

The Footman's Rest

Afternoon Tea, that most quintessential of English customs is, perhaps surprisingly, a relatively new tradition. Whilst the custom of drinking tea dates back to the third millennium BC in China and was popularised in England during the 1660s by King Charles II and his wife the Portuguese Infanta Catherine de Braganza, it was not until the mid 17th century that the concept of 'afternoon tea' first appeared.

Afternoon Tea was introduced in England by Anna, the seventh Duchess of Bedford, in the year 1840. The Duchess would become hungry around four o'clock in the afternoon. The evening meal in her household was served fashionably late at eight o'clock, thus leaving a long period of time between lunch and dinner. The Duchess asked that a tray of tea, bread and butter (some time earlier, the Earl of Sandwich had had the idea of putting a filling between two slices of bread) and cake be brought to her room during the late afternoon. This became a habit of hers and she began inviting friends to join her.

This pause for tea became a fashionable social event. During the 1880's upper-class and society women would change into long gowns, gloves and hats for their afternoon tea which was usually served in the drawing room between four and five o'clock.

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The opening of tea rooms began in the late 19th century, and they quickly became a place for meeting friends, sharing gossip and of course enjoying afternoon tea. Tea rooms were also considered one of the few respectable places for women to meet without a chaperone. Later, music was added to the occasion, and fashionable young people attended afternoon tea dances in the most stylish of hotels, a practice which continued until the Second World War.

Nearly 200 years after the Duchess of Bedford's innovation, despite enormous social changes and the democratisation of tea as an everyday drink - no longer just for the privileged - the taking of afternoon tea remains a popular and luxurious event.

Afternoon Tea at The Footman's Rest is served in our elegant Saloon between one and five o'clock, to allow our guests that little extra time to relax and enjoy this most leisurely of repasts.

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The role of a Footman derived from the attendants who ran beside or behind the carriages of aristocrats, many of whom were chosen for their physical attributes which were shown off by the traditional Footman's dress of stockings worn below knee breeches. They ran alongside the coach to make sure it was not overturned by such obstacles as ditches or tree roots. They would also run ahead to prepare the destination place for their Principal's arrival.

The word was subsequently extended to apply to a household servant, who usually filled glasses, placed and removed dishes, and who stood at meals while the Principal and guests remained seated. Footmen were something of a luxury and therefore a status symbol and part only of the grandest households. Footmen were expected to be unmarried in order to dedicate themselves to their employers. Once a commonly employed servant in great houses, Footmen became much rarer after World War I as fewer households could by then afford retinues of servants and retainers. The position is now virtually an historic one although servants with this designation are still employed in the British Royal Household, where a Footman is considered the highest-ranking servant of this class, wearing a distinctive scarlet livery on state occasions.

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William Fortnum, Esq. was a Footman in the royal household of Queen Anne. The Royal Family's insistence on having new candles every night meant a lot of half-used wax which William Fortnum promptly resold for a tidy profit. The enterprising William Fortnum also had a sideline business as a grocer. He convinced his landlord, Hugh Mason, to be his associate, and they founded the first Fortnum and Mason store in Mason's small shop in St James's Market in 1707.

Steven Scott Kaye, Esq. was a Footman in the royal household of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Steven trained to the highest standards in personal service performing a range of duties at all Royal Residences which include laying the table and serving Afternoon Tea, valeting, sitting on carriage processions, and walking Corgis. Such excellent service was recognised during a State Visit to the United Kingdom in 2001 when Steven was knighted by His Majesty The King of Jordan. He decided to use his knowledge and experience gained in The Queen's employment to create a unique English Tea Saloon and Wine Bar, joining forces with his business partner, Thomas, bringing you their establishment on Canning Circus.



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