

We, the undersigned, write to request an answer to a simple question: **Why are women still banned from becoming members in 2024?**

When the Garrick Club, a bastion of male exclusivity for two centuries, finally allowed women to join this year, it set a crucial precedent. Your resistance persists, revealing the disturbing commitment to outdated and discriminatory practices against women. Each club has a long history of exclusion and elitism, showing the inherent discrimination against women, with all the clubs treating women as nothing more than an accessory to men in power. The all-male clubs represent concentrated class power, with members including the King, Peers, MPs, senior members of the judiciary, barristers, actors, and others. We are allowed in the door as wives, widows, “nieces” (otherwise known as young women for the sexual entertainment of old men) or staff but not as equal members in our own right.

To the Bath & Racquets Club, your club was founded in May 1989. You boast intellectual and social nourishment. Phones are banned, and so are women (with the exception of service staff). Why does your Club allow women to watch squash from the gallery but not participate? Barring women does not add to ‘exclusivity’, it adds to your sexist exclusionary policy. The power your club boasts includes brokering peace between Nicholas Coleridge and Mohammed Al Fayed about libel action, which shows your club is a place where important decisions are made by powerful men.

To the Beefsteak Club, your club was founded in the 1700s and is known for its powerful members who steer nations and corporations, such as former MP Brooks Newmark, Rory Stewart (we expected better from an MP who declared himself a ‘feminist’), former MEP Stanley Johnson, Boris Johnson (another self-declared feminist), Former Minister of State of the United Kingdom for Europe and North America, Alan Duncan, Hugo Swire KCMG, PC, Norman Lamont MP, Former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson, Lord Peter Lilley, and Lord Nicholas Soames, as listed in 2018. Dr William King wrote of the Beefsteak, “He that of Honour, Wit and Mirth partakes, May be a fit Companion o'er Beef-steaks.” Apparently, women don’t embody such qualities or why else would we be excluded?

To Brook’s, your club was founded in the 1700s. “[Brook’s] gambling excesses are legendary, culminating in a story of how in 1785 Lord Cholmondeley placed a bet with Lord Derby that he would win 500 guineas ‘whenever his lordship [fornicates with] a woman in a balloon one thousand yards from the Earth’.” Women are things to be gambled, objects of male desire to have sex with, not equal beings capable of membership.

To Buck’s, your club was founded in June 1919 with members including Iain Duncan Smith MP and former Tory PM John Major, and you considered admitting Crispin Odey, who was accused of misconduct and sexual assault by 13 women. A tradition at Buck’s is to host an event called “The Bond Street Horticultural Society”, which is referred to as “nieces’ night” by members. Older male members have dinner with a rotating list of younger female guests. The club discussed discontinuing the tradition after the Presidents Club scandal in 2018 exposed sexual misconduct at another all-male high-society dinner but decided against it. It’s clear your club believes women are sexual objects, not capable of equal value or worth to men.

To the East India Club, your club was “founded in the middle of the 19th century, its original members were ‘the servants of the East India Company and Commissioned Officers of Her Majesty’s Army and Navy’”. Shamefully, the East India Company pioneered the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism in India. Whilst at your club, Anne Marie Morris MP in 2017 said that not getting a Brexit deal would be a “n\*\*\*\*\* in a woodpile.” Nigel Farage is one of your most prominent members. We ask you, how many members are Indian or of Indian descent — in contrast to the number of members who are white cis men? Much like the gross dedication to your club name rooted in racism and privilege, your male-only membership policy suggests an unwillingness to move past a regressive and harmful legacy.

To the Flyfisher's Club, your club was founded in the 1800s and includes members such as King Charles (as of 2012). After the passing of the Equality Act, your club was not happy and reportedly held a meeting to figure out how to maintain its gender discrimination. You decided that instead of allowing women as guests for certain meals, you would need to ban all women at all times. The panic over Equality laws is telling, and its resistance to inclusivity is indefensible.

To the Savage Club, your club, founded in the 1850s, is still barring women from entry. Why can women only be allowed entry as guests? Why do you feel it's appropriate for members to invite ladies, including widows of former Savages (oddly known as Rosemaries)? Women’s existence is not dependent on our relationship to men. Extending permanent membership to women would demonstrate a true commitment to equality rather than a patronising tokenistic nod.

To the Savile Club, your club was founded in the 1860s in Mayfair. In 2017, you amended your 150-year-old ‘men-only’ rule to allow a transgender woman to remain a member. While we welcome the inclusivity of trans people, please explain why this rule was not changed to admit *all* women.

To the Travellers Club, your club was founded in 1819 and includes members such as Anthony Layden, the chair; Prince Philip was its Patron, and the King, Prince Andrew, and Prince Edward all hold honorary membership. Women are welcome as guests except in the smoking room and the cocktail bar, why? Women smoke and drink, too, you know. Your club has male and female ambassadors, but only the male ambassadors can be members, why? Whilst you did offer a vote on the admission of women, the opposition was successful, with one opposing member jarringly saying, “I see the club as a bastion and retreat from the rigours of normal life and despite being a young(ish) member, I would consider women to be in the normal-life category” and another “warning that hen parties would appear and shrill voices be heard.” Heaven forbid that women’s voices are heard.

To White's, your privileged club was founded in the 1960s, and members reportedly include the King, who allegedly held his stag night there prior to his marriage to Diana. White’s has become a symbol of resistance to positive change, even David Cameron resigned over your refusal to allow women as members. Why are there so many male judicial members but no female judges, we ask you?

To Turf (which Prince Charles and Prince Harry are also honorary members of) and Portland, your clubs continue to discriminate against women, and we want change.

It's time to end this unjust gender-based exclusion and move towards a future where your clubs reflect the equality and inclusivity that must define our society.

Signatures of long version.

Dr Charlotte Proudman, Barrister and Senior Research Associate, University of Cambridge

Apsana Begum, Labour MP for Poplar and Limehouse

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Jenny Beck KC (Hon), Solicitor & Director Beck Fitzgerald

Jef McAllister, legal professional and journalist; Managing Partner of McAllister Olivarius

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