

CORONATION TURKEY? - PART 2

On the 19th July 1821 a crowd gathered early in Whitehall for the re-scheduled Coronation of George IV. It was a hot day, and would only get hotter. Also up early was Queen Caroline of Brunswick, determined to ambush the event. She arrived at Westminster Hall at 6 am to cheers from her supporters. Soldiers promptly closed the Hall front door on her. When she tried to enter by a side door, it was slammed in her face. One Doorkeeper coined the immortal phrase: "No ticket? No entry." Caroline finally left with the crowds shouting "Shame! Shame!" She died two weeks later.

DO: Try to make peace with your ex before a major public event. Threatening her with soldiers and hired pugilists may sound like fun but can easily backfire.

DON'T: Even bother to chase her away if your reputation can sink no lower.

With Caroline gone some 700 people joined the Procession to the Service in Westminster Abbey, headed by the King's Royal Herbestrewer (??), and six maids scattering petals on the carpet. The King in his lavish costume was seen to be sweating heavily throughout the Service. He later remarked: "Never again!" Somehow the Choir managed to escape before anyone else so that the departing King had to pass empty benches covered in litter, described by a witness as "a most unpicturesque arrangement."

DO: Hire an experienced Master of Ceremonies if more than 20 people are involved in the event.

DON'T: Ever rely on musicians to clean up after themselves.

After the service George returned to Westminster Palace followed by the Barons of the Cinque Ports who exercised their traditional right to carry a canopy over the King. George, perhaps wanting to show off his £24,000 robe, decided to walk in front of the canopy, despite the heat. This made the elderly Barons walk even faster. But the swaying of the canopy alarmed the King who accelerated in turn, resulting in "a somewhat unseemly jog trot." Perhaps more predictable was that the Banqueting hall's 2,000 candles in 26 vast chandeliers would, due to the heat, continually spatter the peers and peeresses below with large globules of melted wax.

DO: Rehearse even apparently simple moves. Conduct a thorough fire and safety check.

DON'T: Improvise with elderly supernumeraries

Horses only added to the confusion. The Lord High Steward's role was to ride into the Hall, dismount and uncover the first dish on the royal table. A practice we would do well to revive. However ancient a custom, the poor man, having lost his leg at the Battle of Waterloo and wearing a prosthesis designed for riding, was unable to dismount without the assistance of several pages. Which caused great amusement amongst the unsympathetic guests. Despite this the Lord High Steward was later re-horsed to join the Lord High Constable as both accompanied the King's Champion who, in a full suit of armour, entered through the archway to ride the length of the hall to throw down his gauntlet three times in the traditional challenge. (No mention of Gauntlet Picker-Upper-Pursuivant.)

DO: Carry out a full fitness check on all officers, however eminent.

DON'T: Ever allow a single horse inside a listed building, and certainly not three. Just imagine the poor creatures' reaction to a spattering of hot wax on their haunches in a crowded space.

Once the feast had ended at 8:20 the spectators from the galleries were allowed into the hall to clear the tables. They helped themselves to leftover food but also to cutlery, glasses, silver platters and table ornaments. Lord Gwydyr managed to prevent the priceless gold coronation plates from being carried off. Armed soldiers arrived in time to prevent the kitchens being ransacked. The Hall was not cleared until 3 am the next morning, when some who had fallen asleep on the floor had to be carried to their coaches.

DO: Economise by allowing the Public to clear the remains of the feast, but strictly supervised,

DON'T: Wake up the new King. For as long as possible...

King George IV's reign only lasted another ten years. It was claimed that in Manchester the crowds cheered for the King until the free beer ran out, when they began to sing "God save the Queen". So perhaps Caroline of Brunswick had the last laugh after all.

But Yes, we certainly showed that no one does Pageantry quite like the British!