a relationship between the tradition of alcohol consumption and journalism's specific cultural norms and practices – and if Shafer's argument has validity – that there is a demise in the tradition of alcohol consumption in newsrooms – then there is need to look closely at the Australian journalism micro-cultural institutions that may have the potential to fill the gap in constructing journalism's somewhat unique micro-cultural norms and practices.

Such an examination would need to include review and analysis of the very beginning of the cultural construction process, starting with journalism education, and its pedagogical approach to professional micro-cultural norms and practices. The set of "important common practices", as described by Meadows, may need stronger emphasis, moving away from media theory or communication studies to their very basis in journalism. This means inspiring excitement in journalism's very *raison d'être* by going back to the cultural storehouse of Enlightenment philosophy and its various translations in early Australian journalism.

This may involve creating a sense of micro-cultural continuation across eras through studies of journalism history; a sense that students are contributing to a long tradition of creating a level platform on which the underdog can stand, defying authority to maintain independence, and eternally pursuing that which is hidden. And emphasising it is these foundational values and beliefs that makes one a journalist, as opposed to expensive education, social status and other elitist assumptions about 'professionalism'.

It would be detrimental, however, to suggest that journalists are isolated in their quest. This means emphasis on journalistic camaraderie, a linking to industry that goes beyond how to gather and report the news. Encouraging involvement in various press clubs and other micro-cultural institutions, such as the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, could be a step towards developing a sense of a shared value and belief system.

In tandem, an examination of how these institutions have constructed journalism's value and belief system is warranted. Although each has their own journalism codes of ethics written as explicit guidelines, their utility is somewhat mitigated without an examination of their construction as part of journalism micro-cultural



'sensibility'. A similar comment could be made of the Hunter Institute of Mental Health's (<http://www.himh.org.au>, accessed June 2010) on media coverage of suicide and mental health. (This link needs to be explained)

As for pastoral care, the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma (<http://dartcenter.org/australasia>, accessed June, 2010) has done much to instil a culture of peer support among journalists affected by trauma, whether from reporting on war, natural disaster or local traffic accidents. A review of the Dart Centre's work may be a useful means of examining how the gap in the construction of micro-cultural norms and practices is being filled after the apparent demise of the tradition of alcohol consumption.

But most importantly, as Shafer suggests, a review of the micro-cultural construction of journalism's norms and practices would need a specific analysis of the construction of the values and beliefs related to anti-authoritarianism and independence – values and beliefs previously constructed, at least partially, through the tradition of alcohol consumption.

As Shafer says, previously journalists would "tote firewater to work" as an ostentatious display of "heroic immoderation" (Shafer, 2010: 5). For the same reason, Shafer still keeps a bottle in his office: "not to drink," he says, "but to symbolically cast off the petty rules and restrictions that I imagine thwart me from doing my job."

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**'If I must die, let me die drinking at an inn': The tradition of alcohol consumption in Australian journalism**

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Melbourne, Australia.*



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