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Smoking ban puts snuff back in fashion

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Snuff is making an unlikely comeback. The peppery tobacco powder, which delivers a swift hit of nicotine when sniffed, was introduced to England in the 17th century and quickly adopted as a popular pick-me-up.

It fell out of favour 200 years ago as society discovered cigarettes - but now it is enjoying a revival thanks to the imminent smoking ban.

From 1 July smoking in enclosed public spaces will be outlawed, but snuff is exempt from the rule. Shops selling it report surging interest and pubs are beginning to put it behind the bar.

Ian Wright, sales assistant at tobacconist the Segar and Snuff Parlour, Covent Garden, said snuff was about to become one of the year's most fashionable fads.

He said: "The 20th century was the golden age of smoking, which was cool, sexy, cheap and sociable. Now smokers are social rejects. Snuff, on the other hand, inspires a certain sense of debauched sophistication."

Among well-known snuff aficionados is the actor Sean Bean. Mr Wright added: "Regular takers are probably tipping a wink at smokers and suggesting they try it before the ban comes in. That might explain why we have seen an increase in sales.

"You don't produce a plume of smoke when you take it. It is definitely better as far as secondhand smoke is concerned."

The Albion in Goldsmith's Row, Haggerston, is one of many pubs experimenting with selling snuff. Landlord Dave Chapman said it had already proved popular. "Initially we were selling none but now we have seven regulars using it," he said. "We sell about five or six tins a week.

Our tins cost between £2 and £2.50, which should last at least one month, which is a lot cheaper than cigarettes at £5.50 for 20."

Mr Chapman, chairman of the British Institute of Innkeeping's London branch, added: "When the ban comes in customers can sit merrily and snuff as much as they like." Jamie Clapham, assistant manager at Smith's Snuff Shop, Charing Cross, said: "We have about 3,000 regulars. We sell flavours ranging from strawberry and raspberry to cinnamon and coffee."

Snuff's early enthusiasts were miners who needed a less incendiary alternative to lighting up below ground. Its popularity hit a high among the English aristocracy in the 19th century.

However, experts warn the substance is as addictive as cigarettes and may create an even greater risk of mouth and throat cancer.



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