

# FINANCIAL NEWS

## The Sharp End: Snuff in the modern day

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Tobacco seeds have been found in archeological digs in Peru and Mexico that date the use of tobacco back at least 3,500 years. But it was the Spaniards who first started growing it commercially, and its use exploded after 1559, when Jean Nicot (from whom the word Nicotine comes) promoted the product across Europe as a medical wonder drug.



### Snuff in the modern day

Throughout most of tobacco's history, it has been chewed or sniffed, with smoking really only becoming popular after 1918. Now that the latter has been heavily restricted, the idea of consuming powdered tobacco is once again attracting a following, not least since the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer 2004 report found that nasal use of snuff did not provide conclusive evidence of a link with cancer.

That doesn't mean it's safe, by the way, but it's much less socially disruptive than smoking.

Although snuff-taking is still a minority sport, there are hundreds of different snuff varieties and blends available. Each is usually a blend of tobacco with other ingredients such as essential oils, mint or eucalyptus, although some are pure tobacco.

You can buy Indian, Chinese, American and South African snuff, but the choice really comes down to British or German. The wife of George III had an entire room devoted to her snuff collection, while George IV had his own Morning Mix.

Despite the decline in snuff use over the centuries some wonderful ancient names remain.

In Britain, there are brands such as Wilson's of Sharrow, Sir Walter Scott and Gawith Hoggarth, while the German market is dominated by Poschl and Bernard Schnupftabak. There's even one new British manufacturer on the scene – Toque – which lists 42 flavours of snuff, including Toast and Marmalade, Espresso and Coke.

Aficionados take their snuff seriously, like a good red wine. They enjoy the different blends and flavours as well as the different textures of each brand – some are coarse-ground and some fine, some are moist and some dry. The choice of tobacco – Zimbabwean, Golden Virginia and so on – is also important, not least to the nicotine hit – [www.snuffreviews.com](http://www.snuffreviews.com) is probably the best place to get an idea of what's out there.

It is important to appreciate the ritual of snuff-taking. While Samuel Johnson used to fill his pocket with loose snuff, these days it comes in a nice tin (screw tops are best to avoid spillages), and can either be pinched and sniffed directly off the thumb and middle finger – sophisticates will close a nostril with their free fingers – or else placed on the back of the hand and sniffed.

The snuff should stay in the nose and not enter the throat, and sneezing is normal. There's also a more modern dispenser called the bullet that works like a nasal spray.

-- The writer works in London's finance industry