# The evolution of London's pubs from Victorian stigma to contemporary charm



In contemporary London, the presence of vibrant pubs is a staple of the city's social fabric. These establishments serve as gathering places where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together to enjoy a refreshing drink and hearty meals. However, the historical context of pubs reveals a shift in societal attitudes, particularly during the Victorian era, when such venues were often viewed unfavourably.

During the 19th century, particularly in the Victorian period, public drinking garnered a negative reputation. Pubs were frequently associated with public inebriation and moral decay, leading to a perception that they were the root of various societal issues. As such, these local watering holes became predominantly frequented by the working class, which distanced the affluent upper and middle classes from engaging in communal drinking experiences. Many from the upper class chose to consume alcohol privately in their own homes or at exclusive clubs, while the middle class sought an alternative that would not place them in the midst of what they perceived as the ‘common rabble’.

To cater to the desire of the middle classes for a more respectable drinking environment, pubs began introducing separate areas for patrons. A common solution involved establishing a public bar, where regular drinkers would stand and mingle, alongside a private saloon bar for those seeking a more comfortable and discreet experience. Despite these efforts, some patrons found the mere presence of working-class drinkers unacceptable, necessitating further adaptations.

This led to the innovation of what became known as the 'snob screen'. These frosted glass screens were designed to create a physical barrier between the upper-class clientele and the general pub-goers. Installed at eye level atop the bar, the screens allowed patrons to conceal their identities when ordering drinks by simply opening a window to signal the bartender, who would serve them without any visibility to the bustling public area adjacent.

Today, remnants of this historical practice can still be appreciated in select establishments across London. Notable examples include The Lamb in Bloomsbury, The Crown and Greyhound in Dulwich, The Prince Alfred in Maida Vale, and The Princess Louise in Holborn. Each of these pubs has preserved its own version of the snob screen, offering a glimpse into how drinking culture has evolved over the years.

The contemporary pub scene in London stands in stark contrast to these Victorian tendencies, with the previous class distinctions within drinking establishments becoming increasingly obsolete. The charm of British pubs now lies in their accessibility and inclusive atmosphere, capturing the essence of community spirit that continues to thrive in the city today.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.timetravel-britain.com/articles/london/pubs.shtml> - This URL provides background information on the historical context of pubs in London, including their evolution and how they reflect past societal attitudes and customs.
* <https://www.britainexpress.com/best/Historic-London-Pubs.htm> - This webpage lists several historic pubs in London, offering insights into their history and significance within London's social landscape.
* <https://livinglondonhistory.com/top-ten-historic-pubs-in-london/> - This article highlights some of London's most historic pubs, detailing their unique features and historical significance, which supports the claim about the preservation of historical practices in modern-day London.
* <https://www.victorianweb.org/history/aospubs.html> - This website provides information on Victorian society, including the perception of pubs during that era and how they were viewed in relation to social class.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_pub> - Wikipedia's page on English pubs offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution of pubs, including their role in Victorian England and the social dynamics of that time.