

## The Fleming family's dance academy at Bath 1750-1800

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*For over fifty years two generations of the Fleming family were at the centre of dance activity in Georgian Bath. The musical skills of the Irishman Francis Fleming and the graceful steps of the Frenchwoman Anne Roland were brought together in the 1740s and were the basis of a partnership that produced Bath's longest standing dance school, plus a new generation of dance teachers in their daughters Anne Teresa and Catherine (Kitty), who continued the family partnership after the death of their mother in 1759 and father in 1778. Although the sisters' partnership was dissolved in the 1790s, Anna did not retire from teaching until 1805. For most of half a century the Flemings advertised their Balls and Benefits each year, kept premises in town for their schools, and often travelled to France to learn the latest steps. This paper reviews the Fleming family's activities in the second half of the eighteenth-century and that of the rival dance schools operating in Bath in this period.*

### **Introduction**

A notice in the *Bath Chronicle* for 31 July 1783 announced that 'Miss Fleming is returned from France & continues attending her academy in John St, Bath, twice a week as usual'.<sup>1</sup> The dance school is always called 'an academy' in the newspapers, and the Miss Fleming in question was Anne Teresa Fleming (1746-1823), daughter of the Irish violinist Francis Fleming (1715-1778) and the French dancer Anne Roland (d. 1759). John Street is the short street parallel to Milson Street that had been completed in the 1730s. This was a central and fashionable location for a dance school just off Queen's Square and the announcement was one Miss Fleming

made most years. It indicated the continuation of a family tradition of journeying to Paris to catch up on the latest dance developments in France during the summer months when Bath was out of season. Trevor Fawcett researched dance teaching in Bath in his 1987 *Bath Journal* article 'Dance and Teachers of Dance in Eighteenth Century Bath'.<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to him as a starting point for this article, and to Edward James for his work on Bath's eighteenth-century concert life.<sup>3</sup>

Anne Teresa had inherited the Fleming academy from her father in 1778. It had been developed from the dance teaching practice that her father and mother had started before 1750. Anne Teresa ran the academy for much of her life; first with her father, then together with her sister in the 1780s and 90s, but lastly in partnership with a Miss Mercier. It seems that the premises in John Street were already the family home when she ran the school with her father, and that Anne Teresa remained there until her death at 78.<sup>4</sup> An advertisement for 4 October 1770 has the following, 'Mr & Miss Fleming having lately been at Paris for the further improvement of their Pupils, beg leave to inform their Friends, and the Public, that they instruct those who please to favour them with their commands, in the Minuet, Cotillons, Allemand, etc, after the true modern French taste. Mr and Mrs Fleming wait upon Ladies at their own Lodgings; attend at Mrs Pulleine's boarding school in Trim Street, Rev Mr Hele's grammar school in Broad St Bath & likewise teach at their own house in John St near the Square'.<sup>5</sup> As well as informing the public that the Flemings were up to date on the latest French dances this last advertisement alludes

to their activities within the established girls' schools in Bath. This is something the daughters also inherited from their parents who spent a lot of time cultivating dance at Bath's many boarding schools for girls.

For over fifty years Bath's newspapers regularly advertised the activities of the Fleming's Academy. This was to attract new pupils, but also to announce the balls they regularly gave twice a year, once in December at the end of the Winter season, and then again in April at the end of the Spring season. For instance the *Bath Chronicle* for 18 December 1788 has the following, 'the Miss Fleming's Ball - it is requested that 1st row of seats be reserved for dancers only, 2nd & part 3rd rows for parents & relations of their pupils',<sup>6</sup> and for 7 January 1793 'The Misses Fleming's Winter Ball for their scholars will be on Sat 12 January 1793 at the Lower Assembly Rooms'.<sup>7</sup> With the opening of the surviving upper assembly rooms the older Wiltshire's Assembly Rooms had become known as the Lower Assembly Rooms. The April ball was traditionally held in the Upper Rooms. For example 'Miss Fleming's Ball for her scholars is fixed for 18 April at the Upper Assembly Rooms, Bath'<sup>8</sup> or the 'Spring Ball for scholars of the Misses Fleming will be held in the Upper Assembly Rooms on Wed 24 April at 6 o'clock.'<sup>9</sup> The cost was normally 5s and included tea.<sup>10</sup>

The Fleming balls could be large affairs and were often reviewed in the *Bath Chronicle* after the event, as in the case of the Spring ball of 1793, 'Ball given by the Misses Fleming at New Rooms Wednesday last was attended by 1,000 ladies & gentlemen. Last minuet danced as usual by Miss Fleming.'<sup>11</sup> Up to one hundred young ladies might dance at such an event according to a review of 26 April 1798, the 'Miss Fleming's Ball held Upper Rooms last Wed, after gap of 2 yrs. Upwards of 100 young ladies (her scholars) in elegant dresses executed various figure dances & minuets'.<sup>12</sup> An announcement for 25 December 1788 commented on the Miss Fleming's ball that had taken place on the Saturday before, 'attended by young ladies all emulous in the display of superior elegance &

ease. The last minuet is spoken of as being truly admirable for its uncommon dignity & grace'.<sup>13</sup> That the Flemings' ball was a serious event in the yearly calendar is attested by the presence of the Prince of Wales. A review for 11 April 1799 has 'the annual Ball of Miss Fleming presented a striking & beautiful spectacle at the Upper Rooms on Wed. night. The elegance & agility of the [dance] scholars was admired. Special dances composed for the occasion. HRH Prince of Wales attended.'<sup>14</sup>

### Francis Fleming and Anne Roland

Francis Fleming's early life and his humorous and bizarre adventures are well documented in his comical autobiography, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures, the Perils and Critical Escapes of Timothy Ginnadrake, that chequer'd Fortune*.<sup>15</sup> Born an Irish Protestant near Dublin, he had gravitated to Bath around 1731/2 (the first date he mentions in his book is 30 Oct 1732), and joined Nash's Pump Room Band, 'being remarkable for the fine and loud tone he brought out of his violin, which he retains to this day'.<sup>16</sup> He was quickly made leader much to the annoyance of those already in the band, and was the first conductor of the subscription concerts in Bath which he helped to set up. After many adventures with a certain Miss Fanny with whom he walked to London, he acknowledges that he had treated her rather badly, 'As Miss Fanny was an only child her parents could have given her a fortune sufficient to support her independently yet Tim's pride would not suffer him to even think of marrying a person (ever so agreeable) whom he knew had been illegally possessed by another.'<sup>17</sup> Yet they remain on good terms after she married, and he settles in Bath.

It is a measure of Fleming's character that when putting on a Benefit concert in Salisbury in the 1740s, he worked out 'a scheme to produce a good Benefit to a musical performance'. Realising that a fancy Italianised name was the key to developing an audience he advertised a concert for his benefit under the name of *Signior Turko Francisci Fleminiani*. After putting it about

in the papers 'Tim to his joy found his scheme had succeeded to a miracle; the room was greatly crowded 'others who were dying the week before, were brought in litters to hear this famous Italian'.<sup>18</sup>

After many adventures 'Tim being determined to enter into the matrimonial state, and hearing of the great fame of a certain French lady at Bath in the art of dancing, he resolved to pay his addresses to her'.<sup>19</sup> In fact it was Madame Rolland's sister who had been a stage dancer that Fleming had first thought he was pursuing. However Fleming was soon reconciled to the situation, 'Tim, in the present case, comforted himself with thinking, that what happened might be for the best; as his wife was as excellent in her *smooth* as the eldest sister was in her *high* dancing; being also eximiously inclined, indefatigable in her business, and her scholars proclaimed her a woman of the greatest merit in her art'.<sup>20</sup> They travelled back to Paris in 1752 visiting several towns, after which Grinnadrake's autobiography stops. However it is clear from the Bath newspaper that the life they developed together was built around music and dance. They had three daughters and both elder daughters could play the harpsichord and performed in public at a young age, Anne Teresa at 7 in 1753 and Kitty at 7 in 1756.<sup>21</sup>

Fleming and his wife not only started the dance academy but also built up a regular dance practice within the many boarding schools for girls in Bath. He says in his autobiography 'knowing his wife's art so well, and for the good of his Children, their improvement and Benefit',<sup>22</sup> he devoted his energy to establishing himself as Bath's leading dancing master. The desire to widen his teaching within the schools was no doubt the spur to Francis offering guitar tuition, as the violin was not deemed an acceptable accomplishment for girls, but the guitar was specifically targeted at a female clientele.<sup>23</sup> Mrs Fleming did perform 'display dances' at Fleming's annual benefit concerts, such as in 1747 when she performed a French Peasant dance.<sup>24</sup> In the 1740s she taught French as well as dancing. However by the mid 1750s

her health was failing and she died in 1759 at the Hotwells in Bristol of a lingering illness.<sup>25</sup> Francis was left with all the dance and music tuition on top of his normal duties of leading the town orchestra at the Pump Rooms and in the Assembly rooms. He seems to have recast himself as a dancing master, and this is what he claims as his 'study and business' in his autobiography.<sup>26</sup> In fact he makes it clear that playing for dancing was his real *métier*. By 1758 he had rivals in the dance teachers Daniel Lewis and Thomas de la Main. A more serious rival arrived in the form of Monsieur Deneuille in 1763 fresh from the theatres in Paris and London. Deneuille advertised teaching both French and English dances (including the Hornpipe). Deneuille travelled back to Paris in 1767 to pick up the latest innovations in dance – particularly the new Cotillons and allemandes.<sup>27</sup>

Anne Teresa was 21 in 1768 and had effectively taken over her mother's role as her father's professional assistant and partner. As much for her longevity as her strong character she became an established Bath character and fixture, as her father had done before. Like her mother, she too began the tradition of visiting Paris during the Summer months – returning in early August to reopen her teaching activities. In Paris she no-doubt studied with Monsieur Land, maître de l'Opera, whose disciple she claimed to be.<sup>28</sup>

The years leading up to the opening of the New Assembly Rooms in 1771 were difficult for Francis Fleming. The arrival of Guiseppe Passerini and his wife Christina, who together dominated the town's music in the years 1753-8, brought in an international star for a few years, one who easily overshadowed Fleming. More serious was the attempt by Thomas Linley Senior and David Richards to supplant him as the town's leading violinist in 1767. This may well have had much to do with the fact that he was doubling as a dancing master – and therefore demeaning the other town musicians who were ostensibly under him as leader of the Pump Room Band. The reason given for the plan to remove him however was that when he play'd 'he did it by mere memory, and not by book as the others

do'.<sup>29</sup> Clearly he had a phenomenal musical memory and played major works like the Messiah without music. Though he did occasionally play his own concertos it does not seem that he was a composer in any great capacity. He did not publish sets of dances as several of his fellow Bath musicians did – as with James Cantello's *Fifty of the Newest Cotillons as danced at the Lower Assembly Rooms, Bath* (published in Bath and sold only at the Rooms and by 'Mr Cantello, No.6 Fountain Bldgs.')<sup>30</sup> When the New Assembly Rooms were opened in 1771 Fleming was left out of the band, and Linley took charge, producing a major rift among the town's musicians – one that took several years to heal.

The whole city was well informed of these machinations, which caused all the leading musicians and their families to take sides. Indeed much of the fight took place in the papers. The hardship for Fleming that the events set in train are apparent in the newspaper advertisement for a 'concert of vocal & instrumental music at Mr Gyde's Room on 1 Jan 1772, for Messrs Fleming, Shaw & Milgrove who have suffered the most financially from their attachment to the Old Rooms through the contest to regulate the Pump Room Music. To conclude with a Ball. Tickets 5s each from Messrs Fleming, Shaw or Milgrove, etc'.<sup>31</sup> Fleming was still referred to as 'Leader of the musicians of Bath' as well as being appointed as 'one of his Majesty's band of music'.<sup>32</sup> His death in 1778 shows that he remained leader of the Pump Room band until his death and that he was 'a most lively and facetious companion'<sup>33</sup> – his many practical jokes and bizarre buffooning are revealed in his autobiography.

According to her obituary, Anne Teresa became the most accomplished and respected 'professor' of dancing Bath had ever had. 'The name of this well-known Lady associates itself with all the leading recollections of the city through a period of 80 years'.<sup>34</sup> She was a great conversationalist and raconteur 'Charles Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Mason, Dr Beattie, Beaumarchais, Florian and Condorcet were among her intimate

acquaintances and her familiar correspondents'. It is clear she taught deportment as much as dancing, indeed she was 'celebrated for possessing and communicating that most rare and fascinating quality of grace'.<sup>35</sup> It was to Anne that William Herschel sent his sister Caroline on her arrival in England in 1774 for twice weekly lessons 'to drill her for a gentlewoman', Caroline remarks in her diary 'God knows how she succeeded'.<sup>36</sup> Other notable pupils were the Duchess of Devonshire and Countess of Bessborough. In later years she became stout, had a sedan chair of her own and was accompanied around the town by 'Simon the fiddler', her exhortation to her pupils was 'now ladies, do credit to Bath'.<sup>37</sup>

Kitty, the second of the three daughters joined Anne after Francis's death. The sisters took on some stiff competition from James Hopley in 1777 and Jean-Baptist Froment, who arrived in 1778. Froment advertised the minuet de cour, minuet de la reine, minuet dauphin, loure, gavotte, allemande, cotillions and even quadrille. He published two sets of dances of his own composition and had a dance school at 1 Rivers Street. He died in 1786 at 70 and his widow appointed two successors from London Astier and Second<sup>38</sup>. Yet another French master decided on a working retirement in Bath in the form of Monsieur Metralcour – he held Balls for his pupils in the Upper Rooms and at his premises and Hetling Court.<sup>39</sup> By 1786 there were five separate schools operating in Bath (Fleming sisters, Metralcourt, Second, Astier and the ageing De Le Main). It is interesting that Second took an assistant in Mr Martin expressly to teach 'the Scotch steps and Scotch high dances, so universally admired in polite assemblies'.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1790s the Fleming sisters' partnership disintegrated. Kitty fell in love with the actor Robert Elliston who married instead the Fleming sisters' assistant Miss Randall. This later caused Kitty and Miss Elizabeth Randall now Mrs Elliston to start their own school in Chapel Road and then Milson Street in competition with that of Anne (James, ii, 611-

12). Both schools were operating in the early nineteenth century. However Kitty probably died around 1810, though Mrs Elliston kept going until 1812. Miss Anne Fleming retired very comfortably in 1805 leaving her assistant Miss Le Mercier to continue until 1824.<sup>41</sup>

Susan Sibbald, a young student at the Belvedere school run by the Lee sisters at the end of the century, relates that every Wednesday the tall erect but stout figure of Miss Fleming would arrive at the school in her sedan chair to teach them minuets and figure dances while Miss Mercier concentrated on the basic steps and positions. A violinist came with them to play the tunes. From time to time Miss Fleming would call out:

‘ Now ladies do credit to Bath’, and rear’d her best pupils with a bonbon from an amber box or a flower from her bouquet. A public day was held periodically at the school when the girls dressed up to perform before the mothers and female friends. However in the spring of 1799 it was the turn of the Belvedere school to appear at the Upper Assembly Rooms. There was much practice on the school terrace beforehand, and on the eve of the day itself a team of exclusive hairdressers turned up to style their heads ‘a la Brutus’. Late the next afternoon, in their muslin gowns and primrose sashes, the curling papers gone and replaced by wreaths of yellow roses, the girls were carried two at a time in chairs to the Rooms. The Prince of Wales waited among the crowd of onlookers as they moved to their benches under the orchestra recess in the ballroom. This time Miss Fleming had chosen to open the Ball. Wearing a pale thin satin gown and velvet hat appropriately trimmed with Prince-of-Wales feathers, she partnered one of her scholars in a minuet de la cour. This led into the cotillions, figure dances and group minuets; some of the 50-60 dancers were no more than five years of age. Susan Sibbald herself featured in a group minuet with eight girls. Eventually, after a ‘Bath Curtsy’, Miss Le Mercier raised her hand as a signal for tea, and when tea had been taken all but four of the senior girls were hustled away while the Master of

Ceremonies took charge for the adult ball that followed.<sup>42</sup>

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 31/07/1783 1080/3c.
- <sup>2</sup> Trevor Fawcett, ‘Dance and Teachers of Dance in Eighteenth Century Bath’ *Bath Journal* 2 (1992), pp.27-48.
- <sup>3</sup> Kenneth James, ‘Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Bath’, unpub. D.phil (London University, 1987), 2 vols.
- <sup>4</sup> Obituary in the *Bath Chronicle*, 13/02/1823.
- <sup>5</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 04/10/1770 1027/3b.
- <sup>6</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 18/12/1788 1920/3b.
- <sup>7</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 07/01/1793 2275/3d.
- <sup>8</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 05/04/ 1798 638/1c.
- <sup>9</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 13/04/1783, 3e.
- <sup>10</sup> The advertisement for December 1787 ‘winter ball for scholars of the Misses Fleming will be at Lower Rooms on Sat 22 Dec at 6pm. Tickets 5s incl. tea from Miss Fleming, John Street, Bath.’ *Bath Chronicle* 20 Dec. 1787 1938/1c.
- <sup>11</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 17/05/1793 3c.
- <sup>12</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 26/04/1798 857/3c.
- <sup>13</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 25/12/1788 3c.
- <sup>14</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 11/04/1799 3c.
- <sup>15</sup> Francis Fleming, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures, the Perils and Critical Escapes of*

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*Timothy Ginnadrake, that chequer'd Fortune*  
(Bath, 1771), 3 vols.

- <sup>16</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, i, 77.
- <sup>17</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, ii, 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, ii, 98-9.
- <sup>19</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, ii, 136.
- <sup>20</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, ii. p.141.
- <sup>21</sup> James, 'Concert Life', ii, pp.610-2.
- <sup>22</sup> Fleming, *Bath Advertiser*, 24/03/1759 and 31/03/1759.
- <sup>23</sup> James, 'Concert Life', ii, p. 606.
- <sup>24</sup> *Bath Journal* 09/11/1747.
- <sup>25</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.34.
- <sup>26</sup> Fleming, *Life and Adventures*, iii. p. 238
- <sup>27</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.35.
- <sup>28</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 23/05/1768 and 03/10/1768.
- <sup>29</sup> James, 'Concert Life', i, pp.145-161.
- <sup>30</sup> J. Cantello, *Fifty of the Newest Cotillons as danced at the Lower Assembly Rooms, Bath*, published in Bath and sold only at the Rooms and by 'Mr Cantelo, No.6 Fountain Bldgs.'<sup>30</sup>
- <sup>31</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 26/12/1771 1d.
- <sup>32</sup> James, 'Concert Life', ii, p.609.
- <sup>33</sup> Obituary in *Bath Chronicle*, 26/03/1778.
- <sup>34</sup> Obituary in the *Bath Chronicle*, 13/02/1823.
- <sup>35</sup> Obituary in the *Bath Chronicle*, 13/02/1823.
- <sup>36</sup> James, 'Concert Life', ii, p.695.
- <sup>37</sup> Obituary in the *Bath Chronicle*, 13/02/1823.
- <sup>38</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.37.
- <sup>39</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.37.
- <sup>40</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.38.
- <sup>41</sup> James, 'Concert Life', ii, 610-12.
- <sup>42</sup> Fawcett, 'Dance and Teachers of Dance', p.42