

The Coronation Festival on Parker's Piece

On the 28th of June, 1838, the Municipality of Cambridge organised something that truly went down in history; one of the largest banquets ever prepared, hosting 15,000 diners and 17,000 spectators, which was set up at Parker's Piece to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Victoria! The total number of participants was 32,000, at a time when the population of Cambridge was less than 30,000 people! The "Coronation Festival" is even more impressive if we consider that the plan was finally approved on the 15th of June, only 13 days before the event. At first, the Organising Committee wanted to simply put on some fireworks; but mayor Charles Humfrey aimed to organise something unique that would engage the entire population of the town, from the aristocracy to the poorest classes.

At 2pm the 15,000 sat at dinner sang grace led by the choirs of Kings College and dinner began: meat, bread and pickles, some water and a lot of ale; last but not least, plum-pudding "in a supply that has never been witnessed in this kingdom before". In total, the diners consumed 1,015 stones of meat, 72lb of mustard, 140 lbs salt, 125 gallons of pickles, 4,500 loaves of bread, 1,608 plum puddings of 6.5lbs each and 99 barrels of ale. Naturally, the only toast allowed for the whole night was "The Queen". During the meal, the Overture and Choral Finale were executed by the choirs of Trinity's and King's. At the end of the meal, after the national anthem, the balloon was raised up in the air. After dinner the 'Rustic Sports' began. These included a range of events such as a pig races, donkey races, ram races along with whistling matches, sack races, a biscuit eating competition, a wheelbarrow race, and bobbing for oranges for the guests themselves. Prizes ranged from new shoes, hats, trousers to copper tea kettles and tobacco. The evening finished with illuminations and a fireworks display to end the whole event in style!

