

### III.—NEWCASTLE ASSEMBLIES.

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[Read on the 27th November, 1912.]

To volume iv of the octavo series of *Archaeologia Aeliana*, published in 1860, the late Mr. John Hodgson Hinde contributed a paper dealing with bygone public amusements in Newcastle. Among the subjects elucidated was that of public assemblies for dancing, card playing, etc., which were much in vogue throughout the country during the seventeenth century. The first notice of such an assembly in Newcastle, Mr. Hinde found occurring in the Race week of 1716. The place of meeting was the house formerly occupied by Sir William Creagh in Westgate Street, on the opposite side of that thoroughfare to the present county court, and for some time afterwards kept as a school for young ladies. There is a picture of it on the margin of Corbridge's map of Newcastle, published in 1723 or 1724, during the mayoralty of Matthew Featherstonhaugh, to whom the map is dedicated.

Sykes, in his *Local Records*, copies an advertisement which appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* of the 8th May, 1725, announcing that at this assembly room in the Race week of that year, twelve fine fans would be raffled for at 2s. 6d. a ticket, the best to be valued at 3l. 3s. and the worst at 5s.; the lowest thrower to have the second best fan, valued at 3l., the others according to the numbers thrown.

When the house in Westgate Street was no longer available (about 1736) a new assembly room was opened in Ridley court, Groat Market, and for a period of forty years continued to be the great gathering place for balls, receptions and similar entertain-

ments in the town. Ridley court is the second turning on the right, going down the Groat Market from Pudding chare. It still exists, but 'Oh! how fallen, how changed!' from those happy days when

'The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men ;  
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,  
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,  
And all went merry as a marriage bell.'—BYRON.

For some time assemblies and balls were held in the Race week only; then the Assize week was added, followed by the guild days of Newcastle freemen, and Royal birthdays. Thus, in April, 1762, the *Newcastle Journal* advertises, 'The Assembly will be held on Tuesday next, being the Guild, and on the Monday fortnight afterwards, as usual.' In May of the same year, 'The Assembly will be held on Friday next, being his Majesty's Birthday.' Again, in June, 1764, 'There will be Assemblies on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday in the Race week as usual,' and in August, 'there will be Assemblies on Monday and Wednesday in the Assize week, and the Tuesday following, as usual, and a Concert will be held at the Assembly room on the Tuesday in the said week. Tickets for the Concert at 3s. each, to be had at Mr. Parker's, Mr. Steel, Mr. Hawthorn, at the Assembly Room, at the Coffee Room, Sandhill, and at Mr. Avison's in Green Court, Newgate Street.'

The Rev. John Baillie, who published an *Impartial History of Newcastle* in 1801, thus moralises upon the amusements to which the Ridley court building was devoted :

'Trade has long been the principal pursuit of the people of this town. By the tenor of the indentures of the youth, by their prescribed dress, victuals, and above all, the powerful influence of example, in which they had constantly set before their eyes, the frugality, industry, charity and simplicity of the manners of their virtuous parents, the richness of attire, the soft and delicious luxuries of life, and chiefly the more elegant refinements were confined to the higher ranks of society; and therefore balls, assemblies, masquerades, routs, etc., were kept from the eyes and ears of the youth of this town with a wary and jealous attention. So

that for many years the room appropriated to dancing, assemblies, etc., was in the Groat Market, and is far from being either very extensive, or seemingly adapted for a concourse of polished and opulent people.'

It was this place, probably, that Lord Eldon<sup>1</sup> described in one of his conversations with Miss Forster, for during his youth the Groat Market assembly rooms were at the height of their prosperity :

'At the Assembly Rooms at Newcastle there were two rooms and a stairhead between them . . . . so we always danced from the large room, across the stairhead, and into the other room. Then you know, Ellen, that was very convenient, for the small room was a snug one to flirt in. We always engaged our partners for the next ball, and from year to year. We were very constant.'

In course of time the premises became too small, and the locality inconvenient. Then, in 1776, with much ceremony, the beautiful assembly rooms in the Westgate were opened. Particulars of these splendid apartments, and of the great gatherings, banquets, concerts and receptions held therein down to our own time, may be read in every account of Newcastle. As soon as they were ready for occupancy the old rooms in Ridley court were devoted to other purposes. The *Newcastle Journal* of the 13th April, 1776, contained the following announcement of their dispersion :

'There will be an Assembly on Monday next, being the Guild. After which there will not be any Assemblies at the Assembly House in the Groat Market.

And Notice is hereby given :—

That the Great Room called the Assembly Room in the said House, is now to be let for Entertainments, Sales and many other purposes, and all persons having occasion for it may apply at the said House.

And the whole Stock of Goods and Furniture now employed in the Assembly business, consisting of—

Several dozens of good tea-spoons.

A great quantity of tea-table china.

Two large boilers.

A number of tea kettles, tea trays, hand boards, tables, chairs, and looking glasses.

<sup>1</sup> Twiss, *The Public and Private Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon*, vol i. p. 61.

A small glass lustre.

Four glass globes or lamps with a lander [? ladder] to light them.

↵Thirty-eight glass basons for candles with rings to fix them in.

Thirty benches or seats covered with red cloth, and a variety of other things.

Will begin to be sold at the said House on Monday, the 13th day of May next at ten o'clock in the forenoon, and continue selling till all be disposed of.

N.B.—This will be no more advertised.'

These rooms now became known as the 'Old Assembly Rooms,' and were let to all and sundry. Mackenzie,<sup>2</sup> in his history, states that they were occupied by Mr. George Brown, linen draper, as a warehouse, and next by Mr. Kinloch,<sup>3</sup> dancing master.

Eventually, after two-and-twenty years had passed away, namely, in 1798, having had temporary lodgment at the old dispensary in Low Friar Street, and in St. Nicholas's churchyard, the four-year-old Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society found in them a more permanent local habitation. Dr. Spence Watson, in his history of the institution,<sup>4</sup> tells us that the committee rejoiced greatly in the acquisition of their new rooms, and, in their annual report, congratulated their brethren on 'the pleasant and commodious manner in which they were enabled to hold their anniversary meeting in the spacious and elegant apartment provided for their use, and in which they might hope that the Society had at length arrived at something like a permanent establishment.' Here also were sheltered the Natural History Society, and for a short time, 'in an apartment below the library room in the Groat Market,' our own Society of Antiquaries. For twenty-seven years the Lit. and Phil. occupied the premises and then migrated to their present abode in Westgate Road.

<sup>2</sup> Eneas Mackenzie, *History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, p. 463.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Kinloch was the father of a still better known teacher of dancing—Alexander Monro Kinloch, who published at least two volumes, of a hundred airs each, for the pianoforte, violin, flute, &c., with a note stating that they were equally adapted to the flageolet and Irish pipes.

<sup>4</sup> *History of the Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, page 55.

Then came another long period of vicissitude. Oliver, in his picture of Newcastle, published in 1831,<sup>5</sup> states that 'the Freemasons' Lodge, No. 26, is situated in the Groat Market, in a large room formerly occupied by members of the Lit. and Phil.,' etc. The late Alderman Barkas, writing to the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* in 1888, relates that after the Lit. and Phil. departed, the large room was used by the New Jerusalem church society as a schoolroom, and then it became a temperance hall 'where the well-known Ridley Court meetings were held.'

Finally, in the night of July 30th, 1848, the premises<sup>6</sup> were burnt down and Elijah Galloway, foreman to the Newcastle firemen, lost his life. A few hours earlier the long room had been used for a lecture by that famous controversialist, the Rev. Joseph Barker.

Through the courtesy of Mr. John George Hodgson, a sort of loose cash book, which was found among the papers of his grandfather, the Rev. John Hodgson, historian of Northumberland, has been submitted to the society. It may possibly have belonged to the keeper of the Groat Market assembly rooms, or it may have come from some other source. There is no internal evidence either way. Howsoever that may be, the book gives us at least a passing glimpse of assemblies in Newcastle at a time when they were fashionable and popular. The period to which it chiefly relates is the years 1762-1763, but there are memoranda sprinkled here and there through its pages referring to contiguous years, although having no connexion with the business carried on. The writer seems to have been mainly one Elizabeth

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Oliver, *A New Picture of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Prior to about 1820 these premises had belonged to a family of Riddleys. They then came into the possession of Mrs. Elizabeth Carr (wife of James Carr) whose maiden name was Ridley, and through her descended to Robson Carr, occupier at the time of the fire. Eventually they came to James Nixon Carr, his brother, who married the eldest daughter of Andrew Vinycomb, and the place now belongs to Mr. John Vinycomb, the heraldic artist, and his brother, Mr. Robert Vinycomb, of Holly Avenue, Newcastle.

Pickering, of whom nothing is recorded in local history, and the *brochure* is accordingly endorsed 'Pickering Papers.' This lady may have been the person in charge. If so, she had a half share in the profits, as is proved by most of the accounts which she renders.

It is interesting to make acquaintance in this book with the fashionable frequenters of these select assemblies, to note their members and those who dropped in at various times to drink wine and negus. One cannot be quite sure of the identity of all these big people and must be guided by the family nomenclature, for among them were those who bore the names of Askew and Allgood, Bulman, Blackett and Bates, Collingwood and Carr, Clayton, Clennell and Cookson, Ellison and Fawcett, Lamb and Lambert, Maddison and Moises, Peareth and Partis, Roddam and Swinburn, and so on through the alphabet of county families and well-to-do townsmen.

The book begins with 15th November, 1762, when the last assembly of a quarter was held, and then proceeds to the first meeting of a new quarter, which took place on the 22nd November in the same year. Twenty-four subscribers entered their names at 3s. each, and ten non-subscribers at 1s. also attended. The names of the subscribers are entered as: Mr. and Miss Ellison, Pilg. [Pilgrim Street], Mr., Mrs. and Miss Ellison, Park [Gateshead Park], Miss Dawson, Mr. Carr, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, Mr. Clayton, Mr. Shawdon, Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett, Mrs. Gibson, Mrs. Lambert, Mr. and Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Swinburn, Mrs. Dockray, two Miss Kennedys, Dr. Brown, and Mrs. and Miss Alcock. The non-subscribers were, Miss B. Dawson, Miss N. Winnington, Miss Baxter, Miss Ward, Miss Askew, Miss Noble, Mrs. Lamb, Miss J. Sowerby, Miss Roddam, and Mr. Seton—total, ten gentlemen and twenty-four ladies.

Then comes a financial summation: 24 subscriptions at 3s., 3*l.* 12s.; 10 non-subscribers at 1s., 10s.; Miss Ellison, Park, for

last year, 3*s.*; six packs of cards used, 1*l.* 1*s.* Total 5*l.* 6*s.*, 'half of which is 2*l.* 13*s.*' This allotment of half share appears frequently. Next day the accounts show the following figures:

1762. November 23rd, C. Craddock, sub., 7*s.* 6*d.*; Oct. 25th, tea and  $\frac{1}{2}$  negus, 5*s.* 8*d.*; November 9th, tea,  $\frac{1}{4}$  negus and gloves, 3*s.* 7*d.*; 25th, tea and  $\frac{1}{4}$  negus, 1*s.* 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.* Total 18*s.* 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*

C. Graham, tea, 3*s.*; gloves and  $\frac{1}{4}$  negus. . . . Total 6*s.* 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*

C. York, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*; and C. Bell, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*

Mr. Peareth, tea and  $\frac{1}{2}$  negus, 2*s.* 8*d.*

C. Pickersgill, October 25th, sub. and tea, 9*s.*; November 9th, tea and  $\frac{1}{2}$  negus, 2*s.* 3*d.*; meeting, November 8th, 1*s.*; November 23rd, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*

November 23rd. Received this day of Mr. Partiss<sup>7</sup> for ye use of the Assembly Rooms for his entertainment, 2*l.* 2*s.*

Mrs. Swinburn, year's subscription, 1*l.* 1*s.*; 4 assemblies, at 3*s.*, 12*s.*

Mr. Coulson, year sub., 1*l.* 1*s.*; gloves, 7*s.* 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*; tea, 9*s.*; negus, 3*s.* 9*d.*; Mr. Coulson, short payment in cards, 19th October, 6*d.*

Total 6*l.* 18*s.* 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*, 'one half of which is 3*l.* 9*s.* 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ *d.*'

Dr. Brown, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*

Mr. Bullman, October 15th, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*; November 9th, tea, 1*s.* 6*d.*; November 23rd, tea and gloves, 2*s.* 10*d.* Total 5*s.* 10*d.*

The assemblies appear to have been held on Monday evenings every week, for the first one of the quarter, as we have already seen, took place on Monday the 22nd November. The next in importance, the fourth, was held on Monday the 13th December. There were present, on this latter occasion, fifteen subscribers and twenty-two non-subscribers. The subscribers included Mr. and Mrs. Cookson, Mr. and Miss Clennell, Major and Miss Carr, Mrs. and Miss Peareth, Mr. and Mrs. Blackett, Mrs. Sunderland, Mr.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Partis, sheriff, 1745-46; mayor, 1752-53 and 1760-61; died at his house on the Sandhill, 5th Feb., 1766.

Willson, Miss J. Sowerby, Mr. Dixon, and Miss Hume. The non-subscribers were the two Mr. Moises, Mr. Maddison, Miss Trench, Miss Bell, Mr. Baker, Miss Walters and a lady, Miss Hall, Miss Dawson, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerby, Miss Atkinson, Mrs. Sunderland, two Miss Peareths, junior, two Miss Shields, Miss Noble, Miss Coates, Mr. Stephenson, Plaws[worth], and Mr. Tulip—fourteen gentlemen and twenty-three ladies.

At the eleventh assembly of the quarter, held on the 2nd May, 1763, Sir Lancelot Allgood, with Mrs. and Miss Allgood, attended, and special mention is made of 'tea for Sir Lancelot Allgood, 3s.'

There appears to have been an extra assembly on Thursday, the 5th May, 1763, being a day of general thanksgiving for the peace of Paris. No account of persons present is given, but there are various entries relating to the receipts. For example, Miss Ellison, Side, paid her subscription for the year, as did also Mr. Carr, Miss Chambers, Mr. Blackett, Mr. Adams and Mr. Cuthbert, 6*l.* 6*s.*; gloves cost 1*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.*; tea 1*l.* 10*s.*; wine and negus, 1*l.* 1*s.* 8*d.*; cards, one pack used, 3*s.* These items, with 6*l.* 6*s.* for forty-two assemblies at 3*s.*, make 16*l.* 19*s.* 2*d.*, 'half of which is 8*l.* 9*s.* 7*d.*'

The twelfth meeting, with which the records of assemblies ends, took place on the 9th May, 1763. The names of subscribers present is not recorded, but the non-subscribers at 1*s.* each were Miss Featherstonhaugh, Miss D. Stephenson, Mr. Alcock and Miss Ellison. Miss Pawson paid on account of her subscription 7*s.* 6*d.*, and four packs of cards used are charged 12*s.*, making a total of 1*l.* 3*s.* 6*d.*, 'half of which is 11*s.* 9*d.*'

The consumption of intoxicating liquors at these gatherings appears to have been moderate. Tea and negus are the ordinary refreshments supplied, though the house kept intoxicants in its 'closet.' Stocktaking is recorded on the 26th June, 1762, when the examiners found, 10 bottles Lisbon, 24 Mountain, 7 Rhenish,



and 15 Red Port; total 59 bottles 'all full.' To this inventory the following remarks are attached: 'E. T. says he wants 3 doz. bottles out of closet. 59 in hand, 36, he says, he wants, remains 23 for closet stock.' Other items are 23 quart pots, 6 pint pots; cards, 11 new packs, 1 pack used, total 12. Glasses, 6 doz.; 'gloves, 6 doz.; 10 pair gloves, new;  $2\frac{1}{2}=5$ , bad gloves,  $1=2$  old gloves, will carry to labourr.'

At the end of the year, 31st December, 1762, the stock consisted of 26 packs of cards 'received by C. Banson' new on hand; 16 bottles Mountain, 10 Lisbon, 6 Port and 6 Rhenish.

On Thursday, the 14th April, 1763, Mr. Banks,<sup>8</sup> a dancing master, gave his annual ball at the rooms. His personal account is entered separately, viz.:  $\frac{1}{2}$  negus 'for himself,' 9d.; a negus for the waits, 1s. 6d.; the use of the room, 1l. 1s. Total, 1l. 3s. 3d. 'He left ye servants shillings a-piece.' The other expenses on that occasion are entered as 2 pair of gloves, 2s. 8d.; a tea table for Mr. Dixon, etc., 4s.; tea, coffee and cake for 12 couples, 18s.; a negus, 1s. 6d.; the porter's attendance, 1s.; received of Mr. Humble, 1l. 0s. 6d.; paid Stephen Hogg, the porter, out of this money, 1s.; wine and negus, 1l. 12s. 9d.; 6 negus more 9s.; cake sold, 1s. 6d. Total received at Mr. Banks' ball, 2l. 3s. 3d.

Mr. Charles Ord's assembly on 15th inst., 3l. 9s. 5d. and 3s. Total 3l. 12s. 5d. 'One half, 1l. 16s. 2d.'

Other memoranda which appear in this book are the following:

March 4th, 1756. 'Mr. Cr. Fawcett's opinion, a guinea.'<sup>9</sup>

September 17th, 1762. W. R. paid Mr. Whelan 'in my room' 58l. 10s. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. clear of all accounts and demands (B.W. and

<sup>8</sup> In the *Newcastle Journal* for 29th April, 1775, it is reported that 'on Thursday evening there was a very brilliant appearance at Mr. Banks's ball, when his scholars gave general satisfaction to their friends and did the master great credit, particularly in the Louvre Cotillon and the Passe-pied.'

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Fawcett, recorder of Newcastle, 1746-1753 and, after retirement, through certain alleged Jacobite leanings, re-appointed 1769 and held the office till 1794.

countersigned E.P.), which was all the money he had in his hands. He said he was going to pay it to Mr. Clarke for the mortgage of the house in Rosemary Lane. He signed one inventory, W. R. another, each one.' On same page is a memo. dated 5th April, 1756, relating to this property. 'Lease for 21 years at 14s. a year, payable at March 25th, yearly, 14s., Church Cess and Poor Cess. Principal sum upon the mortgage, 50*l.* to James Clarke,<sup>10</sup> Merchant.'

Dr. $\frac{1}{2}$ of the house in Rosemary Lane, 15 <i>l.</i> 2 <i>s.</i> 9 <i>d.</i>	50 <i>l.</i> 0 <i>s.</i> 0 <i>d.</i> Clarke
	109 <i>l.</i> 2 <i>s.</i> 0 <i>d.</i> Cash

November 22nd, 1762. 'Received of Margaret Bell 7*s.* 6*d.* on account of rent due to me. I paid my two shillings, Eliz. Pickering.'

6th December, 1762. 'Sent by Cath. Banson, Ed. Fawcett bill of 9*l.* Paid by E. Pickering.'

December, 1762. 'Received from Thos. Yeaman, by his wife, a year rent due at Martinmas. W. P.'

14th April, 1763. 'Paid Mr. Ed. Gaire, Land Tax, 1*l.* 18*s.*'

'Mr. John Widdrington,<sup>11</sup> for my moiety or half part of rent for hay loft and stable in the Mill Entry.'<sup>12</sup>

	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>		<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
8 years rent at 1 <i>l.</i> , due Aug.				Cash of Mr. Widdrington			
1, 1765	8	0	0	in part of rent	3	3	0
				1764, March 3, cash of Mr.			
				Widdrington 'when at the			
				Queen's Head with Mr.			
				John Dixon'	1	1	0
					4	4	0
				Balance	3	16	0
					8	0	0

<sup>10</sup> James Clark, son of James Clark, free porter, apprenticed to Joseph Liddell, boothman, 30 Sep., 1717, admitted 26 Oct., 1727. Disfranchised for disobedience to the governor, 22 Jan., 1730. Restored 18 Aug. 1730. Died *circa* 1765. Dendy, 101 *Surt. Soc. Pub.*, p. 343.

<sup>11</sup> John Widdrington. Much about this local worthy may be read in a paper contributed to *Arch. Ael.*, 2 ser. x., by the late James Clephan.

<sup>12</sup> Mill Entry was at No. 59, Head of the Side. It figured conspicuously as a slum in the cholera inquiry of 1854, and was swept away in making the approaches to the High Level bridge, shortly afterwards.

Mr. John Widdrington, for bake house and laundry, 6½ years at 1*l.* a year, May 1, 1764, to February 2nd, 1770, 6*l.* 10*s.* This is described as 'my moiety of half part of a room formerly occupied by Mr. Robert Harrison, baker,<sup>13</sup> as a bake house.'

On the outer cover is a financial statement for October, 1766, as follows:

	l.	s.	d.		l.	s.	d.
Mr. H. Airey's Debt	0	4	2				
Sir Matthew White Ridley's Debt	0	2	3				
Mr. (or Mrs.) T. Waters' Debt	0	1	6				
					0	7	11
2 Assemblies, Messrs. Collingwood and hosts					0	6	0
Gloves					0	11	11
Tea					1	6	6
Wine and Negus					0	13	11½
2 Packs of Cards					0	3	0
Money over-run					0	1	6
					3	10	9½
Mrs. Pool's Sub.	1	1	0				
25 Assemblies at 3 <i>s.</i>	3	18	0				
					4	19	0
					8	9	9½

'Half is 4*l.* 4*s.* 10*d.*'

A still later entry, dated 1769, records that 'Andrew Kennedy has agreed this 20th day of July, 1769, for the room where Jane Young has, at 1*l.* 10*s.* Half to E. F. and half to W. R., and a Quarter's warning of each side to quitt, he to pay to share of Window Cess and Church Cess. Earnest to E. F., 3*d.*; do. to W. R., 3*d.* My room, 20 July, 1769. N.B., A wife and 2 barns.'

There are two doggerel verses in this book on a subject of the most remote antiquity, which, however, cannot be re-produced here. It is to be hoped they escaped the searching eye of Mrs., or Miss, Elizabeth Pickering.

So ends the fragmentary record of gay and festive gatherings which enlivened the good old town of Newcastle in those 'happy' days 'When George the Third was King.'

<sup>13</sup> In the Newcastle Directory for 1778, Harrison and Son are bakers in the Side.