



Spring, M. (2017) 'Beyond the choreography - social dance in context in Georgian Bath', *Choreologica*, 8 (1), pp. 41-62.

Website URL: <http://www.eadh.com/publications.htm>

ResearchSPAcE

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This pre-published version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.

Please cite the final version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the ResearchSPAcE Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

Beyond the Choreography – Social Dance in Context in Georgian Bath

Matthew Spring, Bath Spa University

Eighteenth-century subscription balls have their origins in the formal court balls and masques of the seventeenth century – albeit in a democratised and simplified form. James I had instituted the role of Master of Ceremonies, answerable to The Lord Chamberlain, to be responsible for the smooth running of the events, the observation of rank in the introductions, and seating of the event.¹ For court masques the Master of Ceremonies would visit the Ambassadors in advance to issue invitations and discuss placement. A hundred years later this visitation by the Master of Ceremonies to the lodgings of new arrivals had become an indispensable part of Bath’s etiquette and signalled one’s admittance to the company.² With the Jacobean masque itself the guests would be seated in strict order of precedence. At Bath the banquet was replaced by tea at 9.00. Court revels and the masques put on by the Inns of Court in the later seventeenth century would normally start with the measures followed by galliards, courantos and lavoltas but by the Restoration French and English traditions were combined by branles, followed by the courant and other French dances, and ending with English country dances.³ At Bath by 1771 the long minuet was all that remained of the French dances to be followed after refreshments with the country-dances.⁴ The placement of the band in a box above was a feature of the Jacobean and Caroline Court masques that was built into the structure of Bath’s assembly rooms. Even the chandeliers were reminiscent of the elaborate and

¹ Anne Daye. ‘Seventeenth-century dance spaces: the infrastructure’, in B. Segal and B. Tuck, eds., *Ballroom, Stage and Village Green* (Early Dance Circle Publication, 2015), pp. 5-12 at p. 7.

² Lewis Melville, *Bath under Beau Nash* (London, 1907), p. 105. This visitation is satirized in Dicken’s *Pickwick Papers* when the Master of Ceremonies, Cyrus Angelo Bantam, visits Mr. Pickwick shortly after his arrival, (*Pickwick Papers*, chapter 35).

³ Daye, ‘Seventeenth-century dance spaces’, p. 9.

⁴ Melville, *Bath under Beau Nash*, p. 61.

complicated lighting arrangements achieved by the Jacobean wireworkers and chandlers in their multi-branched, tasselled and be-jangled structures that were tensioned into place and then attached to support huge numbers of wax candles.⁵

By looking at one particular event it possible to get some idea of the organisation behind a Georgian Assembly Room Ball. Ultimately the goal of the event was to make money through providing a purpose-built space for ritualised patterns of human behaviour in the public sphere. The profits went to the investors whose money had built the building.⁶ The Ball provided an opportunity to meet across the polite social classes. The event centred on the dancing but there were alternatives for those not wishing to dance – cards, refreshments, conversation, etc. The dance itself allowed people to intermix with little or no verbal communication – and thus was itself a social leveller.

A current major concern in musicology, following Georgina Born's edited book *Music, Sound Space*, is the interconnection between music and space – and it links into architecture, politics, and dance studies.⁷ The social boundaries implicit in the music of social dance are reflected in the boundaries within society between the insiders who had enough money and cultural capital to join the social space, and the outsiders who did not. But to join the dance you also needed to understand and be able to participate through the demonstration of the correct codes of dance, dress and etiquette. The music was both public for those within the space, but private and exclusive to those within the rooms. There were further gradations within the building where music could permeate the more public arenas of the ballrooms near to the sound source – and the more private spaces of the corridors, or, where in the larger rooms, the music was further away and less prevalent. The building and its intended function was an embodiment of the

⁵ Daye, 'Seventeenth-century dance spaces', pp. 6-7.

⁶ It was built under a Tontine system with 112 original shares. See R.S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850, A Social History* (London, 1981), p. 220.

⁷ Georgina Born, ed., *Music, Sound Space* (Cambridge, CUP, 2013).

politics and economics of the enlightenment age in which leisure was exclusive to the elites and the 'gentile classes', but which, once joined, could allow a good deal of social mobility and exchange. Indeed this fluidity of social mobility is particularly demonstrated in the phenomena of the masquerade balls with masks and fancy dress. Usually Bath and Bristol's citizen's were very much invited to the Ridotto as well as the elite company .

Bath's 'New or Upper Rooms' opened on 30 September 1771 with a much-advertised 'ridotto' to which Bath and Bristol's citizen's were very much invited, as well as the elite visiting company. In England the term suggested a concert, masquerade, banquet and dancing all in one and was more likely to be within the summer season. Jonathon Tyers had re-opened the Vauxhall gardens with a *ridotto al freco* in 1732.⁸ Burney's gives a full account of Evelina's first ridotto in 1778.⁹ In London ridottos were especially associated with Ranelagh and involved fancy dress and masks in the Venetian manner, and a musical entertainment with dance and cost a guinea.¹⁰ Famously the Bath event (which was entirely inside) turned into a riot when the guests, that included a good percentage of locals not used this sort of event, stampeded from the ballroom to get to the banquet set up in the Tea Room.

The twenty year-old apprentice poet Richard Brinsley Sheridan was living Bath where his father, the actor-manager Thomas Sheridan, had retired from theatrical management to open a school of elocution. This venture proved fruitless though the elder Sheridan's 'Attic entertainments', begun in Bath in November 1770, had some success.¹¹ This was the year before Richard Sheridan's celebrated duel with Captain Thomas Matthews and ensuing elopement with Elizabeth Linley in February 1772. Both Elizabeth and

⁸ Jonathan Conlin, ed., *The Pleasure Garden from Vauxhall to Coney Island* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 2013), p. 104.

⁹ Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (London, 1778; London, Penguin Classics, 1994), vol. 1, Letter XIII.

¹⁰ Conlin, ed., *The Pleasure Garden*, pp. 42-3.

¹¹ Linda Kelly, *Richard Brinsley Sheridan, A Life* (London, Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 28.

Richard were almost certainly present at the event. Sheridan wrote 'The Ridotto of Bath'¹² for the Bath Chronicle from the perspective of the servant Timothy Screw 'Underservant to Messers Khuff and Fitzwater' to his brother Henry, servant at the Almack's – the fashionable Balls Rooms in London that had opened in 1765. The bothers 'Screw' are both aghast at the social chaos that ensued at the event.

From Sheridan's poem we learn that Captain Wade the Master of Ceremonies at the Upper Rooms had given orders that no black was to be worn (though some came in black 'as the devil').¹³ Wade had only recently been appointed MC to the New Rooms (on 4 June), for which he was to two get two benefit Balls each season – with the lighting and music paid by the public subscription on those nights.¹⁴ This is significant as, after the fees of the musicians, these were the most costly overheads that a ball entailed on top of the normal running costs. Wade had been Master of Ceremonies at the Lower Rooms from 1769 after a contested election.¹⁵

Thomas Gainsborough had painted a full-length portrait of Wade for the octagon room as a gift, and the Bath Ridotto was the first public viewing of the painting in situ. Today it has been returned to its original position after having been removed and sold in the 1920s. Gainsborough had painted the work at his home at number 17 The Circus and had been sent free tickets for the event.¹⁶ Wade proved a popular choice as a natural son of General George Wade the man credited with discovering and putting down a Jacobite

¹² *Bath Chronicle*, 10 Oct 1771, no. 573, p. 3/c-d.

¹³ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, line 39.

¹⁴ Wade was appointed on 13 Nov 1770. 'Proceedings of the Committee for Managing the New Assembly Rooms, 1771-5' (Bath City Archives, Acc. 28/21 F), for 4 June 1771, p. 5.

¹⁵ Francis Fleming, *The life and extraordinary adventures, the perils and critical escapes of Timothy Ginnadrake, that child of chequer'd fortune* (Bath, 1771), 3 vols. pp. 124-232 of vol.3 are devoted to this election.

¹⁶ 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 27.

circle in Bath in 1715, and who had been its MP from 1722 until his death in 1748.¹⁷

At a meeting on the 17 September the committee managing the New Assembly Rooms decided on the order of events. The doors were to open at 7pm, (followed by music) with food at 9.00 (then dancing) and to finish at 12.00.¹⁸ The guests arrived either by coaches from the south or north, passing along corridors to the entrance after disembarking, or from the front if arriving in a sedan chair. Colonnades were provided for the chairman to wait along the side of the building.

The event was publicised in the Bath Papers – with ‘sideboards by Khuff and Fitzwater’ – and also in the London Evening Post, and the Salisbury and Bristol papers.¹⁹ The date was significant as it marked the end of the summer period when Bath had no official season and the start of Bath’s new autumn season. Thus it was intended to catch both the local clientele and those coming early to Bath for the season and was both local and cosmopolitan. After the guests had gone to the cloakrooms to deposit their coats and cloaks they were given access to the Ballroom and the Octagon room. And could admire the celebrated chandeliers.

**Two rooms were first open'd – the long and the round one –
(These Hogstyegon names only serve to confound one)
Both splendidly lit with the new chandeliers,
With drops hanging down like the bobs at Peg’s ears.²⁰**

The Chandeliers are still there and one of the wonders of Bath (there are five in the Ballroom alone), – they have their own histories and are jealously maintained. Originally they were would be adorned with hundreds of spermaceti candles and raised and lowered each evening for each event. As

¹⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ‘George Wade’.

¹⁸ ‘Proceedings of the Committee’, p. 24.

¹⁹ *Bath Chronicle*, 26 September, 1771, no. 572, p.1/c.

²⁰ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines, pp.41-4.

suggested above a major expense in running the rooms was cost the thousands of best quality candles that were required.²¹

The poem makes it clear that few of the guests understood what a ridotto was and much of the poem dwells on the mingling of the classes:

**But here I must mention the best thing of all,
And what I'm inform'd ever marks a Bath ball;
The Variety 'tis which so reign'd in the crew,
That turn where one would the classes were new;
For here no dull level of rank and degrees,
No uniform mode, that shews all are at ease;
But like a chess table, part black and part white,
'Twas a delicate checquer of low and polite;
The motley assemblage so blended together,
'Twas Mob, or Ridotto – 'twas both, or 'twas neither.²²**

A full ticket cost one guinea and admitted one gentleman and two ladies.²³ Single tickets were half a guinea for a man or seven shillings for a woman, only marginally more than the usual 5 shillings for a single ticket for a full concert with a ball to follow that was normally charged at Bath's Assemblies.

**From Bristol too come many dames of high breeding;
Seven Shillings was money – but then there was feeding;²⁴**

In total the whole event brought in £285 15 and catered for around 1,000 people with some 50 caterers, waiters and musicians.²⁵ On top of this there were a number of permanent staff – headed by a steward and a housekeeper, and under them maids and footmen. One major chore during the evening

²¹ For instance a £50 bill for candles was paid on the 15 October, 1771; and on 25 October a further £24, 15s was paid for candles. 'Proceedings of the Committee', pp. 39-40.

²² Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines, 55-64.

²³ *Bath Chronicle*, 26 September 1771, no. 572/1/c.

²⁴ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 79-80.

²⁵ 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 31.

was to keep the many screened-fires burning along the walls of all the main rooms, for which the best quality coal was ordered in some bulk.²⁶ But excessive heat was a common complaint.

There may have been a concert part of the evening though it is clear there was dancing before the food and that daughters and wives of the band were among the costumed guests. Thomas Linley senior had already been appointed to lead the musicians. This appointment caused major problems for all the musicians in the city as it divided them into those who followed Linley and were in his band and those left out. As the band for the balls was effectively the Pump Room band this affected just about every musician in the city and its reverberations went on for years afterwards.²⁷

Figure 1. Thomas Linley Senior by Gainsborough

**Nay more – there were some this grand ball to adorn,
Whose husbands were puffing above at the horn:
O, spare not your Cornu's! secure you may blow –
Your spouses are planning you fresh ones below:
But sure I was charm'd to behold little Rona
Jig it down all in time to her husband's cremona;**²⁸

This may be a reference to Linleys' wife, Mary and the wives of the other band members like John Brooks, John Grant and William Rogers. It reinforces the theme of the poem that the artisan classes were not deterred from attending by the costs, dress and codes of behaviour. d

Then the greatest disorder broke out at the banquet:

**Well, the doors were unbolted, and in they all rush'd;
They crouded, they jostled, they jockey'd, and push'd:**

²⁶ For instance a bill of £34 was paid out on 5 November in William Brownes. 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 43.

²⁷ See Kenneth Edward James, 'Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Bath', PhD dissertation, 2 vols., (University of London, 1987), i, pp. 191-220.

²⁸ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 83-6.

**Thus at a Mayor's feast, a disorderly mob
Breaks in after dinner to plunder and rob.
I mean not by this to reflect on the gentry,
I'd only illustrate the mode of their entry.²⁹**

The ridotto was good value as it also included food as provided by Khuff and Fitzwater – for which they were paid £52. 10s, plus 10s for the teaspoons³⁰ – I suggest here this was to reimburse the bespoke caterers for spoons that had gone missing during the evening. According to the ad of 26 September Khuff and Fitzwater ‘are employed on like occasions at the Haymarket’ and were specially brought down for this event.³¹ The King’s Theatre, Haymarket was London’s main theatre for Italian Opera but also put on Masquerades Balls.

Figure 2 – Haymarket Theatre Masquerade Ball 1724

The painting of a masquerade ball in 1724 though fifty years earlier shows the arrangement of the higher and lower sideboards with the waiter serving between them. Figure 2. The higher boards behind on which the silverware is careful arrangement of silverware is reminiscent of medieval and renaissance banquets in which food and silverware were displayed as emblems of pomp and luxury. The huge Pantheon that opened in January 1772, only six months after Bath’s Assembly Rooms, also put on assemblies, masquerades and concerts.³² Sadly of all England’s great eighteenth-century palaces of pleasure only the Bath’s Upper Rooms remain. In Bath it is clear that the locals did not understand the choreography of the side-boards on which were food was placed in warming containers to be dispensed by waiters and taken and eaten standing but away from the tables. Instead the guests fought to grab all they could in an unseemly manner. A good deal of

²⁹ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 93-8.

³⁰ ‘Proceedings of the Committee’, p. 31.

³¹ *Bath Chronicle*, 26 September 1771, no. 572, 1/c.

³² *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*. Originally published by London County Council, London, 1963, pp. 268-8.

the poem is taken up with likening the throng to a military assault, trampling the food under foot, some of which sticks to their footwear and clothes.³³ For the rest of the evening the guests return to dancing Cotillions in one room and Country Dances in the other. Thus both the Ballroom proper and the Octagon room are again used for music and dance.³⁴

Figure 3 – Plan of the Assembly Rooms when first opened.

In plotting the overall choreography of the evening the guests thus stampeded from the Ballroom and to the Tea Room, via the joining corridors and the Octagon Chamber, or directly from the Octagon Room. The musicians could also move along the upper corridors that connected the musician's galleries in all rooms. The gallery that let out onto the Octagon Room originally had an organ that is now lost. Thus they may have played during the refreshments, and all the music could be performed from the connected galleries as suggested in the poem. The Ballroom is 100 feet long and 45 wide with a high ceiling that is two stories high and designed to be filled with music.³⁵ Cards do not feature in the poem though usually an Assembly had one of the rooms dedicated to cards all evening – and a fourth room was added in 1777 as a dedicated card room – though both the Octagon room and Tea room could on occasion serve as such.³⁶ The acoustics of the rooms and corridors with different ceiling height, meant that the music would have echoed, refracted and diffused through spaces, especially so when more than one type of dance was being played in adjoining rooms. Both rooms become impossibly hot. There is reference again to Wade and his plumed hat.

And, "Madam, pray how do you like the Rudotter ?

"To see Capt. Plume dance – sure none can dislike him –

"Wade 's picture, I think, is purdigiously like him –

³³ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 93-150.

³⁴ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 93-150. Line 161 'Cotillons in one room, country-dance in another'.

³⁵ Trevor Fawcett, *Bath Entertained* (Bath, Ruton, 1998), pp. 7-8.

³⁶ Fawcett, *Bath Entertained*, pp. 7-8.

“Do you dance, Sir, to-night?” – “No, Ma'am, I do not:”

“I don't wonder at it, 'tis suffoking hot.”³⁷

The fires in rooms were probably unnecessary so early in the season and overheating was a common complaint.

Figure 4 - Minute Book for the years 1771-75 of the committee that managed the New Assembly Rooms (1771-75. Acc. 28/21 F). Payment to the musicians on 11 October 1771.

Unusually and uniquely the Minute Book for the years 1771-75 that belonged to the committee that managed the New Assembly Rooms survives and gives a great of detailed information on the costs of the ridotto including the fees of the musicians. There were eleven Musicians (if we include Linley) who were paid 12 pounds and 17 shillings for their attendance at the ridotto that night.³⁸ Linley was the leader and he received all the money for distribution to the band. It is clear that a fee of 10 shillings and 6 pence (half a guinea) was a normal musician's fee for a night but as this was a special event they may have been paid more.³⁹ The musicians under Linley were required to attend on Mondays (Dress Ball) and Thursdays (Cotillon Ball).

From the names of those listed in the Minuet book we can have a good idea who played what.⁴⁰

Probable Instruments for the band in 1771

John Bassett – violin

John Grant – violin

John Brooks- cello

James Brooks – violin

Alexander Herschel – oboe, clarinet or cello

William Rogers senior – Viola

³⁷ Sheridan, *Ridotto*, lines 164-8.

³⁸ 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 35, 11 October.

³⁹ 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 7, 18 June 1771. 'Resolve that Wm. Rogers Jun be added to the band of Musick for the Balls, and Concerts at 10 shillings and six pence a night.'

⁴⁰ 'Proceedings of the Committee', p. 6, 7 October.

William Rogers, jun – violin

James Cantelo – horn

Taverner Wilkey – violin

Daniel Miller – bassoon

However most pictures show a more mixed band than this would suggest – sometimes with trumpets and always with horns as mentioned in the poem. Most eighteenth-century musicians played a range of instruments and some would have been able to move from strings to wind and brass. They would have played from the three musicians galleries that were all on a connecting corridor. But it was not unknown for the musicians to be placed on specially constructed orchestra for especially big events as seen Rawlinson's 'Comforts of Bath' drawings.⁴¹

The listed band of ten also formed the basis of the band that played for the concerts on Wednesday nights, though for concerts a few others were added to the group – 'Also the said performers proposals for playing at the Concerto, together with those of Miss Linley, Mr Lindley Jun, and Mr Wm Herchall be likewise accepted.'⁴²

2. Bath's other sets of Assembly Rooms.

Sheridan's 'Ridotto' poem is modelled on Christopher Anstey's long and hugely successful *The New Bath Guide* of 1766.⁴³ In it all features of Bath's life from the point of view of visiting company are characterised in the exploits of the visiting Barnard family in a series of letters, each of which takes the reader to an event on the social round that was Bath's season.

Letter 11 takes us to a Ball at the Lower Rooms.

⁴¹ Thomas Rawlinson, 'Comforts of Bath' (1798) plate 10 in a set of satiric drawings.

⁴² Proceedings of the Committee', p. 6, 7 October 1771.

⁴³ Christopher Anstey *The New Bath Guide, or Memoirs of the B-N-R-D Family* (London, 1766). This long poem in 15 letters went through many editions in eighteenth century and early nineteenth.

But hark, now they strike the melodius string,
The vaulted roof echoes, the mansions all ring:
At the sound of the hautboy, the bass and the fiddle,
Sir Boreas Blubber, steps forth in the middle,
Like a holy-hock, noble, majestic and tall,
Sir Boreas Blubber first opens the ball:
Sir Boreas great in the minuet known,
Since the day that for dancing his talents were shewn
When the science is practis'd by gentlemen grown,
For in every science in ev'ry profession.
We make the best progress at years of discretion.
How he puts on his hat, with a smile on this face,
And delivers this hand with an exquisite grace!
How genteely he offers Miss CARROT before us,
Miss Carrot Fitz-Oozer, a niece of Lord Porus,
How nimbly he paces, how alive and light!
One never can judge of a man at first sight;
But as near as I guess from the size of his calf,
He may weight about twenty-stone and a half.
Now why should I mention a hundred or more,
Who went the same circle as others before,
To a tune they play'd us a hundred times o'er?⁴⁴

Figure 5 - Sir Borreas Blubber – with horns

Sir Borreas is unlikely to be Nash as he is mentioned in the poem as having died. Nash was followed in 1761 for two years by the athletic French dancing master Jacques Caulet (Collett) who resigned his post on account of the poor earnings, and gave way in 1763 to the diminutive but scandalous Samuel Derrick (1724-1769), who like Nash coupled the winter and spring seasons in

⁴⁴ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, tenth edition (London, 1776), pp. 100-1.

Bath with the summer as MC at Tunbridge Wells.⁴⁵ The quote from Anstey refers to the long minuet that survived in Bath until towards the end of the century and that they played the same tune for up to two hours. The Master of Ceremonies conducted and danced the minuet, introducing new partners into the dance as it progressed through the social ranks.

Figure 6 – Wade Dancing the Minuet in the Assembly Rooms

In fact Bath already had two sets of assembly rooms in 1771 and Anstey's poem is not clear on which is attended – though probably it is Harrison's. These were the first purpose-built assembly rooms, and were constructed in 1709 on the Terraced Walks, near the Abbey and river. These rooms remained until 1820, and were first referred to as 'Harrisons'. After 1745 they became 'Simpsons', later still 'Gyde's, and finally the 'old or Lower' when the New Assembly Rooms were opened in 1771. Harrison's initial building was a simple two-story structure built into the old city walls with a front entrance on the Terrace Walks. To this was added a ballroom in 1720. It was adjacent to the parade Gardens and later became the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. Harrison's rooms had attached grounds, 'walks' by the river with a summerhouse, and were also used for music and dancing after breakfast concerts in particular,ⁱ but also more elaborate musical events with fireworks.⁴⁶

Until 1730 Harrison had a monopoly but overcharged and exploited his position. The public complaints were such that Nash encouraged the London druggist Humphrey Thayer to finance a new set of Assembly Rooms, also built in on the Terraced walks but on the opposite side to Harrison's with a ballroom larger at 86 feet in length than Harrison's. The two sets of rooms did not exactly face each other but were only a short distance apart. These new rooms occupied the land where York Street now overlooks Terrace Walk.

⁴⁵ Fawcett, *Bath Entertained*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Fawcett, *Bath Entertained*, pp. 5-9.

The rooms that Thayer financed were opened with a breakfast followed by a ball in April 1730. The first proprietor was Dame Lindsey who had run a successful gambling room from her own house in the gravel walks and was an established Bath hostess. She was an ex-opera singer who ran the rooms under her own name until her death in 1737 when they were taken over by her housekeeper Catherine Lovelace who entertained the Prince of Wales there in 1738.

Under Nash the rooms functioned well together and operated such that the card assemblies and balls were shared out on different nights so that direct competition was avoided. By convention the Rooms were referred under the name of the current proprietor. Thus Lindsey's Rooms became Lovelace's in 1738 and Harrison's Rooms became Hayes's when Harrison died in 1731/2. Elizabeth Hayes was Lindsey's sister and the two connived to fix prices for a while in the 1730s.

Subscription Balls in the assembly rooms were a feature of Bath life and followed a strict formula. For full dress Assemblies proper dress was essential. They started at 6.00 pm with formal French dances. This part of the evening was over by about 8.00 when refreshments were called for. The dancing would resume at about 9.00 with country-dances and continue to 11.00 exactly. Dance callers were unheard of and you needed to know the dances in advance to participate. Sometimes dancers would meet in other rooms beforehand at the start of the balls to rehearse the dancing. Bath had many dance academies where skills could be acquired.⁴⁷

The subscription for the balls was payable on arrival in Bath (at the Assembly Rooms) and gave you a ticket that allowed admission for three people.

According to Wood in his *Description of Bath* (17), 'for the Master of [the

⁴⁷ Matthew Spring, 'The Fleming Dance Academy at Bath, 1750-1800', in 'Seventeenth-century dance spaces: the infrastructure', in B. Segal and B. Tuck, eds., *Ballroom, Stage and Village Green* (Early Dance Circle Publication, 2015), pp. 47-52, at 42, and Trevor Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance in Eighteenth-Century Bath', *Bath History Journal* 2 (1992), pp. 27-48.

family] to go to the publick Places, and subscribe Two Guineas at the Assembly-House towards the Balls and Musick in the Pump-House, for which he is entitled to three Tickets every Ball Night. His next Subscription is a Crown, Half a Guinea, or guinea, according to his Rank and Quality, for the Liberty of Walking in the private Walks belonging to *Harrison's* Assembly-House.⁴⁸

The money was used principally to pay the musicians (who also performed in the pump rooms in the mornings for 2 guineas a week). The proprietor of the room made money from the sale of refreshments (tea, chocolate and coffee) and Nash who orchestrated and directed the whole event received nothing. Nash instead made his money from gambling – a source of income that gradually dried up as more and more laws were passed to prohibit it.⁴⁹ He needed not only to be a capable dancer, as he needed to take the place of any missing male dancers – but also understand all the rules of etiquette and social precedence. He would visit new arrivals to ascertain their rank and fortune and be thus able to fit them in accordingly and find appropriate partner.

The room was arranged with long benches on which the women that wished to dance would sit and titled women would need the best seats. Where women sat indicated their desire to dance – and older women who did not intend to dance were encouraged to take the back seats. It was impolite for an available man not to ask a woman who wished to dance. The band played from the galleries and it is clear that the band included wind (reed and brass) as well as string players. A large amount of music survives that is titled 'as danced at Bath at the assemblies' and a good deal of it was published in Bath. However little survives with full sets of parts and it is likely that arrangements were hastily assembled and quickly forgotten. As each dance could take a long time it may be that little in the way of music notation was

⁴⁸ John Wood, *An Essay towards A Description of the City of Bath*, (Bath, 1742) vol. 2, p. 417.

⁴⁹ Fawcett, *Bath Entertained*, pp. 45-7.

ever used. There were music porters employed at Bath for despatching parts that had been quickly written out.

Apart from playing in the pump rooms the real 'bread and butter' work for the band was to play dance music for Balls. According to Gillapsie in a season typical week there might be a Dress ball on Mondays in the upper rooms, A Cotillon Ball in the Lower Rooms on Tuesday (Theatre also on Tuesday), Thursdays saw a Cotillon Ball in the Upper Rooms (Theatre Royal), Dress Ball in the lower rooms on Fridays. Cotillons were an early form of quadrille. Hundreds of books of dance tunes were published between 1750 and 1820s 'As danced at Court, bath and all fashionable Assemblies'.

There was one further large city space that was in regular use for balls that was the city Guildhall. The old Stuart Guildhall had a long upper room 29 feet by 72. The present Guildhall was built in the 1777 with a large upper ballroom with musician's gallery - to replace the old. Both were used for municipal events include balls for the city's permanent inhabitants - the trades people and servant class in particular.⁵⁰ As Dickens has in the words of his Master of Ceremonies:

'This is a ball-night,' said the M.C., again taking Mr Pickwick's hand, as he rose to go. 'The ball-nights in Ba-ath are moments snatched from Paradise, rendered bewitching by music, beauty, elegance, fashion, etiquette, and - and - above all, by the absence of tradespeople, who are quite inconsistent with Paradise; and who have an amalgamation of themselves at the Guildhall every fortnight, which is, to say the least, remarkable.'⁵¹

The walks that were part of Harrison's Assembly Rooms were venues for occasional outside music and dance events throughout the century and

⁵⁰ Fawcett, *Bath Entertained*, p. 48.

⁵¹ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* [1836] (Chatham: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), p. 465.

constitute Bath's first garden venue. Bath's tradition of breakfasting started in the Assembly Rooms, either inside in the rooms, or from late April or May outside, as the weather allowed. The *Bath Chronicle* for 24 May 1780 mentions that the annual Breakfast benefit concert for the wind band that provided the twice-weekly breakfast concerts would take place in the Walks, that year, not in the Spring Gardens. As an 'add on' musicians were available for those wanting to dance Cotillions:

The Band of Clarionets and Horns most respectfully inform the Nobility, Gentry and public in general, that their Annual BREAKFAST CONCERT, of Vocal and Instrumental MUSIC, which used to be at the Spring-Gardens, will this year (by particular desire of several Ladies and Gentlemen) be at Mr Gyde's Garden, Walks and Rooms, tomorrow the 25th. The Concert will be performed in the Garden, where an Orchestra will be erected for that purpose. Particulars of the performance will be expressed in the bills of the day. Horns and Clarinets during the Breakfast in the Walks at 10.00; the concert at half past eleven. Tickets at 3s 6d each, breakfast included ...N.B Those Ladies and Gentlemen who choose to dance Cotillon, &c a band will be provided for that purpose.⁵²

Here the usual annual benefit for the garden musicians was back on the city side of the river in the walks and gardens by the assembly rooms - proving that they were still used for garden functions. The 'orchestra is erected for the purpose' would be a raised wooden structure to allow the musician's sound to travel throughout the gardens, decorated for the event. At this benefit concert 3s and 6d purchased the liberty of the gardens (from around 10.00am giving you time to have taken the cure), with horns and clarinets performing in the walks outside, a breakfast, followed by a concert at 11.30 and dancing that would go on until around 2pm. It may be that the musicians who were the horns and clarinets would also be the string band provided dancing.

⁵² *Bath Chronicle*, 24 May 1780, no. 1023, p. 3/c.

The city's first purpose-built pleasure gardens 'The Spring Gardens' appeared in Wood's plan of 1735 on the other side of the river (where the Rugby ground is today). They were in operation by the 1740s and gathered pace during the 50s. The gardens were modeled on London's Vauxhall Gardens (indeed the London Gardens under Tyers were renamed and re-opened as 'The New Spring Gardens', on the 7 June 1732). The Spring Gardens in Bath were the longest surviving of the six eighteenth-century gardens commercial gardens, finally closing in 1799 after operating for some 60 years, and provided music for public breakfasts in a purpose built breakfast room. John Wood mentions concert breakfasts at the Assembly rooms after a visit to the pump rooms and baths as early as the 1740s,⁵³ but as the Spring gardens expanded its activities it took up this commercial activity, and as well as outside dancing. Under Edmondson's period of tenure 1742-59 the gardens were developed with formal walks, water features and buildings for music, eating and dancing,⁵⁴ but it was William Purdie who took over the lease in 1759 who really expanded the programme of entertainments in the spring and summer months.

Prominent and persistent advertising of the music related events in the Spring gardens appears on from 1761 onwards. Here Purdie is imitating the Vauxhall Gardens in Bristol that had opened for large-scale summer events as early as 1751 under the Austrian Horn-playing Charles family. Their events however only last during the 1750s and were over by 1760 - and it then that Bath's garden galas become a feature of Bath life.

The Rev. Penrose was ferried across the river in 1766 for a Spring Gardens public breakfast with dancing that continued until 2pm.

⁵³ John Wood, *An Essay towards A Description of the City of Bath*, (Bath, 1742) vol. 2, 437-38.

⁵⁴ Fawcett, *Bath Entertain'd*, 58.

We ... were ferried across the Avon from Orange Grove. Spring Gardens lie along the opposite side of the River. The Passage Boat would hold thirty people, covered over the Head and Sides The Gardens are a most delightful Spot, laid out with Gravel Walks, some straight, other serpentine, with a fine Canal in one Place, and a fine Pond in another, with the greatest Variety of Shrubs. In these Gardens is a large handsome Building, wherein is a Breakfast Room capacious enough to hold many sets of Company, having six windows in the side, (so you see it must be long) and proportionally wide.⁵⁵

Spring Gardens were only accessible by ferry until Pulteney Bridge was completed in 1774. Indeed the ferry ride across and along the river was part of the experience (Purdie also held rights in the ferryboat service). Normal admission to the gardens was 6d (or 2s 6d for a season ticket), and a metal disc was provided by way of a ticket – these could be copper or silver. This compares with Tyers’s normal charge of a shilling for London’s New Spring Gardens (Vauxhall). However Bath’s garden breakfasts on Mondays and Thursdays with music cost more at 1s and 6d’. Penrose’s diary account of a breakfast party in the Spring Gardens is closely corroborated in Christopher Anstey’s satire on Bath, *The New Bath Guide*, first published in the same year 1766. Here Lord Ragamuffin on meeting the Barnard family invites them to his private breakfast party at the Spring Gardens. He suggests to Simkin Barnard: ‘it would greatly our pleasure promote, If we all for *Spring-Gardens* set out in a boat’.⁵⁶ This they do and later at the breakfast table:

**The company made a most brilliant appearance,
And ate bread and butter with great perseverance;
All the chocolate too, that my Lord set before ‘em,**

⁵⁵ John Penrose, *Letters from Bath, 1766-1767*, ed. B. Mitchell and H. Penrose (Gloucester, 1983), 96, 106.

⁵⁶ Richard Anstey, *The New Bath Guide, or Memoirs of the B-N-R-D Family* (London 1766), 120.

**The ladies dispatched with utmost decorum,
Soft musical numbers were heard all around,
The horns and the clarionets echoing sound:
Sweet were the strains, as od'rous gales that blow
O'er fragrant banks, where pinks and roses grow.⁵⁷**

Somewhat later after his Lordship attempts the courtship of Lady
Bunbutter,

**... while she ate up his rolls and applauded his wit:
For they tell me that men of true taste when they treat,
Should talk a great deal, but they never should eat:
And if that be the fashion I never will give
Any grand entertainment as long as I live:
For I'm of opinion 'tis proper to cheer
The stomach and bowels as well as the ear,
Nor me did the charming concerto of Abel:
Regale like the breakfast I saw on the table:
I freely will own I the muffins preferr'd
To all the genteel conversation I heard.⁵⁸**

Mention of Carl Frederick Abel is interesting as he was a great favorite in Bath from his first visit in 1760 and returned regularly to play his own music, principally on the viol, in the card rooms of the lower assembly. He was a prolific composer and leader of the Bach/Abel concerts that led one section of London's musical elite. The younger company of Lord Ragamuffin's Spring Garden's breakfast party then proceed to dancing, after much gossip conversation, again with reference to 'Horns tickling the ear' during the meal;

**But those who knew better their time how to spend,
The fiddling and dancing all chose to attend.**

⁵⁷ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, 122.

⁵⁸ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, 124.

**Miss CLUNCH and Sir TOBY perform'd a Cotillon,
Just the same as our SUSAN and BOB the postillion;
All the while her mamma was expressing her joy,
That her daughter the morning so well could employ.⁵⁹**

Lord Ragamuffin produces a climax to the breakfast festivities 'In handing the Lady Bumfidget and daughter, This obsequious Lord tumbled into the water.' Here we have horns and clarinets playing outside in gardens while the breakfast is eaten, followed later by violins to play for the dancing.⁶⁰ Numerous advertisements throughout the 1760s to the early 1790s indicate that horns and clarinets were indeed the normal music of the Spring Gardens for public and private breakfasts, though they might also be a feature of inside breakfasts.

Figure 7 - Invitation to Spring Gardens, *Bath Chronicle* 7 May 1767, no. 342, p. 1/c.

Further details of the music for public breakfasts is found in the newspaper poem 'An Invitation to SPRING-GARDENS, *Humbly dedicated to the Dancers of Cottillions*. By a GENTLEMAN.' This is little more than advertisement paid for, or at the behest, of Purdie to advertise the start of the season for outside breakfasts at the beginning of May. Figure 7. From it we learn that the boat passage costs a penny, that the company assembled at the Pump-rooms after the cure, that both French and English tunes were used for the cotillions and that several sorts of music were provided. Firstly in the breakfasting house – presumably the horns and clarinets that also played in the grove, but whereas Anstey's breakfast party then danced to fiddles, the 'Invitation' suggests a single hurdy-gurdy man provided the music for the dancing. The implication

⁵⁹ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, p. 127.

⁶⁰ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, p.128.

is that the dancing went on both in the purpose built breakfasting room but outside in the gardens.

4. Other Venues for Social Dance

There were three other main venues for social dance. The several large hotels and Inns in Bath had large upper rooms in which Balls were advertised to take place – in Particular the coaching Inns such as the White Lion and Pelican had spaces large enough for dancing. For instance an ad for Pelican Great Room: Tuesday dec 26 1758 – 12/26/1758 Ball ‘There will be a good Band of Music provided: And no Persons in Livery will be admitted.’⁶¹

At any time Bath had a number of dance ‘Academys’ which had spaces for rehearsal and the teaching of dance. Lastly private homes were frequently fitted up for private Balls on a smaller scale throughout the Georgian Period. And clearly the company practised dancing in their homes. When in Anstey’s *New Bath Guide* Simpkin Barnard the son of house, shortly after his arrival in Bath is accosted by the sound of Bells and Fiddles –

**No city, dear mother, this city excels,
For charming sweet sounds of fiddles and bells.⁶²**

The Bells are the Abbey bells that are rung for each new member of the company – a distinction that he has to pay for. Then the City musicians i.e. the Town Waits arrive:

**For when we arrived here at Bath t’other day,
They came to our lodging on purpose to play,
And I thought it was right, as the music was come,**

⁶¹ *Bath Advertiser*, Dec 23 1758 no.163. p.4/a. Ball on Tuesday December 26 1758 - ‘There will be a good Band of Music provided: And no persons in Livery will be admitted.’

⁶² Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, tenth edition, p. 35.

**To foot it a little in Tabitha's Room:
For practice makes perfect, as often I've read,
And to heels is of service as well as the head,
But the lodgers were shocked such a noise we should make,⁶³**

After complaints from the neighbouring lodgers he pays them off

**So while they were playing their musical aires,
And I was just dancing the hay round the chairs,
He roars to his Frenchman to kick them down stairs,⁶⁴**

Again he must pay for the music to stop.

**So I thank'd the musicians and gave them a guinea,
Tho' the ladies and gentlemen call'd me a ninny;⁶⁵**

Figure 8 – Bath Waits

Social dance was a central activity that took place in a variety of Bath's city spaces. It could not take place without the music that animated the spaces such that they could fully function as public and private spheres where social interactions based on codes of movement, dress, gesture could take place. Some, like the Upper Assembly Rooms were designed specifically for it – but other buildings and indeed the outside could be adapted to service as a dancing space. The most important and costly elements that were needed were lighting and music. The organisation of the evening moved from the formal dances to the less formal, and provision for non-dancers was always there. The whole evening had its own greater choreography with the movement to and from the rooms and through the rooms during the course of

⁶³ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, tenth edition, p. 38.

⁶⁴ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, tenth edition, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Anstey, *New Bath Guide*, tenth edition, p. 41.

the evening. Dance was the key means to social engagement both within ones class and outside around which the evening was structured. All that was necessary was to have paid the ticket fee, have the appropriate dancing skills and be correctly dressed.
