



# The *dream* house

The history of Brocket Hall ranges from stately prime ministers to spectacular parties. Grace Cain visits a place ideal for your own fairy-tale event

Couture wedding dresses overflowed from boats; models were almost thrown from ponies; and then there was the peacock. A fairly average set-up for a Harrods-style wedding (see our photoshoot on page 68), and nothing especially out of the ordinary for Brocket Hall either, which has seen some opulent – and dramatic – occasions in its time.

One frequent visitor to the Hertfordshire property was a young Queen Victoria, who would call on her friend, mentor and prime minister, the second Lord Melbourne, who lived here. That friendship was, though, one of the more tranquil chapters in the estate's history. If the portraits in the house could talk, they would tell you about the stormy affair between Lord Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb (the aforementioned Lord Melbourne's wife); the unfortunate demise of a later prime minister, Lord Palmerston (allegedly on the billiard table, during a liaison with a maid); the 8,000 'Brocket Babies' born in the house during its World War II years as a maternity hospital; and the sorts of celebrity-riddled parties you never forget (if you ever remembered them in the first place).

Indeed, entertaining guests has been Brocket Hall's main purpose since it was built in 1760. The stately home and its 543 acres of parkland sit 22 miles from London – a long way in Victoria's time, but an easy journey for today's cars or helicopters (there are two landing pads within the grounds). Today, it hosts Christmas

parties, masquerade balls, gala dinners, bar mitzvahs, conferences and – of course – weddings. You can tie the knot in either the house itself, the golf club or Auberge du Lac (the estate's waterside restaurant). And a team of discreet butlers will ensure that everything goes your way.

As far as wedding-breakfast venues go, you'd be hard-pressed to top the lavish ballroom, furnished by the flamboyant first Lord Melbourne to host his royal friends. The 'Prime Minister's table' seats 54 guests beneath ceilings decorated by 18th-century painter Francis Wheatley and a grand chandelier that (allegedly) cost a company so much to make that it went bankrupt. After dinner, guests can follow in the footsteps of Lady Caroline Lamb, who introduced the waltz to England in this very room. Other entertainment can also be arranged. A casino is a popular choice, but the extensive grounds mean myriad outdoor activities are also possible.

Each of Brocket Hall's 30 bedrooms has its own distinct mood. The pretty Lady Melbourne suite, with views over the tranquil Broadwater Lake, is often used for brides. Arguably, the hand-painted chinoiserie wallpaper of the Prince Regent suite (commissioned by King George IV) makes an even greater impact, but whichever you choose, one thing is for sure: with bedrooms and ballrooms fit for a king (or queen), any wedding at Brocket Hall is sure to go down in history. □

For more information, visit [brocket-hall.co.uk](http://brocket-hall.co.uk)



*Clockwise from top left* A view of the Broadwater Lake; Brocket Hall's imposing exterior; Harrods' photoshoot; the lavish ballroom; one of the estate's two championship golf courses

