

What's On in Edinburgh? Christmas at the Palace



There are many sights to see in Edinburgh this Christmas.



You might like to walk up The Mound and marvel at the electric light show that is Princes Street Gardens. You might like to watch the skaters whizzing round the ice in St Andrew's Square. Or you might like to look out, as I did last week, from a royal gallery onto a colonaded piazza, above which Victorian lamps glow softly in the twilight. And if you did this, you might be forgiven for thinking you have been transported to Narnia, with Mr Tumnus about to arrive at any minute.



The Palace of Holyroodhouse is magical at any time of year, but this December it has been transformed into a festive wonderland. Over 20,000 lights are now twinkling throughout the royal residence and giant trees welcome visitors into opulent public rooms.





The piazza itself – which was designed by **Sir William Bruce** in the late 17th century – is swathed in subtle red and green garlands. From here one enters the **Great Stair** with its stunning Baroque ceiling; Two artists, whom Bruce brought to Edinburgh from London, worked for ten years on the immensely detailed mouldings, which feature the key motifs of the palace including angels holding the **Honours of Scotland** (Scottish Crown Jewels, now housed at Edinburgh Castle). Frosted garlands and wreaths studded with berries and pines adorn the staircase itself and these, explains Senior Curator Deborah Clarke, have been designed specifically to reflect the plasterwork above.





What do you put on your table on 25 December? A few candles? Some flowers? That silver angel thing that your auntie gave you in 1993? Whatever you do, you're unlikely to achieve a setting as impressive as the one you can see in Holyroodhouse. Beautiful pieces from **Queen Mary's** silver banqueting service are interspersed with decorated trees – yes, trees! Maybe the Royal Ones didn't want to spend hours looking at each other, or maybe they just needed somewhere to hide the Brussels sprouts – who knows?

The dinner service itself was made in Edinburgh in 1935 by **Henry Tatton & Co**; its simple design echoes that of 17th century Scottish silver, and each piece bears the Scottish coat of arms and the hallmarks of both the company and the **Edinburgh Assay Office** (which is still very much in the city – Broughton Street to be precise – and one of the few left in the UK). The table is laid for dessert, with *comports* – wide shallow dishes for the display of fruit – filled with grapes; the comports form part of a **Bloor Derby** porcelain set ordered by **Queen Victoria** – the first monarch to use the Dining Room – in 1842.



HRH George V and Queen Mary actually sat on the thrones in Holyroodhouse's **Throne Room**. Our own Queen doesn't sit on them any more, but she does use this apartment for the luncheons she holds for **Knights and Ladies of the Order of the Thistle** (the highest honour in Scotland). The Queen's not very likely to have time to pop in over Christmas, but if you do you can see the second largest Christmas tree in the Palace – this one decorated with gorgeous red and white lights. You can't sit on

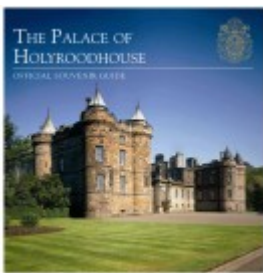
the thrones though – no, not even if you do bring your own crown, paper or otherwise.



The spectacular Great Gallery at Holyroodhouse is hung with **Jacob de Wet's** portraits of the real and legendary kings of Scotland. It feels a bit like Hogwarts in here – as you walk across the deep red carpet, you wouldn't be too surprised if one of those Royal Personages started talking to you. It's a room deserving of an extra special tree – and it has one, decorated with sumptuous jewelled baubles, while the royal fireplace is draped with festive foliage.

If you'd like to sing **carols**, attend a Royal Christmas **party**, listen to Christmas **music** (performed live by **The Scottish Vocal Ensemble**) or learn about courtly conduct and Stuart **dances**, all of them will be happening in here at some point over the holiday period – see below for details.





The Palace is a member of **Edinburgh World Heritage's Food Heritage Trail**, which has been developed to help both visitors and residents to discover the city's food history, experience Edinburgh's culinary traditions and dine in some of its historic locations. This month the **Cafe at the Palace** is entering into the spirit of the season by serving mince pies, Christmas cake and mulled wine – or why not try a **special Christmas-themed afternoon tea**? The **Palace shop** also has lots of ideas for **gifts**, from jewellery to food and drink, books and toys, and if you're a visitor they can even arrange international home delivery for you.



And if all that Christmas excitement stirs the child within you, fear not – these days even grown-ups can have fun in

Holyroodhouse's **Family Room**. The Palace's dressing up clothes – intended for the young rather than the young-at-heart – were getting damaged by all the adults who tried to squeeze into them, so now, explains Business Development and Communications Manager **Rebecca Hill**, they've brought in some larger sizes. You too can take a turn as a medieval maiden or masquerade behind a mask – go on, you know you want to...

The Palace will be decorated until **Monday 4 January 2016**.

Events at Holyroodhouse include:

Exclusive Evening Tours – an after hours tour with an expert guide, which includes 'behind the ropes' access to some apartments not normally open to the public, and is followed by a glass of champagne, a mince pie, a guidebook and 20% discount in the Palace shop. Various dates are available.

Carols Around the Christmas Tree – on **Wednesday 9th December**, the **Scottish Vocal Ensemble** will provide an evening of Christmas carols and seasonal music in the splendour of the Great Gallery, followed by a walk through the decorated State apartments. A glass of wine, a mince pie and 20% discount in the Palace shop are all included.

A Royal Christmas Party – Family Event Day: Sunday 20th December will be a day of wonderful family events, including **Courtly Conduct & Dancing, Make & Take Craft, Face Painting** and '**Banqueting Table**', plus classic Victorian games, activities and costumes to choose from in the Family Room, and the day's finale, a **Family Carol Concert**, with local family choir **Sing in the City**.

Hogmanay at Holyroodhouse – Family Event Day: on Thursday 31st December you can enjoy a full day of family events to bring in the New Year. In addition to the activities offered on Sunday 20th December there will be **Secret Stairs & Corridors Tours** – take a family tour behind the ropes of the Palace and find out about royal festive traditions.

Full details of times and tickets (Family Event Days are included in the normal admission ticket price, other events are charged separately) may be found on the Palace's website [here](#).

Many thanks to Deborah Clarke and Rebecca Hill, Palace of Holyroodhouse for allowing us to see the wonders of the Palace.

