

# GOODWOOD HOUSE

2015



*Dancing into Battle:  
The Duchess of Richmond's Ball  
15th June 1815*



The Duchess of Richmond's Ball by Robert Hillingford, 1870s.

## DANCING INTO BATTLE: THE DUCHESS OF RICHMOND'S BALL

On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1815, the Duchess of Richmond hosted a ball at her home in Brussels. The arrival of a messenger half-way through set in train a sequence of events that would culminate in the Battle of Waterloo three days later, thus making the ball arguably the most famous in history. This exhibition celebrates the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ball.

Like many English aristocrats, the fourth Duke and Duchess of Richmond were living in Brussels owing to straitened circumstances. Their house became a hub of social activity filled with family and friends, including their own thirteen children. The Duchess invited the cream of Belgian and Dutch society, British civilians, diplomats and army officers to her ball. The Duke of Wellington, a great friend of the family, and the Prince of Orange were among the guests, all of whom appear in her guest list which is one of the treasures of the Goodwood collection.

When Napoleon escaped from exile he quickly built up an army and the Dutch, Belgian, Austrian, German and English forces gathered together to oppose him. The message that was delivered to Wellington in the middle of the ball reported that Napoleon had crossed the border into Belgium. Examining a map with the Duke of Richmond, Wellington declared, 'Napoleon has humbugged me, by God, he has gained twenty-four hours march on me'. When Richmond asked what he intended to do, he replied that he had told the army to concentrate at Quatre-Bras, but that he would not stop Napoleon there, and pointing to the map placed his thumbnail on Waterloo declaring, 'I must fight him here'.

That night many of the guests left the ball straight for the holding battle of Quatre-Bras, followed two days later by the battle of Waterloo. Heart-wrenching scenes took place in the early hours of the morning as soldiers said goodbye to their loved ones, some never to see them again. The ball was immortalised by Lord Byron in his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818) and William Thackeray in his novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848).



The Prince of Orange (later William II, King of Holland) by John Singleton Copley (Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 2015/Bridgeman Images).

## THE BACKGROUND

In 1815, the British people were finally able to breathe again having lived under the threat of a French invasion for just over twenty years. The 1802 Peace of Amiens was short-lived and it was only when Napoleon was exiled to Elba that people were able to travel freely again.

Together with the Low Countries, Belgium had been occupied for twenty years by France under Napoleon's rule. Brussels, a largely Catholic city, was freed from French power by the Allies on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1814. On 11<sup>th</sup> April Napoleon abdicated and at the Treaty of Paris the whole area was formed into a new state known as the Netherlands. To maintain stability, the British left an army contingent in the former Austrian Netherlands, commanded by the Hereditary Prince of Orange. The Duke of Wellington was the Commander-in-Chief of the whole Anglo-Netherlands Army and following the Congress of Vienna the Hereditary Prince's father, the Sovereign Prince of Orange, became King of the Netherlands.



Lady Caroline Capel holding her daughter Harriet by John Hoppner (National Trust Images).

## LIVING IN BRUSSELS

The cost of living in Brussels was much less expensive than it was in Britain, where overseas trade restrictions had inflated prices. It was therefore seen as an attractive alternative for English people wishing to save money, particularly upper class families who could maintain a standard of living that was beyond their reach in Britain. One such family was the Capels, an aristocratic English family who had fallen on hard times owing to the Hon. John Capel's weakness for the 'Green Table' (gambling). Capel was keen to find somewhere abroad where they could live 'on an economical plan'. His wife, Lady Caroline, sister of the second Earl of Uxbridge who was to play such a crucial role in the Battle of Waterloo, wrote to her mother soon after they arrived: 'You get the most beautiful Silk & Satin Shoes here for 4s 6d a pair & walking shoes for 3s 6d – Gloves, Silks, Ribbons, as cheap...'

Among the other English families living in Brussels was the Greville family. According to Lady Caroline Capel, Charles Greville and his wife Lady Charlotte 'fell so in love with the house & the place that they have taken the only remaining tolerable one to be had near the Park'. Caroline continues '... In short we are likely to have too many English, I mean in point of society, unless you could select just what you liked & leave out the rest...' The arrival of the Prince of Orange added to the sense of gaiety, much to the excitement of Caroline's teenage daughter, Georgiana: 'I waltzed a good deal with the Young Prince ... I danced without cessation for three nights; but they were not like London Balls for these begin at 8 and end at one O'Clock'.

The endless round of balls and dinners kept everyone amused in the evenings, while picnics, horseracing and hunting were among the entertainments during the day. Georgiana described a Fête Champêtre she attended in the Forêt de Soigny, given by Lord Lynedock for the Prince of Orange and the English Colony: 'It was really delightful, the Party was very large and agreeable, the Day lovely and the Scenery Beautiful. Tents were pitched on the side of the Forest under some large Trees on an Eminence looking upon a piece of Water. The Band of the 52<sup>nd</sup> played during Breakfast, and Horn Music was placed at a distance which vibrated thro' the Forest. I never saw a more animated scene or a more Motley Group, consisting of Ladies, brilliant Uniforms of various Colors, Hussars attendant upon the General officers, Peasants and 'Sprigs of gentility' from the Village of Soigny'.

The presence of an English garrison formed another attraction in Brussels, particularly for any matchmaking mothers anxious to marry their daughters off to a string of eligible officers ripe for the picking.

## THE PRINCE OF ORANGE

At the heart of the Brussels social scene was the dashing and charming Hereditary Prince of Orange, nicknamed 'Slender Billy'. The Prince was a great Anglophile having been educated at Oxford University and having served in the British Army. In 1811, he became ADC to the Duke of Wellington and took part in several campaigns of the Peninsular War. The Capels adored him, especially their teenage daughters; Maria described him as a 'tame cat' and Georgiana exclaimed: 'We have been very gay lately since the arrival of the Prince of Orange who is extremely good natured to us ... he intends to be very merry & to have Balls and Breakfasts without end'. The Prince had to make a conscious effort to court the locals, as Georgiana snobbishly put it, 'he mixes the English and Foreigners, and policy not preference induces him to dance with the Belgians oftener than the English'.



Charles, 4th Duke of Richmond *attributed to Joseph Wilton.*



Charlotte, 4th Duchess of Richmond *by Joseph Nollekens, 1812.*

## THE RICHMONDS IN BRUSSELS

It was into this social whirl that the Duke and Duchess of Richmond arrived in the autumn of 1814. Like their friends the Capels, the Duke of Richmond was bringing his family ‘for a year on an Economical Plan’. The Duke took an advance party with his two eldest daughters, Mary and Sarah, leaving the Duchess to bring the rest of the family. The latter comprised seventeen people which included Spencer Madan, a young gentleman who had just been employed as tutor to the younger boys: Frederick (aged 13), Sussex (aged 12) and Arthur (aged 8). Madan, the son of a clergyman, was a sensitive, bright and earnest young man of sound judgement. Well-connected, he was also an old school contemporary of the eldest son, the Earl of March, at Westminster. However, nothing could have prepared him for the wild behaviour of his charges and the demanding character of his mistress. His letters to his family reveal the constant social dilemmas he was faced with on a daily basis, often arising from the Duchess’s whims.



Charlotte, 4th Duchess of Richmond, *engraved by Mackenzie.*

Travel in those days was very slow, especially when crossing the sea. It took the Duchess’s party two days to reach Dover from London where they then had to wait another five days before crossing the English Channel. They made their journey to Boulogne in a Royal Navy sloop, HMS Redpole, leaving at noon and arriving at 8 pm. As the tide was out, everyone had to walk a mile and a half up the beach to an inn where they stayed the night in cramped conditions. The party then made their way to Calais to pick up their carriages before travelling via Dunkirk and Bruges to Brussels, arriving on 14<sup>th</sup> October, sixteen days after leaving London.



Spencer Madan (*Private Collection*).



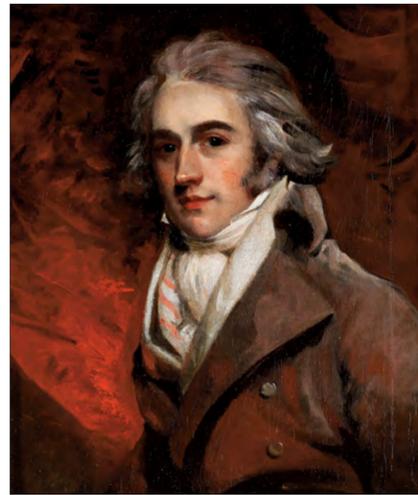
Charles Lennox, later 4th Duke of Richmond, playing cricket as a boy, *said to have been painted by his nurse.*

## SPORT

Once the Richmonds were settled in Brussels, the Duke indulged in his passions for horseracing, cricket and hunting. He was a steward of the Brussels races where, according to Madan, ‘the horses being for the most part chargers, and the riders gentlemen of the Guards’. One of the Duke’s sons, William, a young officer in the army, had a serious riding accident in a race at Enghien the following year where he ‘was taken up for dead but has experienced a most wonderful recovery’, as Madan reported. The Duke excelled at cricket – again Madan tells us: ‘The family are at present gone to Enghien to a cricket match amongst the gentlemen of the guards, in which the Duke takes a part. You have of course heard of his fame as a cricketer; he was, I believe, considered one of the two best in England, the other is Ld. F. Beauclerc’. In December, 1814, Maria Capel, one of Caroline’s teenage daughters, wrote to her grandmother, ‘... on Saturday next there is a Grand Wolf Hunting to take place in the Forest of Ardennes about 50 Miles from here. It is to last a fortnight – Papa & The Duke of Richmond are Prime Movers &, as it carries them & The Cream of our Society off, we think it a great Bore’.



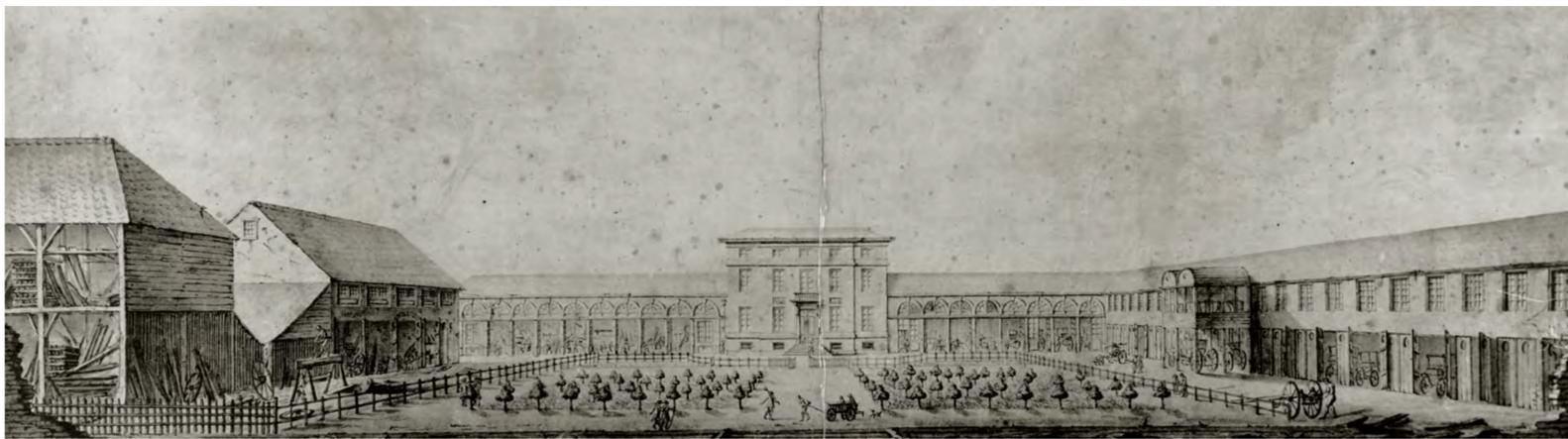
Lady Charlotte Greville by Sir Thomas Lawrence.



Charles Greville by John Hoppner.

## ENTERTAINMENT

The Duchess, meanwhile, threw herself into the social scene mixing in the very best society. In November 1814, Madan wrote to his father, ‘A great ball was given here about ten days ago under the patronage of the Dss of Richmond and Lady C. Greville on the part of the English, and the Dss de Beaufort and Marquise D’Asche on the part of the foreigners’. A month later, he wrote of the ‘constant round of Balls, Assemblies, and Parties of various descriptions, so that not a single night passes without some engagement at home or abroad’. The Capels were amongst the Richmond’s most intimate friends in Brussels, Caroline writing to her mother, ‘We have seen a great deal of the Richmonds, the Duchess has taken very much to us but I do not think it will last as she is, you know, a difficult person to deal with and withal a dreadful mischief maker...’.



The house rented by the Duke and Duchess of Richmond in Brussels (Archives of the City of Brussels, ref: FI. T-1). The ball took place in the carriage house to the right.

## THE RICHMONDS’ HOUSE IN BRUSSELS

*‘The Duke of Richmond (has) a delightfull House & Gardens in the Lower part of the Town,  
& delightfull it ought to be, to at all compensate for the disadvantage of the situation’.*

(Lady Caroline Capel, September 1814).

When the Duke and Duchess of Richmond moved to Brussels they rented a large red-brick house in the Rue de la Blanchisserie. The street had been named thus because a laundry business had been established there in the seventeenth century. Wellington referred jokingly to it as ‘The Wash House’. Although it was in an unfashionable part of the town, it did mean that the Richmonds had plenty of room for their children, together with a large garden, ancillary buildings and stabling for their horses. To the southern boundary of the property was the old city wall or ramparts. The house had only been built twenty years earlier by a coachbuilder, so the smart three-storey residence was flanked by two barn-like wings that had been used for the coach-building business. The wing that had been used as a showroom was converted into a school and playroom for the younger children, as recalled by Lady Georgiana Lennox: ‘My sisters used the room as a schoolroom, and we used to play battledore and shuttlecock there on a wet day.’ It was in this wing that the Duchess of Richmond held her famous ball.

## THE HOSTS



Charlotte, 4th Duchess of Richmond  
*after Richard Cosway.*



Charles, 4th Duke of Richmond *by*  
*John Hoppner.*

### THE FOURTH DUKE OF RICHMOND (1764-1819)

**B**orn Charles Lennox, the fourth duke only came into the titles in 1806 on the death of his uncle, the third Duke of Richmond. He had had an inauspicious start to life as his mother had given birth to him in a barn while his parents were on a fishing trip in Scotland. He was brought up at Stoke, not far from Goodwood and joined the army when he was twenty-one. His rash character got him into trouble on two occasions when he ended up fighting a duel, one of which was with the Duke of York.

Lennox advanced through the ranks, serving in the West Indies and the Peninsular wars before becoming a Lieutenant-General in 1805. Unfortunately, on inheriting the dukedom, he also inherited his uncle's considerable debts (£180,000) and the two new wings his uncle had started to build at Goodwood were incomplete. The offer to go overseas to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant was therefore an attractive proposition, enabling him to escape some of his creditors. The family remained in Ireland from 1807 to 1813 and developed a close friendship with the young Colonel Arthur Wellesley, Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1807-1809.

On returning to England, the Duke and Duchess hosted the Allied Sovereigns for breakfast at Goodwood on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1814 following the Treaty of Paris and prior to the Congress of Vienna. However, the expense of living in England in a style suitable for someone of his rank and status, combined with the burden of a large family of thirteen children, necessitated going abroad again and so they upped sticks and moved to Brussels. Spencer Madan, the boy's tutor described the Duke as being 'a man of some talent, of sound understanding and judgement, and ... of the most polished manners and the strictest honour.' Madan's letters to his parents give us a vivid description of family life in the Richmond household where the Duke was always extremely affable to him, in contrast to the piques and rages of the Duchess. Madan, a devout Christian, was rather shocked that 'The Duke has allowed his boys to play at billiards, and as he himself is in the habit of playing on a Sunday, just as much as another day, I did not know how to forbid them, what they saw their father do.' Richmond also enjoyed burning the midnight oil and Caroline Capel describes how he 'continues his old system of smoking till 3 or 4 in the Morning & drinking Gin & Water'.

### THE DUCHESS OF RICHMOND (1768-1842)

**C**harlotte, Duchess of Richmond, was a force to be reckoned with. She was the daughter of the fourth Duke of Gordon and his formidable and beautiful wife, Jane, Duchess of Gordon. Brought up as the eldest of seven children, she had a very domineering character that blew hot and cold depending on her mood. When she was twenty-one, she married the young Charles Lennox in a secret ceremony at her family home, Gordon Castle, much to her mother's delight who was keen to marry her daughters well. Lennox had just been posted to Edinburgh as Colonel of a regiment, in the wake of his duel with the Duke of York.

Having ruled the roost in Dublin as the Lord Lieutenant's wife, Charlotte quickly became the leading hostess in Brussels. Poor Spencer Madan often took the brunt of her fierce temper, calling her 'one of the sourest most ill-tempered personages I ever came across in my life' and complaining of her 'haughty and disagreeable behaviour ... & her constant & ill judged interference with regard to the boys...' In reality, as the mother of fourteen children (one of whom had been killed in an accident at sea), she was probably stretched to her limit managing the household, her family and settling into an alien city with financial worries on top, not to mention her weakness for gambling.



Lord George Lennox *in the manner of John Linnell.*



Charles, Earl of March *in the manner of Richard.*

## THE RICHMONDS' CHILDREN

All thirteen of the Richmond's surviving children were in Brussels. The eldest three sons were in the army. Captain, the Earl of March - an 'excellent young man' according to Madan - had fought in the Peninsula with the 13<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons before becoming assistant military secretary and ADC to the Duke of Wellington (1810-1814). After acting as a volunteer in the storming party at the Siege of Ciudad Rodrigo, he exchanged into the 52<sup>nd</sup> Foot and was with them at the Battle of Orthez (27<sup>th</sup> February 1814) where he was hit by a bullet in his chest. The bullet remained in him for the rest of his life, 'from the Effects of which he has not recovered, but Faints at the least transition from heat to cold' as Maria Capel told her grandmother. March was then appointed extra ADC to the Hereditary Prince of Orange, his erstwhile fellow ADC from the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo. He had his own small house within the grounds of his parents' one. Lieutenant Lord George Lennox, the second son, was in the 9<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons and had been an ADC to Wellington for some time. His younger brother, Lieutenant Lord William Pitt Lennox, had been an ADC to Wellington at the Congress of Vienna, and rode back from there to Brussels with him. However, Wellington decided on a policy of only having Peninsula War veterans, so William was moved to be ADC to Major General Peregrine Maitland, who would turn out to be his future brother-in-law when he eloped with his sister Sarah.

The younger boys, Lords Frederick, Sussex and Arthur, were under the tutelage of Spencer Madan and were described by their mother as 'the most headstrong untoward little pickles she ever knew'. Certainly they tested Madan's patience to the max.

The seven daughters were named Mary, Sarah, Georgiana, Jane, Louisa, Charlotte and Sophia and ranged in age from 23 to just 5. Madan said of the four eldest daughters, '... [they] are the most good-humoured unaffected girls I ever met with, exceedingly highbred but without an atom of pride'.



Lord Frederick Lennox *by Thomas Overton, 1829.*



Lady Sarah Lennox *in the style of Peticolas*

# NAPOLEON ESCAPES

‘... in a State of Anxiety at the News of the Tyger having broke loose...’  
(Lady Caroline Capel, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1815)

On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1815, Napoleon slipped between the hands of his captors and escaped from the island of Elba with a small force of 600 men, landing on the mainland on 1<sup>st</sup> March. Troops sent to intercept him threw down their arms and joined the cause, so that by 20<sup>th</sup> March when Napoleon entered Paris, he had an army. Meanwhile the armies of Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia were mobilising a combined force of 150,000 men on France’s eastern borders, with the Duke of Wellington as commander of the Anglo-Netherlands army. Some of the foreigners in Brussels fled as soon as there was a whiff of any danger, but the Richmonds, Grevilles and Capels remained. Wellington entered Brussels on 4<sup>th</sup> April (with Lieutenant Lord William Lennox as ADC) followed six days later by the new King (formerly the Sovereign Prince of Orange) of the Netherlands. Wellington immediately set about preparing the army to meet his formidable opponent, particularly calling for those who had served with him in the Peninsular.



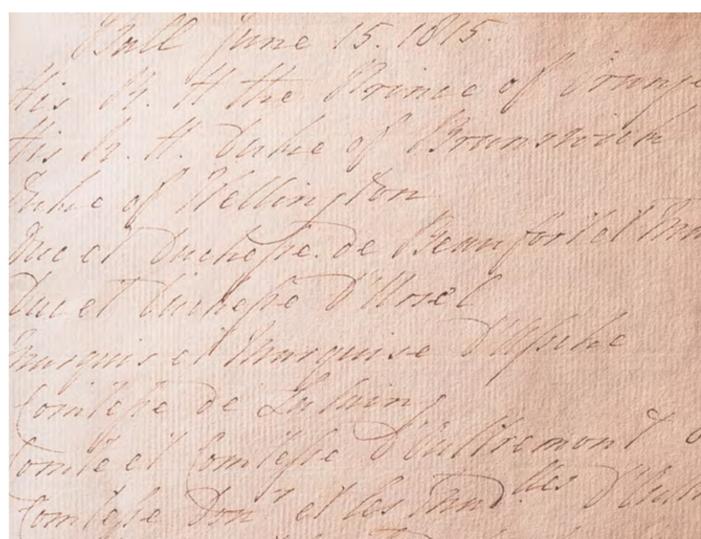
Napoleon Crossing the Alps by Jacques Louis David (Musée National du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France / Bridgeman Images).



The Duke of Wellington by George Dawe.

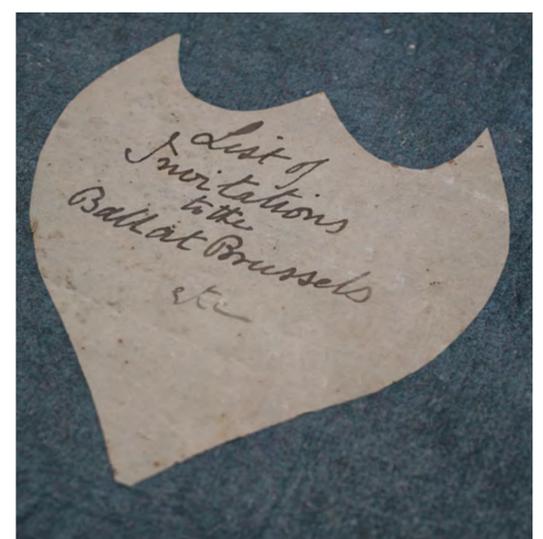
Nobody quite knew what Napoleon intended, although the likelihood was that either he would strike towards Brussels or that the allied armies would invade France. Despite the rumours and panic which were rife in Brussels, the parties continued unabated. Lady Caroline Capel wrote, ‘Balls are going on here as if we had had none for a year’. Wellington gave a ball on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, the British Ambassador on 5<sup>th</sup> June and Wellington again on 7<sup>th</sup> June with another one planned for 21<sup>st</sup> June, the anniversary of his Peninsular victory at Vittoria. He did not escape Caroline’s criticism: ‘The Duke of W- has not improved the Morality of our Society, as he has given several things & makes a point of asking all the Ladies of Loose Character’. Despite his flirtations, Wellington was playing his cards close to his chest with regards to military matters. Caroline Capel again: ‘... Nobody can guess Lord Wellington’s intentions, & I dare say Nobody will know he is going till he is actually gone. In the meantime, he amuses himself with Humbugging [sic] the Ladies, particularly the Duchess of Richmond’.

On 12<sup>th</sup> June, Napoleon left Paris, heading north east. The Duchess of Richmond had planned to give a ball on 15<sup>th</sup> June, but she was understandably unsure whether it could take place, so she said to Wellington: ‘Duke, I do not wish to pry into your secrets, nor do I ask what your intentions may be; I wish to give a ball, and all I ask is – May I give my ball? If you say, Duchess, don’t give your ball, it is quite sufficient – I ask no reasons’. Wellington replied: ‘Duchess, you may give your Ball with the greatest safety without fear of interruption’.



Detail of the beginning of the guest list written by the Duchess of Richmond.

Duly sanctioned by Wellington, invitations were sent out; some were distributed by the Duchess’s friend Captain Verner to various cavalry officers; and others were delivered by the British Embassy. Sir Charles Stuart, the British Minister in Brussels, also lent her his plate [silver] and put his servants at her disposal for the ball.



Cover of the book containing the guest list for the Duchess of Richmond’s Ball.



The Duchess of Richmond's Ball by Robert Hillingford, 1870s. The painting was done many years after the ball so is not entirely accurate. It depicts the moment when Lieutenant Webster arrives with a message for the Duke of Wellington, who is depicted standing next to the Duke of Brunswick (in black) and General Allava. The Prince of Orange reclines on the ottoman and the Duke and Duchess of Richmond can be faintly made out in the room beyond (the Duke's Garter star is just visible).

## THURSDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1815

On the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> June, Wellington had reports of French movement but carried on with routine work. Everyone expected that nothing would happen until early July when the combined Allied armies would advance into France. In the afternoon, people walked in the Park where, according to Miss Charlotte Waldie, newly arrived in Brussels, it was, 'crowded with officers, in every variety of military uniform, with elegant women, and with lively parties and gay groups of British and Belgic people, loitering, walking, talking, and sitting under the trees! There could not be a more animated, a more holiday scene; everything looked gay and festive, and everything spoke of hope, confidence and busy expectation'.

Dinner parties were held from the usual hour of 3-5 pm. The Prince of Orange dined with the Duke of Wellington. Before 5 pm, Wellington received news that Napoleon was on the move and walked to the Park to give further orders. Expecting to march the following morning, he announced that he would go to the ball and hoped other officers would do the same. Then, hearing that the French had attacked Prussian outposts and had seized Charleroi, he ordered the troops to assemble at their headquarters.

By late afternoon, gunfire could be heard in the city causing concern among the foreigners, some of whom were already making preparations to flee.

## THE BALL

The clatter of hooves on cobbles could be heard from 10 pm as guests started to arrive for the ball at the Richmond's residence in the Rue de la Blanchisserie. The Richmond family were all present, including the boys' tutor Spencer Madan. As the ball was a private party, hosted by the Duchess of Richmond, the two hundred or so guests were made up of her friends, relations and acquaintances, about half of whom were army officers. Other guests were British civilians (such as the Grevilles and John Capel accompanied by two of his daughters, Georgiana and Maria), Belgian and Dutch aristocrats, individuals of various nationalities and diplomats. Senior officers included the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Brunswick and the Earl of Uxbridge (commander of the Anglo-Netherlands cavalry); while relations included the Duke's nephews, Lord Aspley and his brother the Hon. Seymour Bathurst, and the Duchess's cousins, Colonels John and Alexander Woodford. Also present were Lieutenant Charles FitzRoy and Major General Peregrine Maitland, both of whom were later to marry two of the Richmond's daughters.

Everyone eagerly anticipated the arrival of the Duke of Wellington, who unbeknown to most of the guests was busy making preparations for action the following day. Away from the glamour of the ball, bugles and drums began to sound the 'assembly' in Brussels at about 10.30 pm. Accompanied by Müffling, the Prussian liaison officer, Wellington arrived very late at the ball. Lady Georgiana Lennox immediately rushed up to him to ask him whether the rumours of the French advance were correct. His reply was blunt: 'Yes, they are true; we are off tomorrow'. He put on a brave face and tried to appear calm and collected but it was noticed that he was discreetly issuing orders to officers.



*Print depicting the waltz taken from a dancing-master's manual, circa 1815. (Courtesy of David Miller).*

## DANCING

After supper, there was a spirited display of Highland dancing by four sergeants from the 92<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot (later known as the Gordon Highlanders); a regiment that was particularly close to the Duchess's heart as it had been raised by her parents and present in Dublin when her husband was Lord Lieutenant. The sergeants were accompanied by the legendary Pipe-Major Alexander Cameron and they treated their audience to a Highland reel and a sword dance, an individual dance over two crossed swords. The latter was an ancient Scottish dance and one of the origins of the Highland reels which had been developed in the eighteenth century. As the daughter of the Chief of Clan Gordon, it was highly appropriate that the Duchess's ball should have a Scottish flavour. Her daughter Lady Louisa recalled: 'I well remember the Gordon Highlanders dancing reels at the ball; my mother thought it would interest the foreigners to see them, which it did ... there was quite a crowd to look at the

Scottish dancers'. Apart from the Highland dancing, there was almost certainly waltzing. Being cut off from the continent for so long, English dancing had remained rooted in the eighteenth century. However, across the Channel fashions had moved on and the waltz, which had first become fashionable in Austria, was all the rage. At first, the Duke of Richmond frowned on it - as Maria Capel told her grandmother - and would 'not let His daughters Waltz. But as hardly anything else is danced here he must soon give up the Point'. By the time of his wife's ball, we can only assume that he had relented and his daughters were allowed to waltz (whereby the man actually held the woman in his arms).



*'Ball Dress'. Fashion plate from Ackermann's Repository of Arts, April, 1812 (Volume VII) (Philadelphia Museum of Art).*



*'Paris Dress'. Fashion plate from Ladies' Magazine, December, 1801 (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London).*



*'Evening Full Dress'. Fashion plate from Ackermann's Repository of Arts, April, 1812 (Volume VII) (Philadelphia Museum of Art).*

## DRESS AND FASHION

The Duchess of Richmond's Ball was undoubtedly a glamorous occasion heightened by the presence of the military officers in their different coloured uniforms. It was the height of the 'Romantic' period in dress where female sensibility and male masculinity were emphasised through their clothes. Ladies would have worn Empire-line dresses made from silk or satin with a low décolleté, square neckline and small, neat sleeves. The overall simplicity of the dress was ornamented with pretty detailing; an eastern, exotic feel was sometimes adopted with Etruscan or Egyptian decoration. Gloves and shawls were worn and hair was worn up in loose-fitting buns inspired by ancient Greece. Younger girls and children would have been dressed by their mamas in muslin with silk sashes. The years of the Napoleonic wars had introduced a military swagger to male civilian dress, so even those not in uniform may have had a military air about them. For evening dress, gentlemen would have worn white waistcoats over crisp linen shirts with an elegantly-tied neck cloth. Over the top, they would have worn a long-tailed coat with navy blue being the most popular colour choice for the evening. Black or pale-coloured satin knee breeches were worn with white stockings by both civilians and officers. Shoes were black and decorated with silver or gold buckles or a ribbon to hold them in place.

The Prince of Orange would have worn his British Army General's scarlet jacket with blue facings, while the Duke of Brunswick was very striking in his jet-black uniform.



*The Duchess of Richmond's fan, used by her at the ball.*



*Lady's dress reputedly worn at the Duchess of Richmond's Ball (Saffron Walden Museum).*



*The uniform of Lieutenant Claude Alexander, Adjutant, 92nd Foot (Gordon Highlanders), by family tradition worn at the Duchess of Richmond's Ball (National Museum of Scotland).*



*Two striped woven silk gauze dresses reputedly worn by the Misses Perceval at the Duchess of Richmond's Ball (Fashion Museum, Bath and North East Somerset Council in association with National Army Museum / Waterloo 200).*



*The Duchess of Richmond's lace shawl, by repute used by her at the ball.*



The Intelligence of the Battle of Ligny by William Heath (The Stapleton Collection / Bridgeman Images). This depicts the moment that Lieutenant Webster delivers the message to the Duke of Wellington.

## A MESSENGER ARRIVES

Just as the guests were finishing their supper, Lieutenant Henry Webster arrived, spattered with mud and bearing an important message. Webster, one of the Prince of Orange's ADCs, had just galloped the ten miles from Braine-le-Comte. The gate porter asked him to wait for five minutes while the guests rose from supper, sensibly realising that the appearance of this young officer would cause panic among the ladies. Out of breath and peeping through the door, Webster could see the Duchess of Richmond on the Prince of Orange's arm and Lady Charlotte Greville on the Duke of Wellington's as they made their way back to the ballroom. Dashing into the room, he handed the despatch to the Prince who passed it unopened to Wellington who proceeded to slip it into his coat pocket. Webster then waited outside in the hall until Wellington had read the message. In a low voice, Wellington then asked Webster to summon the Prince's carriage for him to return to his headquarters. Very quickly, the news spread that the French were advancing and the officers gradually started to slip away. The band halted mid-bar at the sudden exodus from the dance floor. Madan wrote, 'A sad gloom overspread the entertainment, and a trying scene of leave-taking followed'.



Before Waterloo by Henry Nelson O'Neil (Private Collection © Mallett Gallery, London / Bridgeman Images). This depicts tearful farewells as officers leave the Duchess of Richmond's ball.

The Duke of Brunswick assured Lady Georgiana Lennox that his Brunswickers would be sure to distinguish themselves, as she had done them the honour of accompanying Wellington to their review several weeks earlier. She said a tender farewell to the handsome Lord Hay, a young ensign, who surprised her by his excitement at the impending action. Her sister Lady Jane recollected in later years:

*'Well I remember the rising from that supper-table, and all that followed immediately after it. I know I was in a state of wild delight; the scene itself was so stirring, and the company so brilliant, I recollect, on reaching the ballroom after supper, I was scanning over my tablets [dance cards], which were filled from top to bottom with the names of the partners to whom I was engaged; when, on raising my eyes, I became aware of a great preponderance of ladies in the room. White muslins and tarlatans abounded; but the gallant uniforms had sensibly diminished.'*

Meanwhile, the Duchess of Richmond stood at the door imploring the officers to 'wait one little hour more' and 'not spoil her ball' while Wellington asked her husband for a map. Richmond took him aside into his dressing room and spread out a map on the bed, assisted by his young daughter, Lady Louisa. Studying it, Wellington snorted, 'Napoleon has humbugged me by God, he has gained twenty-four hours march on me'. Asked by Richmond what he intended to do, he replied, 'I have ordered the army to concentrate at Quatre-Bras, but we shall not stop him there, and, if so, I must fight him here', placing his thumbnail on Waterloo. Then with a quick 'adieu' he left the house by a side door.

The other guests left just after 2 am. and made their way home through streets alive with soldiers who were given orders to depart at about 4 am. Lady De Lancey stood at her window, watching them march through the city gate '...and saw the whole army go out. Regiment after regiment passed through and melted away in the mist of the morning'.



Summoned to Waterloo, Brussels, Dawn of June 16th, 1815 by Robert Hillingford, 1898. The Gordon Highlanders (92nd Foot) can be seen marching out of the city on the right heading for Quatre Bras (Courtesy of the Council of the National Army Museum, London).

## THE BATTLE OF QUATRE BRAS – 16<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1815

The following day saw fierce fighting at Quatre Bras, an important crossroads linking communications from Nivelles and Brussels with those from Blücher's position at Ligny. From his stand at Charleroi, Napoleon had ordered Marshal Ney to take possession of Quatre Bras. However, the overall result of the day was indeterminate with heavy casualties on both sides. Among those killed were three guests from the ball: the Duke of Brunswick; Lord Hay; and Colonel Cameron, commander of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Foot.

## SATURDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1815

As Wellington established his position at Mont St. Jean, just south of the village of Waterloo, the wounded arrived in Brussels. Madan wrote to his father: 'On Saturday morning the attention of us and the Bruxellois was taken up with the wounded who arrived by hundreds. I never saw so dismal a sight. Poor fellows some without an arm, some without a leg, covered with blood and dust, worn with fatigue and hunger, some fainting, other raving with pain, were brought crowded upon carts and wagons under a burning sun'.



The Battle of Waterloo by George Jones (National Museum Wales / Bridgeman Images). The Duke of Wellington can be seen in the centre of the action silhouetted against a cloud of smoke.

## THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO – 18<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1815

On Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> June, Wellington's aim was to keep Napoleon at bay until the arrival of the Prussians. That morning back in Brussels, the Duke of Richmond gave orders that his family should be ready to depart at quarter of an hour's notice and rode out to the battlefield to ask the Duke of Wellington's opinion on whether to leave the city. At two o'clock, the inhabitants of Brussels heard the cannonading begin, as described by Madan: 'The doubt and anxiety visible in every countenance as we walked upon the ramparts listening to each coup de cannon was extreme, and at home the poor D'ss harassed by the thoughts of the Duke being absent, of her 10 children with her, and her 3 sons in the action was a pitiable object'.

The Duke of Richmond, ever the man of action, insisted on watching the battle, riding round with his son Lord William who was still recovering from his riding accident. The historian William Siborne recounts: 'Just as the Enniskillings were on the point of advancing across the Wavre road to charge, an individual in plain clothes on their left called out, "Now's your time!" This was the late Duke of Richmond ...' The Duke's blood must have been running very high as two of his sons were involved in the fighting: the Earl of March was ADC to the Prince of Orange and Lord George was ADC to the Duke of Wellington. After the Prince of Orange was wounded, March became an extra ADC to Wellington.

By teatime, Richmond felt able to leave the battlefield, as Madan wrote: 'At 4 the Duke came home, and reported that all looked favourable, but we must still be ready to start. About seven just as we were sitting [down] to dinner came a messenger to say that Wellington had gained his battle, and that the French were retiring. Wounded officers came in at intervals but knowing nothing. About ten arrived 8,000 prisoners with 2 eagles and stands of colours and soon after a note from an ADC of the Duke of Wellington to say that the victory had been complete.'



Henry Paget, 2nd Earl of Uxbridge (later 1st Marquess of Anglesey) by Frank Wilkin. Lord Uxbridge was the father of the 5th Duchess of Richmond.



Charles, Earl of March, in the manner of Rochard, and his future wife, Lady Caroline Paget, by Christina Robinson, flanking a copy of a letter written by her father, Lord Uxbridge, to her stepmother, Charlotte ('Cha'), about the loss of his leg at Waterloo. Lady Caroline's engagement ring is also shown.

## THE AFTERMATH

The devastation of the battle was felt by everyone, none more so than by the inhabitants of Brussels who tended the thousands of wounded. The Allied losses were about 22,000 killed and wounded, and the French about 37,000. Of those guests that had attended the Duchess of Richmond's ball, eight were killed at Waterloo and one died later of wounds. Thirty-five of the guests were wounded.

The following day, the Duke of Richmond, Lord March and Lord George drove round the battlefield in their coach. Peter Soar, the Duke's coachman, said it presented such a sight as he hoped never again to witness. He picked up a large number of trophies and curiosities and took in a forlorn terrier lying upon the body of its master. On the Tuesday, Lord William rode over the battlefield with his father and even though the wounded had been removed, he was appalled by the sight: 'there lay heaped together dead men and horses...' Lord Uxbridge's son, who had rushed out to Brussels to tend his father after he had lost his leg, wrote to his sister, Caroline (later the 5<sup>th</sup> Duchess of Richmond): 'I rode over the field of Battle the other day, and it is the most horrid sight possible. ... in short the Battle was something that no one ever saw before, everyone is either killed or wounded, and instead of saying who is killed or wounded, you must say who has escaped' (24<sup>th</sup> June 1815).

Nearly seven weeks after the battle, the Duke of Richmond took the Capel daughters to see the battlefield, including the farm where their uncle, Lord Uxbridge, had had his leg amputated. Georgiana reported back to her grandmother, 'from the house we went into her [the owner's] pretty neat little garden in the *centre* of which his leg is interred, it was overgrown *with weeds, which we cleared away*'.



Objects gathered from the field of Waterloo, including musket balls and French eagles, and a baton made from the Duke of Wellington's famous tree.



*Napoleon's campaign chair, probably by the Jacob brothers, given to the Duke of Richmond by the Duke of Wellington.*



*Champs de Mai banner. Banners representing the different departments of France were awarded by Napoleon to his armies when they rallied before him on the Champ de Mars in Paris in May 1814.*



*Silver plate used by Napoleon on the morning of the battle of Waterloo.*

## TROPHIES OF WAR

**A**s the English basked in the glory of victory, the Richmond's sang-froid in the face of the enemy advancing did not go unrewarded. For their loyalty of staying in Brussels and keeping going as if nothing was happening, Wellington presented them with Napoleon's campaign chair, which was carried on all his campaigns. He also gave them a 'Champ de Mai' banner which had been given to him by Louis XVIII. The Duchess was presented with Napoleon's silver breakfast plate last used at the Ferme de Caillou on the morning of the battle. Two years later, the grateful people of Brussels presented her with a china tea and coffee service painted with views of all the main battle sites and uniforms of the different soldiers



*Paris china depicting scenes and soldiers from Waterloo and views of Goodwood, given to the Duchess of Richmond by the grateful people of Brussels, circa 1817.*

## THE LEGACY

The Duchess of Richmond's Ball has gone down in history as one of the greatest balls there has ever been. What started off as yet another party in the endless social whirl of Brussels life, abruptly took a change in direction and became the scene of heart-breaking goodbyes and was inextricably linked with the battle of Waterloo. In the nineteenth century, it was immortalised by Lord Byron in his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818):

*There was a sound of revelry by night,  
And Belgium's Capital had gathered then  
Her Beauty and her Chivalry—and bright  
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;  
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when  
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,  
Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again,  
And all went merry as a marriage bell;  
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!*

...

*Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro,  
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,  
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago  
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness;  
And there were sudden partings, such as press  
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs  
Which ne'er might be repeated; who could guess  
If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,  
Since upon night so sweet such awful morn could rise!*



The Black Brunswicker by Sir John Everett Millais, 1860 (Lady Lever Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool). This famous painting depicts the tender farewell between a young officer from the Black Brunswickers (a German volunteer corps) and his sweetheart, dressed in her ball gown having attended the Duchess of Richmond's ball. An engraving of David's painting of Napoleon can be seen on the wall behind.



The Waterloo Banquet, 1836 by John William Salter (Private Collection Photo © Philip Mould Ltd, London / Bridgeman Images). The painting, a preparatory study, depicts the annual dinner that took place at Apsley House, London, hosted by the Duke of Wellington for the principal officers who fought under him at Waterloo, including the 5th Duke of Richmond.

William Thackeray in his novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) wrote a marvellous evocation of the ball with his fictional characters; while in the twentieth century, several characters attend it in Georgette Heyer's 1937 novel *An Infamous Army*, and also in her novelisation of the life of Sir Harry Smith, first Baronet, *The Spanish Bride* (1940).

The ball was lavishly recreated for the film *Waterloo* (1970), directed by Sergei Bondarchuk and produced by Dino De Laurentiis. It starred Christopher Plummer as the Duke of Wellington and Virginia McKenna as the Duchess of Richmond.

More recently, Bernard Cornwell used the ball in *Sharpe's Waterloo* (1990), placing his character Richard Sharpe in the role of the ADC who brings the message to Wellington.

Each year, a charity ball is held by the British Ambassador in Brussels to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo and the Duchess of Richmond's Ball. In 2015 it is anticipated that many people will be holding events in commemoration of the original Duchess of Richmond's Ball.