

Breaking Into Regency Society

Dos and don'ts for a successful season at Almack's (geared to Americans like me!)

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So, you yearn to have fun and experience Regency society at its best? Then Almack's (the 19th century Meet Market) is for you. If you're lucky, you have a rich, aristocratic connection waiting to sponsor your introduction into Polite Society. Perhaps your sugar daddy or fairy godmother can persuade the haughty patronesses of the revered Almack's Assembly Rooms to overlook your humble American origins and grant you a voucher to enter Almack's sacred portals.

By the by, extra insurance wouldn't hurt with this ultra snooty crowd. Hyphenate your last name; that always adds stature. A handle like Jones-Smythe will do wonders for your consequence!

Okay, let's begin. Wednesday night is Almack's night. An annual subscription costs ten guineas, or roughly \$2,100 in today's money. Try to get your benefactor to pay for you. The doors open at eight, but don't arrive on the dot; that's considered gauche. And please, don't even think about making your appearance after eleven P.M. At that hour, the doors remain firmly shut to all—commoners and royalty alike.

If you're a young lady, then wear a white gown, the simpler, the better. If the year is 1812 or later, and you wish to waltz, you must obtain permission from one of the patronesses. After you've received it, you may waltz to your heart's content. However, a word of advice: don't grant three dances to the same man. If you do, then anticipate lots of people offering their best wishes—you are now expected to marry the man! Also, if you spin about the floor for two successive dances with the same gentleman, stuffy matrons are bound to view you as fast, and you certainly don't want to ruin your reputation.

And heaven help you if, with all your exertions, you feel warm. Don't dare sweat! More genteelly put: don't perspire. If you must go onto the balcony for cooler air, please don't leave in the company of a man. This may excite comment.

Do try to get social arbiter *par excellence*, George (Beau) Brummell's approval. If you do, your success for the season is guaranteed. But remember however, you must do this before May 1816. Brummell loses his exalted status at that time and must flee to Europe.

If you're a matron, please wear dark colors. Purple is always socially correct. You also must keep your head covered. A toque is acceptable, and if this hat sports ostrich plumes, so much the better. As a matron, you're expected to keep an eye on the sweet young things gadding about the dance floor. If you spot any potentially damaging behavior, it's your duty to pass along the gossip as quickly as possible. The patroness Lady Sarah Jersey (known as Sally or Silence) always desires fresh tittle-tattle. As a matron, you're allowed to participate in dancing, but please, in moderation. Plus, whatever you do, don't let on that you're having fun. Boredom is the look to strive for.

If you're a widow, then dress in black, but if you're in deep mourning, what are you doing out socializing? Bad ton, really. After six months, you're in the half-mourning period, and you can indulge in modest entertainment. Colors like grey are now acceptable. But please, no dancing.

If you're divorced, forget it! How'd you get into Almack's, anyway? Place a sack over your head and stay at home!

If you're a man, don't forget your knee breeches and white neckcloth. Even the Duke of Wellington (you remember the hero at Waterloo?) has been turned away for dressing inappropriately.

These are but a few of the rules governing success or failure in Regency England. Of course, inheriting 30,000 pounds a year doesn't hurt at all, either. Have fun, and if you find yourself an eligible *parti*, please let me know. I do enjoy playing matchmaker!