



Assembly Rooms Case Study

The Assembly Rooms was built between 1783 and 1787 to provide a place of entertainment for the wealthy residents of the New Town and it has long been associated with impressive banquets and prestigious dinner parties. Most noteworthy of all was perhaps the Peers Ball, held in August 1822.

An eyewitness called Thomas Mudie later wrote a book about the glittering royal occasion. If he were around today, we reckon he'd have been ready and willing to reveal all about the events of that evening...

Peers Ball, August 1822

Attendees: Perhaps too many judging by the accounts. Guests included King George IV, Lord Melville and Lord Errol, Sir Walter Scott and the Dukes and Duchesses of Hamilton, Atholl, Argyll, and Montrose.

Can you tell us more about the recent Peers Ball held at the Assembly Rooms?

The ball was organised by the Peers of Scotland in honour of King George IV during his visit to Edinburgh. The dancing in the main Ballroom was Scottish, with reels and strathspeys to music from Nathaniel Gow's band, while the smaller ball room was reserved for dancing quadrilles for the young and fashionable. A large supper room was offered for guests, alongside a room offering ices to cool down the dancers.

What were the aims of this event?

This was the main social event of the King's visit. For the Peers of Scotland, it was a way of demonstrating their loyalty and perhaps getting the King's favour, meanwhile, for Edinburgh society it acted as an unprecedented social networking opportunity – the place to see and be seen and hear the gossip.

Peers Ball

Why did you choose Edinburgh as the host city for this event?

The King's visit was the idea of Sir Walter Scott, who was intrigued by the idea of organising the first visit to Scotland by a reigning monarch in almost 200 years. As the capital city, with its Royal Palace and Castle housing the honours of Scotland, Edinburgh was the obvious choice. The port of Leith also offered easy access, which was important as the King came by ship from London.

What made the Assembly Rooms stand out as the place to hold this event?

The Assembly Rooms was the obvious choice for the event, as it was the only venue capable of hosting such a large number of guests in such grand surroundings. It was also an opportunity for the city to show off its Assembly Rooms, putting them on the national stage with a royal seal of approval.

Have the Assembly Rooms helped you overcome any obstacles during the planning and implementation of your event?

The managers of the Assembly Rooms could not have been more accommodating to the organising committee, allowing them to transform the decoration of the building and even take out a few windows where necessary! A gilded throne was placed in the Ballroom, and gold and scarlet sofas arranged at strategic points, for the King to rest if fatigued by dancing. With the east lane entrance reserved for the King, a new access on the front of the building was also created for those guests arriving by sedan chair.

Note: All requests for removing windows, sourcing thrones and making alterations to the building will be considered on a case by case basis.



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Assembly Rooms will host a reimagined Peers Ball on Saturday 25 November 2017 to celebrate the venue's 230th anniversary. Tickets for the Alternative Peers Ball are now on sale via the Usher Hall www.usherhall.co.uk / 0131 228 1155.

