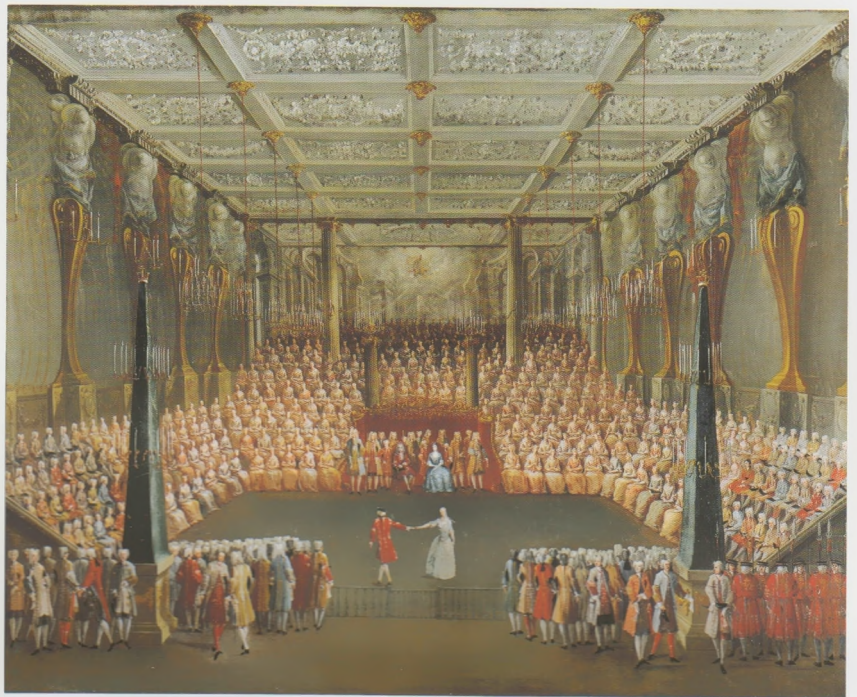


Melanie Doderer-Winkler,  
*Magnificent Entertainments:  
Temporary Architecture for  
Georgian Festivals*

Yale University Press (£40)

This may at first appear to be an unusual book to include in these pages, but for anyone who has ever looked curiously at prints of Georgian balls and firework displays it will explain much. A most attractive, well-researched and sumptuously illustrated book, it focuses on temporary buildings and their use for splendid theatrical events and for royal, national or private celebrations. One example was the firework display in Green Park, London in 1749 to celebrate the Peace of Amiens, and for which Frederick Handel composed his *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. A

*The Duke of Dorset's State Ball in Dublin Castle. oil on canvas, c. 1732. (Private Collection)*



neo-palladian pavilion was made from wood, plaster and painted canvas, but it caught fire during the display and was destroyed.

Longer lasting were the decorations put up for a ball in Dublin in 1731, which were re-used a number of times. The ball, to celebrate George II's birthday, was set up in a semi-derelict hall in Dublin Castle, to the designs of the Irish architect Edward Lovett Pearce. There were huge trompe-l'oeil canvas hangings of architectural settings as well as wood-and-canvas obelisks and steep, ramped seating. Willem van der Hagen, a scene painter and topographical artist in Dublin, probably painted these hangings, and they still survive. It was this theatre link that was important to the magnificent entertainments; the false perspective of scenery fooled the eye and the lighting was so ingenious we would still marvel at it today.

Another aspect that linked lighting and painting was the manufacture of 'transparencies': these were often large linen panels that were so artfully painted that when lit from

the front one view was seen but when lit from behind an entirely different scene appeared, as if by magic. Such illusions were much treasured by the Georgians and were staples of theatrical set design. On a much smaller scale the transparency principle was adopted for decorating domestic roller blinds in the early 19th century.

The endpapers of this endlessly fascinating book are neoclassical floor designs by the architect John Yenn. These were intended as temporary ballroom floor decoration and were executed in either thin paint or, more commonly, in coloured chalk – in part to stop the dancers slipping. Here again they are related to the patterns chalked on threshold stones when the floor is cleaned, and when they are rubbed off it is time to re-do the pattern.

There is fertile ground here for further research into the furnishing for these grand events, such as the 'rout' chairs hired out by Thomas Chippendale.

*Treva Rosoman*



A hand coloured engraving showing the main elevation of the Bank of England lit-up by lamps and transparencies to celebrate the recovery of George III in 1789. By Tomkins and Hamilton after Sir John Soane.  
(Courtesy of Sir John Soane's Museum via Yale Press.)