

Bridgerton Afternoon Tea – Fun Facts and Trivia

June 8, 2024

- ❖ Afternoon tea was introduced to England by Anna, the seventh Duchess of Bedford and a good friend to Queen Victoria, in 1840. Dinner wasn't served till eight in her house and she would get hungry around four in the afternoon, so instead of wait she would have tea, bread, butter and cake brought to her rooms to hold her over. It became a frequent habit and so she began inviting friends to join her.
 - ❖ By the 1880's upper class and society women were conducting the act as well and would dress up for the occasion and have the tea served in their drawing rooms from 4-5 in the afternoon. Men began to join as well when the tea would be moved outside to the gardens in the warmer summer months.
 - ❖ Tea was a fine delicacy at the time and people wanted others to know they could afford it on a regular basis.
 - ❖ Afternoon and High tea are not the same thing. Afternoon was often seen as a higher class event and consisted of lighter, sweeter foods such as pastries and light sandwiches. High tea was considered a working class meal that was eaten about five and consisted of hearty, savory foods like fish or meat pies with their tea.
 - ❖ High tea also differs because it was served at a higher table and with high backed chairs, whereas afternoon was served on both lower tables and chairs.
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- The “Social Season” ran from May to August each year and was dictated upon the residency of the Royal Family being in London, which was typically from April to July and again in October through Christmas.
 - The social season was made up of a series of balls, receptions and social and sporting events attended by upper class members of society.
 - By 1780 the concept was well established and King George III decided to hold a major ball in May named after his wife, Queen Charlotte. The ball became the main event of the season and was where young women of eligible age would be presented to the Queen and society as ready to be married.
 - The debutantes were presented in formal court dress of a long, often white, dress and three Prince of Wales ostrich feathers in their hair.
 - After World War II the strict social parameters were relaxed and the debutantes were allowed to be presented to the Sovereign in cocktail dress attire.
 - The practice was terminated by Queen Elizabeth II in 1958.
 - On July 17, 1958 the last debutante to be presented to the Royal Family (Prince Phillip and the Queen Mum in this case as Queen Elizabeth II was ill at the time and could not attend) at Buckingham Palace. Her name was Sandra Seagram, the great-great granddaughter of Seagram Whisky founder Joseph Emm Seagram. Her mother and grandmother had also been presented at court.
 - Even though the official practice or presentation was terminated, a newer version was revived in the early 2000s by Jennie Hallam-Peel, a former debutante. They

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now throw a ‘Queen Charlotte’s Birthday Ball’ on the former monarch’s birthday and the focus is less on the debutante’s entering society and more so on building business and networking skills and etiquette and fundraising for charities. Instead of being presented to the monarch, the debutantes curtsy before a large birthday cake meant to represent Charlotte herself. This function is not associated with or put together by the Royal Family at all.