

1066 – 1455 AD



Norman

The drinking habits of the Normans were similar to the Viking settlers. Clean drinking water was scarce so the poor predominantly drank mead (a strong alcoholic drink brewed from honey), ale brewed with cereal grains water and yeast or cider brewed from apples and other wild fruit.

1485 – 1603 AD



Tudor

Due to the lack of clean drinking water, historians have estimated that consumption of weak, low-alcohol drinks during the Tudor period was around one gallon per person, per day – including children!

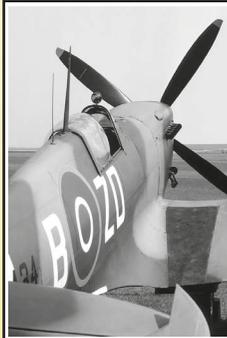
1837 – 1901 AD



Victorian

During the Victorian era wine would be served after each course of a meal. Madeira (a sweet desert wine) or sherry was served to accompany the desert, after which the men would retire to the drawing room for port and cigars, and the women to the parlour to sip sherry.

1939 - 1945 AD



WWII

Although alcohol was not rationed in Britain during World War II it was expensive and considered a luxury. Alcohol was used by servicemen to relieve pain, clean wounds and calm nerves. It Was also included in service men's ration packs for boiling water.

Drinking wine and beer was safer than drinking water until relatively recent times when a public supply of safe drinking water could be made available. Previously water would have been drawn from sources that themselves were contaminated with sewage and garbage, or at best natural pollutants and bacteria. Serious illnesses were regularly contracted from polluted drinking water. One notable occurrence is the well documented outbreak of cholera in London in 1854, during the first three days it killed 127 people, and by the end of the outbreak 616 people had died from drinking contaminated water. The alcohol contained in beer and wine was a natural defence to this problem. By experience gained over thousands of years people had learned that to drink brewed beverages was safer, although they did not at that time understand the exact reasons why.

When the Puritans sailed in the Mayflower to colonize New England in the newly founded Americas (The New World - now the USA) they carried with them on their long voyage more beer than water! However beer of that time did not contain the same alcohol percentage as modern beers (typically 4-5% ABV) it was known as 'small beer' with an alcohol content of approx. 1% ABV.

Beers and wines continued to be consumed in large quantities up until the first introduction of a new process, distillation, in the 15th century and that of a newly invented wine making process which produced a light dry sparkling wine, Champagne, in the 16th century. These new forms of alcoholic beverage slowly gained acceptance throughout the 17th century. In 1685 the British government passed an act to encourage the use of surplus grain in the production of distilled spirits which could be taxed to raise revenue. Within six years 11 million gallons of distilled spirit was being produced in the London area alone. This easy availability of cheap high alcohol content drink was readily accepted by the working class poor providing an escape from the daily drudgery of early urban life. Inevitably this led to drunkenness and social problems on a large scale.

Throughout Europe in the 18th and 19th century drunkenness was common. Many of the problems with poor health, mortality rates and poor living conditions were at the time blamed on excessive alcohol consumption. This brought about reform measures encouraging abstinence and moderation in the consumption of alcohol, initially promoted by a desire to increase industrial production efficiency but later as a social and health promotion measure.