



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 40 – MARCH 2014

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SATURDAY 31 MAY 2014

HOLBURNE MUSEUM, BATH



Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*, 1844

AGENDA AND BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 31 MAY 2014



The Holburne Museum

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held at the Holburne Museum, Bath on Saturday 31 May.

The Museum is based around the collection of Sir William Holburne (1793-1894) who lived in Bath's Cavendish Crescent and was a near neighbour of William Beckford. Holburne made various purchases at the 1845 Lansdown Tower sale.



Sir William Holburne

Holburne's collection was left by his sister to form the nucleus of a museum of fine art for Bath. Since 1916 the Museum has been housed in the former Sydney Hotel, built in 1796-7, as part of the Sydney Gardens. Lisa

White wrote about 'Sir William Holburne and William Beckford' in *Beckford Journal* 9 (2003).

Dr Richard Wendorf, will lecture on 'Living with William Beckford'. Dr Wendorf is Director of the American Museum, in Britain. He was Director and Librarian of the Boston Athanæum and previously Librarian of the Houghton Library and Senior Lecturer on the fine arts at Harvard University. His books include *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society*, and *The Literature of Collecting and Other Essays*.

In the early evening, there is a reception for members at Beckford's house 20 Lansdown Crescent, by kind invitation of Dr Wendorf.

A programme, agenda and booking form are to be found in the middle of this Newsletter.

WEBSITE

Gradually more information is being added to our website. Information about the Lectures volumes is now included and we hope to add the first five issues of *The Beckford Journal* in the next few months.

Recently new members have come via the website, and it is gratifying to know that the number of visitors to the site is increasing.

www.beckfordsociety.org

BECKFORD LECTURE 2014

28 NOVEMBER

We are delighted to announce that Prof Didier Girard will give this year's Beckford Lecture at the Travellers Club in London on Friday 28 November.

Didier Girard is a literary editor, translator, and essayist. He is Professor of European Literature at the University of François Rabelais, Tours and General Co-ordinator of the Erasmus Mundus joint doctorate in the humanities at the University of Bergamo. He wrote *William Beckford: Terroriste au Palais de la Raison* (1993) and has edited many of Beckford's works for the French publisher José Corti.

The lecture will be followed by dinner. Further information will appear in the next Newsletter.

CONVERSATIONS WITH BECKFORD

Conversations with Beckford which reproduces in facsimile the recollections of Beckford published in the *New Monthly Magazine* shortly after his death in 1844 is now available, price £6. It has an introduction by Jon Millington.

Copies are available by post from the Secretary (see back cover). It is on sale at Beckford's Tower and may also be obtained through your local bookshop

ISBN 978-0-9537836-6-3.

FONTHILL ABBEY

OPEN DAYS MAY 2014



By kind permission of Mr and Mrs Stephen Morant the grounds and woods of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sunday 4th May and Sunday 25th May, 11am to 4pm.

Entry donation, refreshments and simple barbecue in aid of charities:

4th May - Parkinson's UK.
25th May - Fonthill Gifford Church and Village Hall.

No entertainments but a choice of marked paths to follow (some steep and rugged) around varied woodland and lake. Bluebells, rhododendrons and some special trees. Views of the abbey, which is undergoing stone repairs and may still be in scaffolding. There will be Beckford and Fonthill books and maps to browse. Dogs welcome on leads.

Entry is only via Stone Gate Lodge (on the Hindon - Newtown lane) SP3 6SP.

RECENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Kwinten Van De Walle ‘The Architectural Theatricalization of Power in William Beckford’s *Vathek*’. *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*. Vol 26. Issue 3 (2013) pp. 163-168

Sarah Rutherford and Jonathan Lovie, *Georgian Garden Buildings*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2012. This well illustrated volume in the Shire Library series has various references to Fonthill. There are illustrations of the boat-house, gateway, grotto entrance, and hermitage.

Stepleton House which was bought by Julines Beckford and later home to Peter Beckford and his wife Louisa Pitt is described (with illustrations and a plan) in Michael Hill, *East Dorset Country Houses*, Reading: Spire Books, 2014. pp. 304-310. There is also a detailed account of Highcliffe Castle, Christchurch a building much influenced by Fonthill Abbey. pp. 209-223.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

At a conference on ‘Strategies of the Interior’ held at the University of Bern, 16-17 May 2013, Prof Caroline Van Eck (Leiden University) presented a paper ‘To role back the current time to show glorious visions of the past: The period Rooms of William Beckford and Sir John Soane’.

Dr Dominic Janes (Birkbeck, University of London) gave a paper on ‘The Perverse Visibility of William Beckford’ at the Queer Gothic Session of the College Art

Association Conference held in Chicago on 12 February 2014.

PETERBOROUGH HOUSE



Peterborough House

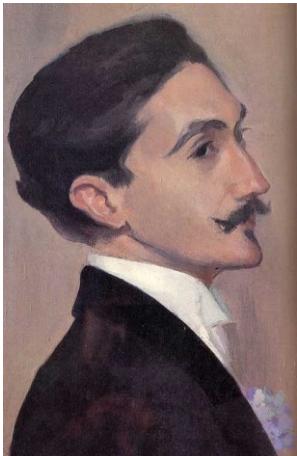
Peterborough House a mansion south west of Parson’s Green in Fulham survived until 1900 when it was demolished to make way for the new streets and houses. Sue Pierson records the history of the house in *Peterborough House: A mansion in every way calculated for a family of distinction*, London: Fulham and Hammersmith Historical Society, 2013.

The estate was owned by the earls of Peterborough until 1782. John Meyrick built a new house in the neoclassical style in about 1798. In front of the house was a semi-circular drive with a lodge at either end. In 1840 the House was let to William Beckford for about a year. He is not mentioned in the 1841 census, but Thomas Beckford, aged 50, and Maria, 35, together with three daughters are recorded.

Price £7.50 including postage from Sue Pierson: Tel 0207 7316544 or email: sue@lancepiersopn.com

ISBN 978-0-901643-06-3

MONTESQUIOU



Robert de Montesquiou, 1887

Philippe Julian in his biography published in 1965 of Robert de Montesquiou (1855 - 1921) the French aesthete and symbolist poet, draws comparisons with Beckford.

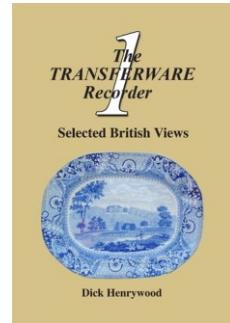
‘These experiments seem to have been directed by the wish of Baudelaire: “In an apartment decorated with cleverly-contrived pieces of furniture and seductive colours, one feels one’s spirit brighten and one’s being prepare itself for fortunate events ...” Perhaps certain recollections of Poe’s The Domain of Arnheim had also polarised this taste. Poe, in turn, was familiar with descriptions of Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey and between Montesquiou and Beckford there were many points of resemblance: both were men of brilliant talents and difficult dispositions both great collectors and bibliophiles.’ p.47

‘Mallarmé, too, was at once charmed by Montesquiou’s elegance: he liked the luxurious and the unusual. Perhaps he saw a similarity between this

young Maecenas and William Beckford, for whose oriental story *Vathek* he had composed a preface. There was in both men the same taste for curios, the same knowledge of painting, and the same passion to create around themselves a setting that matched their dreams. Certainly the top rooms of the mansion on the Quai d’Orsay had none of the immensity of Fonthill Abbey; but in them also one found the same contradictory mixture: a fervent quest for the past and a passion for whatever was new’. p. 57

Robert de Montesquiou: a Fin-de-Siècle Prince. (translated by John Haylock and Francis King). London, Secker & Warburg, 1965.

TRANSFERWARE



Dick Henrywood has been researching transferware pottery for more than three decades. With Bill Coysh he wrote the pioneering *Dictionary of Blue and White Printed Pottery*, 1982. Now he has started *The Transfer Recorder* to bring together subsequent knowledge in a reference form. The first number, ‘Selected British Views’ was published in October 2013. Fonthill Abbey appears in the “Antique Scenery” series by Zachariah Boyle (page 28), four in the Bluebell Border series by Ralph & James Clews (pages 38-40), and one in the mystifyingly mis-named “Irish Scenes” series by Elkins & Co (page 88). All six are illustrated, five with matching source prints alongside.

Paperback 176pp. 579 illustrations

£14.95 + £3 postage

www.transferprintedpottery.com

VIEWS OF LANSDOWN TOWER EXHIBITION



Shortly after William Beckford died the book *Views of Lansdown Tower* was published revealing the extraordinary building, interiors and collection he had created. An exhibition this year at Beckford's Tower will display a copy of this significant book alongside original watercolours, sketches and plates of the building 15 March – 26 October.

TOWER LECTURES

Views of Lansdown Tower
Wednesday 2 April – 6pm

To coincide with the exhibition, Dr Amy Frost will explore the views that revealed Beckford's immensely private building to the public for the first time.

Beckford and Edmund English
Wednesday 30 April - 6pm

Steve McMillan will reveal new research into the relationship between William Beckford and Edmund English, author of *Views of Lansdown Tower*.

TOWER TOURS

Tours of all areas to see parts of Beckford's Tower not normally open to the public. 19 March, 12 April and 24 May. 11am and 2pm. Limited to 6 per tour, so booking is essential. Tickets £10.

beckford@bptrust.org.uk
Tel 01225 460705

EMBLEMS AND ENIGMA: THE HERALDIC IMAGINATION



William Beckford's scheme of thirty quarterings,
1808

An interdisciplinary symposium *Emblems and Enigma: The Heraldic Imagination* will be held at the Society of Antiquaries of London on Saturday 26 April. Papers include one by Michael Snodin and Stephen Clarke on 'Heraldry and Conscious Display: The Cases of Strawberry Hill and Fonthill Abbey'.

www.heraldics2014.wordpress.com

RECOVERING FONTHILL
1560-2014
A SYMPOSIUM



J Bucker – Ruins of Fonthill Abbey

A two day symposium *Recovering Fonthill*, organised by the University of the Arts London: Central Saint Martins, will be held 12-13 September.

The first day, at Central Saint Martins, Kings Cross, will include papers on ‘Francis Lord Cottington’s Fonthill’, ‘Putting together Alderman Beckford’s Splendens’, ‘The “making” of William Beckford’, ‘Restoring Alderman Beckford’s Organ’, ‘Treasure-hunting: locating Beckford’s collection’, ‘The Lanes: Grotto Builders’, ‘The Morrisons’ Pavilion’, and ‘Little Ridge and Detmar Blow’. The second day will be at Fonthill with guided visits across the estate, and a visit to the archives of the Morrison family.

A flyer about the symposium is enclosed with this mailing

**BECKFORD’S
BURGHLEY HOUSE**

Beckford’s copy of [John Horn], *A history or description, general and circumstantial of Burghley House*, 1797, is offered by James Burmester, Rare Books, of Upton Cheney in his catalogue 89 - ‘The Romantics’.

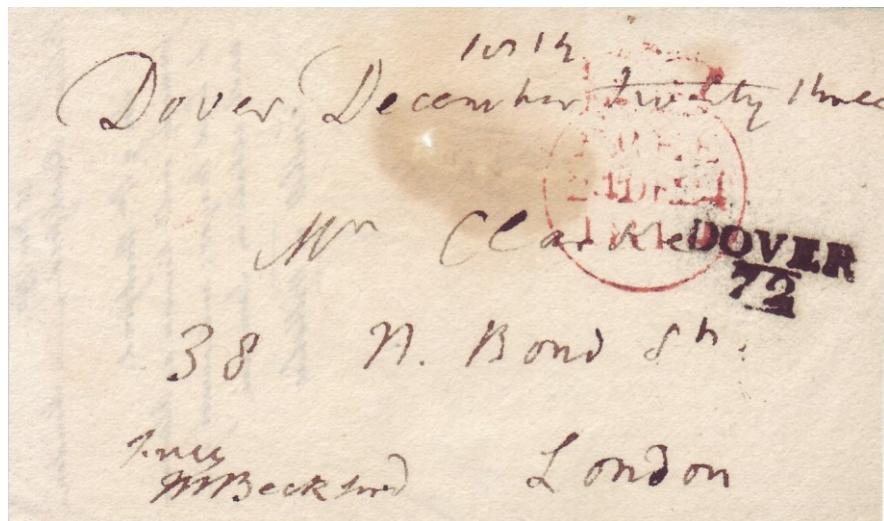
It has a two-line pencilled note in Beckford’s hand concerning Guido’s painting “the Boy and Pigeon. The volume was later in the collection of the Earl of Rosebery and has his bookplate.

VATHEK – A COMIC VERSION



Despite browsing in bookshops and searching the internet, one edition of *Vathek* escaped our discovery. We are very grateful to Geoff Blum for information about a comic version of *Vathek* drawn by the Swiss cartoonist Patrick Mallet and published in France by Glénat in 2006.

BECKFORD AT DOVER IN 1814



When Beckford was in Paris between October and December 1814 he kept in touch with Franchi, as we know from *Life at Fonthill* (1957). In what must have been one of his last letters before returning to Fonthill, he wrote to Franchi from Dover on 24 December: 'Yes-still at Dover for my sins and perdition. The Customs, with so many articles to inspect, have taken the whole day, despite much agreeable rapidity ...' The day before he wrote to his bookseller and publisher William Clarke, also from Dover. Even if the contents are unknown, the address panel (sometimes called a 'free front') has survived, postmarked in red 'FREE / 24DE24/ 1814', surmounted by a crown. In those days Members of Parliament were entitled to free postage as long as they signed their names next to the address, and this is what Beckford did, since he was MP for Hindon from November 1806 to February 1820. Otherwise it was usual for the recipient to pay for postage, although the sender could pay the charge, which partly depended on the distance, in this case the seventy-two miles from Dover to London.

JON MILLINGTON

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Items of Beckfordian interest are always welcome.