On the 28th January 1831 there was a Grand Ball at The Royal Pavilion in honour of the birthday of The Duke of Sussex. On 3rd February 1831 a description of the ball with the full guest list was published in The Brighton Gazette.

Prior to this event Lord and Lady Gage of Firle Place attended a small dinner with their Majesties at the Royal Pavilion, where according to the Brighton Gazette the guests were "more select than numerous".

Most of those on the guest list for the Ball would have known each other prior to this event. The beautiful Brunswick Square area of Hove, where The Regency Town House stands today in no. 13 and no. 10, was not in fact formally completed until after the date of this Ball but three of the women on the guest list were already resident in the square and two others would be shortly.

Each of the dresses in this room is attributed to one of these five women. Imagine if you will that they might have gathered at Firle Place in the days preceding the Grand Ball. They would surely have talked about what they would wear and about the other aristocratic guests who might attend.

Lady Grace Gore (1772-1866) is the matriarch of our imagined gathering. She would have been 59 in 1831. She married Sir Ralph Gore (7th Baronet) in 1802. They lived at number 26 Brunswick square. The Gore's attended and hosted many social events. There is a record of one in particular, on Monday 30th December 1833, that included Maria Cunnyngham.

The eldest of their three daughters was also named Grace Gore (1805-1868). She would have been 26 in 1831 and living with her parents. She would marry Frederick Dundas MP in 1847. Dundas was the maiden name of Maria Cunnyngham. So it is possible that Grace met her husband Frederick through Maria at one of the numerous social events for which Brighton was famous.

Maria Cunnyngham (1787-1842) lived at no.10. She would have been 44 in 1831. She was born in West Lothian, Scotland, her father a captain. Maria married Robert Cunnyngham in 1813. Robert would in fact die in 1832 but Maria would remain living in Brunswick Square hosting and attending numerous dinners and social events.

The sisters Albinia (1808-1880) and Isabella (1809-1884) Hankey would have been 22 and 23 respectively when they attended the Ball. They were two of the 13 children of Thomson and Martha Hankey who visited Brighton regularly throughout the 1830s staying variously at the Old Ship, the Albion and the Norfolk hotels. From 1842 they lived at number 4 Brunswick Square, later moving to number 10. Shortly after the Ball, in April 1831, Albinia would marry James Craig Somerville a medical doctor at St John's Hackney; it is possible that she even met him the night of the Grand Ball. He would die in 1847, aged 48, and in 1854 Albinia would marry Henry Revel Spicer, 22 years her junior. They would live in Montpellier Road, Brighton and then in Worthing. Isabella would marry William Howard a clergyman in Witchingham Norfolk in 1837 but she would be admitted to Heigham Hall private asylum in 1866, discharged in 1868, admitted to Catton Grove private asylum in 1879 and discharged in 1884. Isabella died in 1884 so probably this is what discharged means in the asylum records

The guest list for the Grand Ball from 1831 published in the Brighton Gazette