

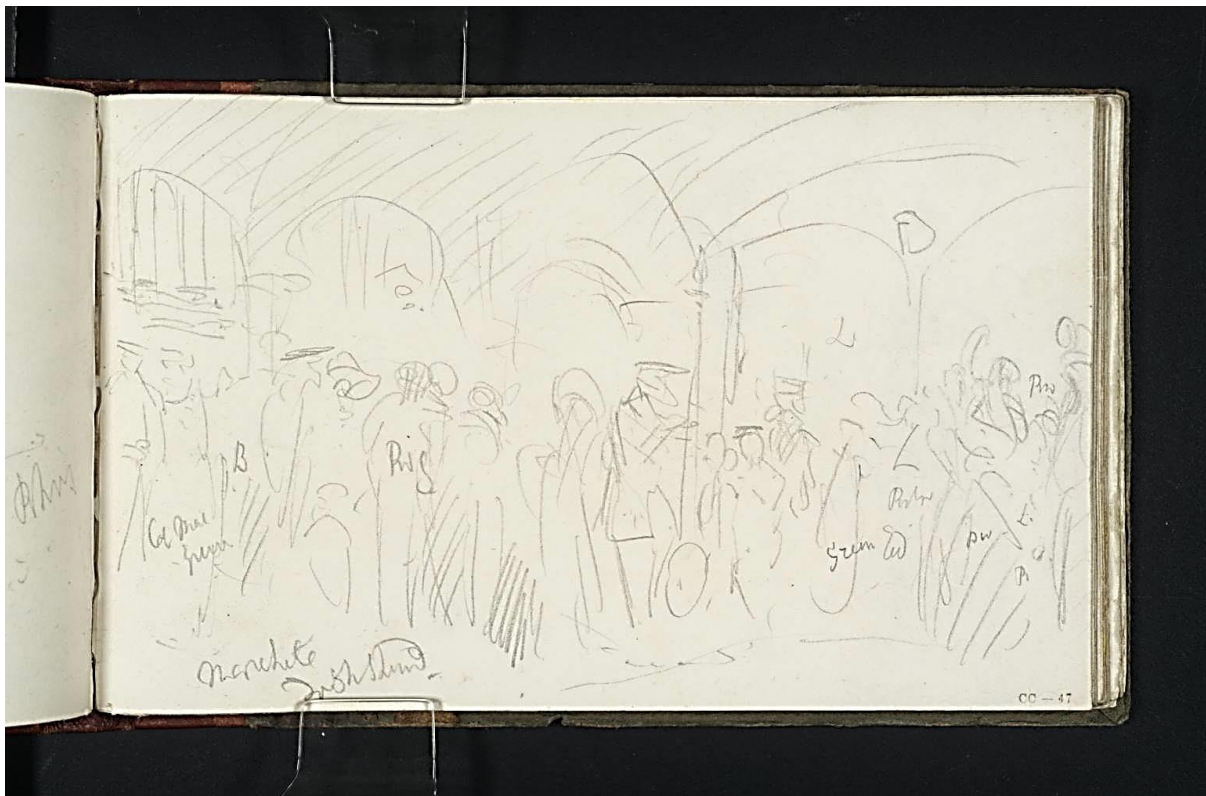
Historical accounts of the balls given for George IV in Edinburgh in August 1822

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The 200th anniversary of George IV's jaunt to Edinburgh seemed to have inspired many Scottish themed events in 2022. This politically charged occasion: the first visit of the ruling Hanoverian monarch to Scotland (after almost a century of conflicts between the country and the Crown) curated by a celebrated writer, still attracts interest and research, unlike e.g. a similar visit of George IV to Ireland in 1821.

It might be interesting to look at what we know was happening in the Scottish capital during the famous visit. The King was in Scotland from the 14th to the 29th of August, officially landing at the Shore in Leith Harbour on Thursday the 15th. The programme planned by Sir Walter Scott was inspired by medieval royal visits and included a Procession through the Royal Mile, a Levee and Drawing Room reception at Holyrood Palace (badly needing the repairs at the time); a Civic Banquet in Parliament House, a Military Parade at Portobello Sands, a special church service at St Giles' Cathedral, and a visit to the Edinburgh Theatre Royal to see Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*. And, of course, there were two Balls hosted by the Peers and the Caledonian Hunt Society on the 23rd and the 26th of August respectively. The details of the royal visit of 1822 were widely covered in newspaper reports summarised later in *A Historical Account of His Majesty's Visit to Scotland* by Robert Mudie. Compared to the rest of the program, the Balls were less documented in writing or in visual references. Regarding the latter, only two unfinished sketches by William Turner have surfaced with glimpses of the Peers' Ball.



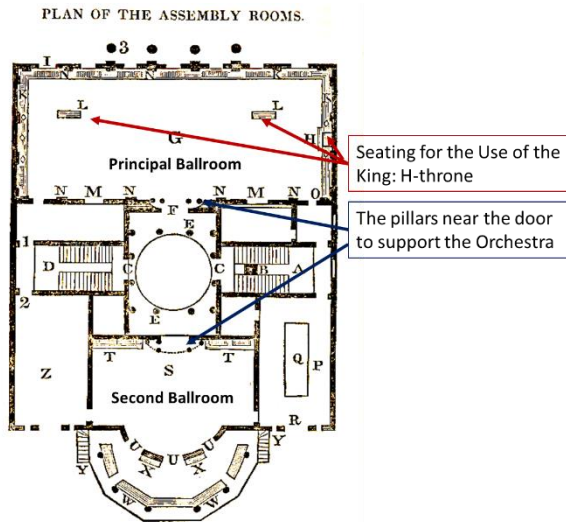
Joseph Mallord William Turner

The Peers' Ball at the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, 1822

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Mudie described in great detail the preparations of the George Street Assembly Rooms where both balls were hosted. In charge of those were Mr William Murray from the Edinburgh Theatre Royal and Mr Trotter, a manager of the Assembly Rooms, rather than Sir Walter Scott. The Assembly Rooms were redecorated and fitted with a temporary pavilion facing south where refreshments were served.

Interestingly, two Ballrooms were used for dancing with the smaller one designated for Quadrilles. The Assembly Rooms still standing on George Street have been remodelled several times since the visit, altering the ballroom space as well as removing the balconies for the orchestra. Mudie gave the dimension of the principal ballroom as 92 feet long (~28 m), 42 feet wide (~13m), and 40 feet high (~12 m) which is slightly bigger than the modern ballroom. Several accounts commented on the excellence of the gas illumination of the Assembly Rooms' exterior. The bills indicated a mixed use of candles and gas lights internally.



Plan of the Assembly Rooms adapted from Mudie, R. (1822) A historical account of His Majesty's visit to Scotland. Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/03026018/>.

Dress code



Left: King George IV, after Sir Thomas Lawrence - circa 1815, © National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 2503

Middle: Kilt, part of a suit of Highland dress belonging to William Blackhall of Blackfaulds and worn during King George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822, ©National Museum of Scotland

Right: Mary Jane MacDougall's presentation gown worn at the Drawing Room Reception at the Holyrood Palace, 1822. Oban: MacDougall of Dunollie Preservation Trust. Image courtesy of the National Museum of Scotland.

For both balls the attendees started to arrive at around 8 pm, whereas the King entered the ballroom around 9:30 - 10 pm, both times in military uniform and Wellington boots (Field Martial's for the Peers' Ball and Colonel of the Guards for the Caledonian Hunt). The Peers' Ball was more formal with court dress worn predominantly, though some gentlemen chose either Highland attire or military uniform. The ladies were mostly in white dresses. For the Caledonian Hunt Society Ball, the male members of the Society wore specially prepared uniforms. "The dresses of the ladies were more

varied and fanciful than at the Peers' Ball. Blue was much worn; and, as on the previous occasion, there was a great profusion of feathers."



Top Left: Fashion plate featuring Court dress design for 1822 in R. Ackermann's Repository of Arts &c., 1822, London. Image courtesy: Claremont Colleges Denison Digital Library.

Top Right: Fashion plate featuring Evening Dress in Blue for Spring 1822 in R. Ackermann's Repository of Arts &c., 1822, London. Image courtesy: Claremont Colleges Digital Library.

Bottom Left: Johann Hummel Court suit, c. 1814. Courtesy of FIDM Museum, USA.

Bottom Right: Slip waistcoat of cotton with a satin standing collar, Great Britain, 1820-1830 ©V&A, London.

Dance & Music



Nathaniel Gow

In addition to Mudie's report, the descriptions of the Peers' Ball can be found in the letters by Mary Frances Grant and Mary Amabel Scott, whereas Jane Grant described her experience at the Caledonian Hunt Ball. Both balls were ticketed. Despite that, the rooms were crowded with limited space for dancing mostly near the King and at the bottom of the ballroom. Where the King was present only music and dance "purely [Scottish] national and characteristic" were performed, with Quadrilles danced either after the King left or in the separate Ballroom. The music was provided by Nathaniel Gow's band - the most fashionable band in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, no details of what tunes Nathaniel Gow arranged for the occasions were published unlike for other balls at the Edinburgh Assembly Rooms or another of Gow's royal commissions at Windsor c.1797.



MARY.

Mary Frances (later Gardiner, c.1803 – 1840) and **Jane Grant** (later Gibson-Craig, c.1800 – 1863) were daughters of Sir John Peter Grant, 9th of Rothiemurchus, and younger sisters of Elizabeth Grant (Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, afterwards Mrs. Smith of Baltiboy) who wrote the *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*. The portraits are from the *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* published in London by John Murray in 1911 (available at the Internet Archive <https://archive.org/> courtesy to the University of Toronto - Robarts Library)



JANE.

Mary Amabel Scott (1798 – 1844) was a daughter of Hugh Scott, 11th Baron of Harden, and Harriet von Bruhl, daughter of a Saxon ambassador at the British Court. Lady Harriet was a close friend of Sir Walter Scott and helped him with the translation of German poetry. Mary Amabel married Major George C.D. Lewis in 1834. Her letter was addressed to her younger sister Anne Scott (1808 – 1879).

Nathaniel Gow (1763 -1831) was a son of the celebrated Scottish fiddler and composer Niel Gow. He learnt to play violin and cello in Edinburg. Since 1782, he was appointed one of his majesty's trumpeters for Scotland. He led his fashionable band in Edinburgh employed by the George Street Assembly Rooms from 1791 after his older brother's, William, death. Gow ran a well-attended annual ball at the George Street Assembly Rooms from 1797 and enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Athol, the Duke & Duchess of Buccleuch and members of the Caledonian Hunt Society. His band were employed on many occasions during the royal visit, including receptions in Dalkeith Palace where George IV resided and the Civic Banquet. In addition to the two balls described here, the regular 10th Dancing Assembly took place on the 27th of August at the George Street Assembly Rooms, also accompanied by Gow's band. Their fee for that occasion was £13 and 13 shillings, not the usual fee of £10 and 10 shillings, due to the "additional instruments involved". Rumours have it that Nathaniel Gow declined his fees for playing at the Peers' and Caledonian Hunt Balls. Nathaniel Gor's portrait is from the *Glen Collection of Scottish Dance Music: Strathspeys, Reels, and Jigs, Selected from the Earliest Printed Sources, or from the Composer's Works* (Edinburgh, 1891).

Dancing at the Peers' Ball

The Peers' Ball started with the anthem as soon as the King entered the Ballroom, followed by a reel and then a country dance, according to the newspaper report. Mary Frances mentioned that the reel played was an "old strathspey". The reels lasted for about half an hour, perhaps performed by different groups of dancers. Mary Amabel Scott indicated that the Ball was started by Lady Anne Scott who, together with her sister Isabel, "danced the reels famously". Also, a set of a foursome reel was performed at the bottom of the ballroom for 15 min initially and repeated when the King approached to admire the dancers. The set consisted of two older gentlemen, one of whom was a Highlander, and both "jumped and capered so and made all sorts of such strange antics", Mary Amabel had never seen before. Perhaps it was "Muray of Abercarney" by whose dancing George IV was so enchanted that according to Mary Frances Grant the King "made him dance an immense deal before him"? Elizabeth Grant in her *Memoirs* mentioned that Muray danced with the younger Jane which seems impossible as Jane did not receive a ticket to the Peers' Ball. Mudie also reported on "a lady and a gentleman in a Highland dress who danced a strathspey with much taste, which the King so much admired, that he clapped his hands in token of approbation". It is not clear if it was part of Abercarney's set, or something entirely different as the King moved through the Ballroom watching the dancers. Neither Mary Frances nor Mary Amabel danced a lot as it was too hot and too crowded, and the majority was "...in the same predicament. It was not in fact a dancing ball." Mary Frances and her party left at around 1 am. Mudie indicated that the ball continued "until long after the hour of night's black arch the key-stane."

Lady Anne Scott is likely to be Lady Anne Elizabeth Montagu Scott (1796 – 1844), the oldest daughter of Charles Montagu-Scott, 4th Duke of Buccleuch. George IV stayed at the Dukes of Buccleuch's Dalkeith Palace near Edinburgh during the royal visit.

Lady Isabella Scott is likely to be Lady Isabella Mary Montagu Scott (1800 – 1829), a younger daughter of Charles Montagu-Scott, 4th Duke of Buccleuch. She married the Honourable Peregrine Francis Cust in 1823.

"Muray of Abercarney" is a mystery figure. Mary Frances wrote the name of the dancer as "Muray of Abercarney". Jane in her account of the Caledonian Hunt Ball mentioned that the King asked for "Murray of Aberganny who certainly dances very well and who pleased him very much at the Peers' Ball". Elizabeth Grant in her memoirs mentioned that "Captain Murray of Abercairney, a young naval officer" danced in front of the King. Basil C. Skinner in his paper "*A contemporary account of the royal visit to Edinburgh, 1822*" in 1962 suggested it could be either James Murray, 16th of Abercairny (b. c.1780 - d. 1840) or his brother William, 17th Laird (b.c.1785 - d. 1850).

Dancing at the Caledonian Hunt Ball

The King arrived about 9:30 pm, entering the Ballroom with something like a candle-lit procession. The dancing again commenced with a reel. Mudie described that "the first reel danced was to the air of Brechin Castle. His Majesty was particularly pleased with the second set and clapped his hands in token of his approbation". Music for the Brechin Castle Strathspey can be found in the "Part First of the Complete Repository of Original Scots Slow Strathspeys and Dances published by Gows.



Breechin Castle adapted from Part First of The Complete Repository of Original Scots Slow Strathspeys and Dances ...humbly dedicated to Her Grace the Dutchess of Gordon by Niel Gow & Son's, 2nd ed c.1805. Image courtesy University of Glasgow Library.

Jane Grant managed to see the King and dancers closely. She and her company got to the front line of the circle surrounding the King where the space for dancing was cleared and where "two reels at a time were danced without any stop, all the while the King stayed, which was two hours...There were other reels going on at the lower end of the room, and after the King went, country dances and quadrilles in the small room", one of which Jane joined later. Mudie also mentioned that "a number of quadrilles were danced in the second ballroom" seemingly at the same time as the reels in the principal ballroom.

Conclusions

The available accounts provide a rather confusing description of what was danced at those Balls. However, they give the impression that the Reels took the main part and draw the attention of the King and the attendees. Mudie reported that there was a Country Dance after the reel section, letters are vague about whether it took place. However, Mary Amabel Scott indicated that she saw a reporter in the Assembly Rooms. Both Mary Frances and Jane joined the Quadrilles in another room after George IV left. The reels lasted for at least half an hour during the Peers' Ball and for the whole time of the royal presence at the Caledonian Hunt. Probably apart from the Abercairney's set dancing the foursome reel for about half an hour, other sets changed more frequently indicating that reels were done in a court minuet-like manner, where individual couples stepped on the dance floor one after another. The dance manuals of the period described reels for a varied number of dancers from 3 to 6. The historical accounts of these Balls show a more performing aspect of social dancing with an emphasis on the display of dance skills compared to the practice seen at period balls today.

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