



Linore Rose Burkard

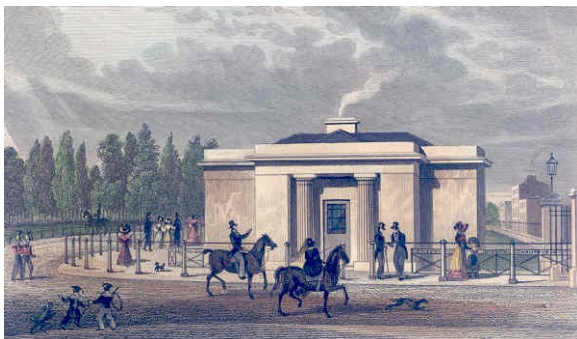
*Inspirational Romance
for the Jane Austen Soul*



A Day in the Life of Regency London

by [Linore Rose Burkard](#)

It's fortunate for posterity that when the American Mr. Louis Simond made a trip to Regency London, England in 1809, he not only stayed in the **fashionable West End** of the city but kept notes on what he heard and saw. He recorded details about the general tide of life for the residents who lived, loved, and played there. His are not the only eyewitness notes we have of the period, but they are uniquely revealing.



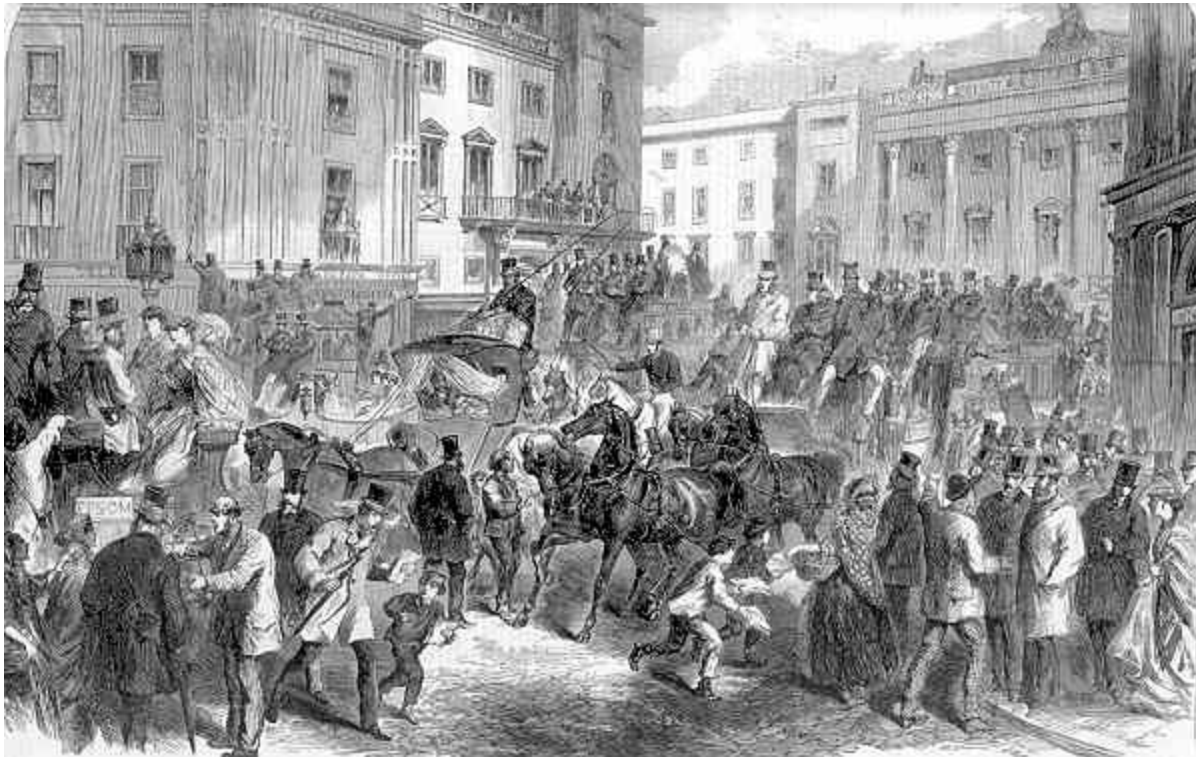
Simond was amused to notice that, firstly, no one stirred earlier than 10 am. At that time, shops became sleepily awake, and the **Horse Guards** were on the move in a noisy parade, their daily march from the barracks to Hyde Park. But what of the *ton*, the inner circle of fashionable society?

These lofty souls did not appear until nigh three or four o'clock, when, in a great racket, they would begin making their "morning" calls, go shopping or promenading, or grace an assembly room with their presence. Why was the beginning of their day so late in the afternoon? Because it went on until early next morning, or even 'til dawn.



Simond tells us there was gaslight on some of the streets, and this, in 1809 (earlier than we might have thought); but the lights were not effective, and after being lit at dusk, did little to illumine one's way (they made "little brightish dots" in a line going down the street).*

There was a lull of activity around this time, and then, from six o'clock to about eight, after people had dressed for dinner and evening entertainments, the racket and street traffic started up again. Another lull would follow, and then near ten o'clock the crush of carriages was back with all its ensuing noises: The thunderous hoof-beats, whinnying, whips cracking, people laughing, wheels turning, churning, and lumbering along the cobbled roads. It was an awful din that rarely subsided before midnight.



This illustration is later than the Regency but conveys the idea of how busy London was.

In the book, [*Our Tempestous Day*](#), Carolly Erickson says that, according to Simond, "At one o'clock it was still difficult to sleep for all the commotion. Gradually, though, the number of carriages diminished until, as the sky began to grow light, only a single carriage was heard now and then at a great distance. The fashionable world went to sleep, not to be roused until long after noon."*

The next day, it would start all over again, and the endless whirl of activity called the "season" would continue.

Simond also detailed what it was like attending a party (or, “rout”) of the fashionable. After waiting in long carriage lines along the street to gain entrance, one would greet the host or hostess and then stand (never sit) in rooms crowded with elegant people, jostling and moving about to find one’s friends, with no entertainments offered and apparently no refreshments. He mentions the lack of cards, music, and even conversation. Supposedly, the aim was to get there, be seen, and see whomever else had braved the crowded streets to attend.



St. Dundstan in the West, Fleet Street

When ready to leave, waiting for one's carriage was the next trial, after which it was on to another “at home” (what we would call an “open house” today). One can imagine the sheer exhaustion of attending just one or two of these in a week! And yet they were constantly being hosted, and the greater your popularity and consequence, the more invitations you would receive.

Entire afternoons and evenings could be spent attending such things, and, as the gridlock and flux of carriages in the street and their accompanying flambeaux gave away

the location of these affairs, they were virtually public knowledge—and therefore heavily attended.

So much for the painstaking work of ordering and sending little gilded invitations to an elite list of recipients weeks in advance. As Mrs. Bentley notes in [*Before the Season Ends*](#),** *"a hostess always prefers a crush to its opposite. But important members of the ton must not be made to suffer!"* Alas for Mrs. Bentley, it was seemingly unavoidable at times.

Interestingly, a picture of a “rout” occurs in the BBC adaptation of “Sense and Sensibility” with Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet, when Marianne spots her mysteriously absent sometimes suitor and cries out (quite *unfashionably*) “Willoughby!” Some people are shown with a glass in their hand, and there are, I believe, servants making the rounds with trays. According to Simond, no refreshments would have been served, but customs might have changed from year to year, so who knows?

Either way, I must still say, the Regency? You've got to love it!

**Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England*, by Carolly Erickson

Linore Rose Burkard is the author of “Romance to Warm the Soul, Fiction to Stir the Heart.” To get her free monthly newsletter with occasional articles like this one, please sign up [HERE](#). When you do, you'll get a free “flash fiction” Regency romance, “The Highly Sensitive Bride” by Linore.

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