

Stone Bottles, 'Tinny' Thomas', and Ginger Pop. A Miscellany of Ginger Beer 1856 – 1956

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In this article I don't trace the history of ginger beer in Australia. Instead I get together a grab bag of items on ginger beer over the course of the years from 1856 – 1956 and let them effervesce like bubbles in a glass of ginger beer.

First references to ginger beer

The first reference I found for ginger beer was in 1824; T. Champion & Co published this advertisement for imported ginger beer.

Just imported per Denmark Hill, and on SALE at the Stores of the Undersigned,—Black and Coloured Bombazines, Stone Bottles for Ginger Beer ...¹

In 1825 T. Clarkson advertised that he had for sale ginger and ginger beer corks.²

Homemade ginger beer

The earliest recipe I found for making ginger beer in the home is this one from Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*.³

Ginger Beer - One gallon of boiling water, one pound of loaf sugar, one ounce of best ginger, bruised, one ounce of cream of tartar, or a sliced lemon. Stir them till the sugar is dissolved. Let it remain until it cools to the heat of milk, then add a tablespoon of good yeast. Cover and let it stand for twenty-four hours. Bottle it, not filling the bottles. Cork well and tie down and it will be ready for use in two days. Cost, a halfpenny per bottle and the trouble of making.

In November 1937 Mrs. R. Young's Ginger Beer Recipe won the weekly recipes contest in the *Examiner*. It's unusual for using an egg white.

Ginger Beer

1 ½ oz cream of tartar, 3 oz. ginger (whole), 3 lbs. sugar. The juice of 2 lemons, 2 gallons boiling water. 2 tablespoons of yeast, the white of one egg. Bruise ginger well, mix all things together except yeast and white of egg, which should be added when the liquid is nearly cold Stir well and strain. Bottle and let it stand two days before using.⁴

There were recipes for other styles of ginger beer being made in the home also.

Cold Water Ginger Beer

36 cups cold water, 1 ½ teaspoons tartaric acid, 2 ½ teaspoons cream of tartar, 2 ½ teaspoons ground ginger, 3 lb sugar, whites of 2 eggs and as many egg shells as possible, 2 teaspoons baker's yeast, or dry-barm, or 1 cup home-made yeast.

¹ T. Champion & Co. *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Dieman's Land Advertiser* 10 December 1824 p.4

² T. Clarkson *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 22 September p.4

³ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*, Sampson, Low, Son & Marston London 1864 p, 270

⁴ Winning Recipe, *Examiner* 3 November 1937 p.10

Method: Put acid, cream of tartar, sugar, whites beaten, egg shells and yeast into a kerosene tin and pour water on top, put ginger in a little bag and drop into water, let stand 4 hours, then strain and bottle and tie down securely. Let stand 3 days before using; this makes one dozen bottles.⁵

There was even a totally deconstructed one.

Ginger Beer Powders

A wholesome and effervescing drink may be quickly made from the following directions: — Two drachms of white sugar, five grains of powdered ginger, and twenty-six of carbonate of soda. Mix them well and wrap in blue paper. Put thirty grains of tartaric acid in white paper. When wanted, dissolve each separately in half a glass of water; mix, and drink whilst effervescing.⁶

Commercially made

The first reference to the commercial making of ginger beer was from Benjamin Hill in 1820.

BENJAMIN HILL, having removed from Castlereagh-street to No. 19, George-street, begs leave most respectfully to return his sincere acknowledgment of gratitude to those Friends in particular under whose patronage he was induced to offer to the Public his highly approved and very superior brewings of SPRUCE and GINGER BEERS; and trusts, from the very liberal encouragement he has hitherto experienced from most Families of respectability in Sydney, that he need not endeavour to explain the beneficial effects of such wholesome Beverage, more especially derivable therefrom at this season of the year.⁷

The quality of the water used in making ginger beer was often stressed in advertisements or news articles. In 1872 *The Herald* reported on a visit to the manufactory (sic) of Mr. P. G. Dixon in West Melbourne.⁸

The improvements that have recently taken place in the mode of manufacture of aerated waters, ginger-beer and lemonade, can be seen daily in operation ... Manual labor is saved to as great an extent as practicable by the application of the latest inventions in machinery to the manufacture of the beverages; but while this is done care is taken that the waters shall be free from impurities and of a wholesome character. We have examined samples of the various waters prepared at the establishment, and must, in justice, say that they are remarkable for flavor and general excellence.

There were, however, cases of adulteration.

Pulp In Ginger Beer

"It seems commercial suicide on the part of a manufacturer to send his goods out in this dangerous condition," Mr. W. H. Eilbeck, of the Board of Health, said yesterday at Liverpool Court. He proceeded against Burnett Maurice Goran, cordial manufacturer, of Bankstown, for having sold adulterated mineral waters. ... "In company with the Health Inspector for

⁵ Cold Water Ginger Beer, *Manjimup and Warren Times* 28 March 1945 p.3

⁶ Ginger Beer Powders, *Ginger Beer Powders*, *Weekly Times* 9 July 1881 p.14

⁷ Benjamin Hill, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 25 November 1820 p.2

⁸ Native Industries No.1 *The Herald* 27 February 1872 p.2

Liverpool," continued Mr. Eilbeck, "I visited a number of small shops in the town and found 83 bottles which contained foreign matter." ... Goran was fined £2, costs 10/-s.⁹

In 1933 Mr J. Klumpp, the Beaudesert cordial and aerated water manufacturer began making ginger beer. 'Judging by samples submitted to us the product should have a ready sale, for it is undoubtedly as good a ginger beer as one could wish for. It has plenty of sting in it/ and it leaves a delightfully mellow taste that is not experienced when drinking other makes.'¹⁰

Manufacturers made more than ginger beer. In 1872 it's noted that 'Messrs. J. Hempsted and Co. are making aerated waters of all kinds, including soda-water, lemonade, ginger beer, and mineral waters of different descriptions.'¹¹

Stone Ginger Beer Bottles

The earliest reference I found to stone bottles for ginger beer was in the 1824 T. Champion advertisement.

Just imported per Denmark Hill, and on SALE at the Stores of the Undersigned,—Black and Coloured Bombazines, Stone Bottles for Ginger Beer ...¹²

The stone bottles look like they hung around for quite a while. They are called for in this 1905 recipe

Pour a gallon of boiling water upon three-quarters of a pound of loaf sugar; one ounce each of ground ginger and cream of tartar, and the rind of one lemon. When cool, add the juice of the lemon, and a tablespoonful of yeast. Cover, and let it stand until next-day, then strain it clear from the sediment and put it into stone bottles. Tie down the corks, and it will be fit to drink in two days.¹³

I think I am on safe ground when I say that any recipe which calls for corks to be tied down are using stone bottles. There were several of these.

I couldn't find a reference to show when glass bottles generally replaced the stoneware. There is one news item I found in 1928 where the Fremantle City Council orders the change from stone to glass as the stone ones were unsanitary.¹⁴

The Ginger Beer Plant

The first reference to the ginger beer plant I found was in 1920.

"The ginger beer plant is often known by the name of Balm of Gilead" explained Mr E. Cheel, F.L.S., in a lecture to his fellow-members of the Naturalists' Society. ... Mr. Cheel has had a ginger beer plant in a bottle for 12 years ... He said that the plant was made by a yeast and a fungal growth which operated in common. ... The could be kept indefinitely, and used to

⁹ Pulp In Ginger Beer, *The Daily Telegraph* 23 December 1938 p.4

¹⁰ Klump's Ginger Beer, *The Beaudesert Times* 8 December 1933 p.4

¹¹ Aerated Waters Manufactory Ipswich Queensland *Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser* 19 November 1872 p.3

¹² T. Champion & Co. *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Dieman's Land Advertiser* 10 December 1824 p.4

¹³ Ginger Beer, *The Queenslander*, 25 February 1905 p.4

¹⁴ Stone Ginge Beer Bottles *The Advertiser* 19 June 228 p.15

produce a slightly effervescent drink if properly kept and fed. It has a pleasant taste and is cooling for the blood.¹⁵

The first recipe for it I found was this one from 1933.

I use half a level teaspoon of ginger, one level teaspoon of cream of tartar, and sugar to your taste, 2 to 3 teaspoons. Mix well in a cup. I mix the ingredients dry first, then add a little water to make into a paste and then fill the cup, put into a jar with a wide top and put enough water to make one bottle-full. The first lot made requires a teaspoon of compressed yeast mixed with the other ingredients to start the plant.

After that, it is only necessary to make up ginger, cream of tartar and sugar, and add to the jar, filling up with enough water to make a bottle. Leave stand for 12 to 24 hours and strain into a bottle and cork.

When pouring off, try and not lose any of the sediment. This is known as the 'plant,' and is necessary to 'work' the next jar of liquid.¹⁶

Ginger Beer Plants continue to live in kitchens of the present day.¹⁷

A Sober Drink

Ginger Beer was promoted by temperance supporters as the sober alternative to beer, a position exploited by others.

It was one of three 'Sober Drinks' for which recipes were given in the *Weekly Examiner* on 28 December 1828 p.³ The other two were Apple Water and Currant Water.

"Missionite" is the latest word coined by the Age. It is a local temperance preacher who is meant —one who is exploding with zeal for the cause, and ginger-beer, is the whole explanation.¹⁸

At Warrnambool, a woman is accused of manufacturing ginger beer which contained 8 ½ per cent, of proof spirits. This means that the drink was very little less intoxicating than brewers' ale, which, as most people know, averages between 10, and 11 per cent, of alcohol. A remarkable feature of the case is that the same woman was fined last year for selling "temperance" drinks which had made children reel from her shop. Presumably ever since then she has continued to dispense this poisonous stuff to young people.¹⁹

Twas noon. Happy noon. The sun scorched from its meridian ; the dust whirled in gusts along the street of George ; wearied Rechabites²⁰ poured down sparkling draughts of ginger beer, and busy sons of Mammon fled from their counters and devoured light repasts.²¹

¹⁵ Ginger Beer Plant, *The Sydney Stock And Station Agent* 16 July 1920 p.7

¹⁶ The Ginger Beer Plant, *Weekly Times* 1 April 1933 p.21

¹⁷ Sourced from personal correspondents with the author 2005

¹⁸ Through The Cullendar, *The W. A. Bulletin* 24 March 1888 p.5. The other drinks were Apple Water and Currant Water.

¹⁹ Intoxicating Ginger Beer, *The Australian Star* 13 March 1908 p.4

²⁰ The Independent Order of Rechabites was a temperance organisation created in England in 1835

²¹ A Lay of a Modern Troubadour, *Sydney Punch*, 19 February 1917 p.1

Ill Health and Ginger Beer

In 1908 a complaint was made that makers of ginger beer 'whether by accident or otherwise, manufacture drinks that are absolutely dangerous when consumed by young children.'²²

A heart-warming item

Honesty Has Its Reward In Ginger Pop

Soon after 10 a.m. yesterday, a small boy detached himself from a crowd of children on the corner of a Merewether street. He was holding his sides, and groaning. "Princey," he said to a short, cheerful little man in shirt sleeves "I feel sick. I've had 15 glasses of ginger beer so far." The boy, who recovered sufficiently to take another drink a few minutes later, was one of some 200 Merewether West children receiving his annual "reward for honesty." The reward-- 20 gallons of ginger beer and 300 or more ice-creams - has been given each Christmas Day for five years by Mr. R. A. Princehorn.²³

A Local Hero's Story

In 1952 the Mirror ran a story about a ginger beer stall seller on the occasion of his being asked to 'move on' by the Fremantle City Council. 'Tinny' Thomas' had had the stall for 33 years selling ginger beer for a threepence drink. 'Tinny' Thomas' ginger beer became something of an institution and drinking it rather a fad. 'Apart from the time he was in Kalgoorlie and when he re-enlisted in the Army, 1939-44, he has run the stall personally and cannot understand why the Council should want to move him'. The article did not say what became of Tinny.'²⁴

Summing up

Ginger beer has been made in Australia from the earliest days of the colony. It was and continues to be made at home and also in aerated waters factories. It could be made as a dry good or by a ginger beer plant. It was promoted by temperance adherents as an alternative to alcohol.

²² Intoxicating Ginger Beer *The Australian Star* 13 March 1908 p.4

²³ Honesty Has Its Reward In Ginger Pop, *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* 26 December 1949 p.2

²⁴ Tinny and his ginger beer must move on *Mirror* 17 May 1952 p.6