



This Regency Resource
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Romance that Speaks to the Soul

Haute Ton



Readers of Regency are probably familiar with the term ‘ton’. But for the reader new to Regency the term is unfamiliar and somewhat odd. When I first began reading Regency I was flummoxed by the unfamiliar terminology. I only knew I enjoyed reading and learning about the Regency (also known as Georgian) era. And so, I determined to write this article. In it I summarize the meaning of the word ‘ton’.

Ton pronounced is ‘tone’. The word derives from the French phrase Le Bon Ton meaning good form. Also the word haute ton is translated as high fashion and adapted to encapsulate Regency’s high society.



Lady Caroline Lamb



Beau Brummell

The term exemplifies the very nature of the upper echelons of society. To be considered worthy of the haute ton or the fashionables one must conform to certain accepted behaviors. These social behaviors were familiar only to the haute ton and were practiced to perfection. If one did not conform woe be unto that person!

Depending upon the fashions of the season these rules of conduct might be altered or changed altogether. And oftentimes the Lady patronesses of Almack's set forth the rules. If a peer of the realm longed to enter the inner circles of the haute ton a subscription to Almack's must be obtained. But to receive a subscription voucher to Almack's peers must first pass muster with the lady patronesses. This task could be daunting. If one had title, good breeding and excellent conduct Almack's doors opened wide for them. Once the peers gained acceptance into Almack's their reception into the haute ton was virtually assured.

After being received into the ton its members were expected to follow the rules of manner, fashion and conduct set before them. If a person broke the rules of haute ton conduct one might say of that person that they had bad ton. Those peers that had good ton frowned upon being 'seen' with those that had bad ton.

The world of the ton revolved around strict rules of conduct wherein keeping up appearances meant the difference between making a good match or a bad match for the young debutantes that had their 'Season' in London each year. Even with the solemn issue of making a good match hanging over many young girls' heads the members of the ton pursued pleasure and frivolity with a passion. They spent the season in London and then retired to the country for even more pleasure at their country estates. Like ducks in a row, the ton followed one another in all ways.



Below is a small list of other names for 'the ton'.

Aristos

The Beau Monde

The Elite

Fashionable Society

Fashionables

The Fashion

Haute Ton

Nobles

The Peerage or simply Peerage

Peers of the Realm

Polite Society

Society Types (this term was employed more often by the servants of the peerage)

The Upper Ten Thousand or Upper Ten

Upper Crust

On the flipside we see the demimondes of society. This class of people remained outside that of proper society. People unfortunate enough to be considered a part of this class had fallen into ill repute.

Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary has two definitions for the word demimonde.

Demimonde

Pronunciation: \ 'de-mi-,määnd, -mē-\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: French *demi-monde*, from *demi-* + *monde* world, from Latin *mundus*

1 a: a class of women on the fringes of respectable society supported by wealthy lovers ;
also : their world **b:** the world of prostitution

2: a distinct circle or world that is often an isolated part of a larger world <a night in the disco *demimonde*> ; *especially* : one having low reputation or prestige

When you happen upon the term demimonde when reading Regency, keep in mind that it refers to those in disrepute. It would never do for the Regency hero or heroine to be deemed a demimonde of society. Perhaps for the sake of the story the hero or heroine might fall into ill repute for a time, but one would expect the matter to be resolved by the end of the story.

Regency is an interesting and sometimes shocking era of history to read and learn about. My fondest wish, as a lover of all things Regency, is that more people will come to enjoy it as much as I do.



Stephanie Boles

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References and Further Reading

“What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew”, by Daniel Pool, 1993, Simon & Schuster Inc.

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