



# THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 43 SEPTEMBER 2015

**THE BECKFORD LECTURE**  
**PROFESSOR THOMAS KEYMER**  
*William Beckford and Bad Verse*



**FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2015**

**AT 6.30 PM**  
**THE TRAVELLERS CLUB**  
**106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1**

**TO BE FOLLOWED BY DINNER**

**DRINKS WILL BE SERVED FROM 6.00 PM**

## TWENTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Forty members attended the Annual General Meeting held at Salisbury Museum on Saturday 6 June.

The Treasurer reported that the accounts showed a surplus of £428 for 2014/2015.

Our Chairman, Sir Malcolm Jack took the opportunity to review the Society's progress and achievements over the past two decades. There had been twenty issues of the Beckford Journal, and various other publications including Jon Millington's Beckford bibliography. Excursions to Scotland, Portugal, Switzerland and the Bay of Naples. And also visits to galleries, houses, libraries and gardens. The Beckford Lectures had covered a wide range of subjects and had been printed in four volumes. There was a loyal core of members and the Society was truly international in having members from across Europe as well as Japan, Singapore, Australia, USA and Canada.

Sir Malcolm felt that he should step down as Chairman at this point having served since the Society's formation. The Committee had proposed that Stephen Clarke should take on this post and this was carried unanimously.

Bet McLeod and Jane Wainwright were elected to serve for another three years on the Committee.

Stephen Clarke said that he was honoured to be elected Chairman. He paid tribute to the Sir Malcolm for his outstanding chairmanship, which had been carried out with style, panache and a lightness of touch. The meeting supported these remarks.

Following the death last year of Dr Anthony Hobson, who had been President since 1998, the Committee proposed that Sir Malcolm Jack should be appointed as President. This was carried unanimously.

Bet McLeod was thanked for her work in editing the Beckford Journal and Mike Fraser gave an update on progress on the Society's website.

One of the points raised by members was whether the Journal should be subject to peer review. It was agreed that this would be considered by the Committee.

Following lunch in the museum garden, Sidney Blackmore gave a talk 'Sir Richard Colt Hoare: Antiquary, Landowner and Neighbour'.

## BECKFORD LECTURE 2015

This year's Beckford lecture will take place on Friday 27 November when Professor Thomas Keymer will lecture on 'Beckford and Bad Verse', in which he will examine the poetic burlesques in Beckford's novels.

Professor Keymer is Chancellor Jackman Professor of English at the University of Toronto. After studying at Cambridge he taught at Royal Holloway, University of London and St Anne's College, Oxford.

His research interests focus on Restoration, eighteenth and Romantic-period English and Irish literature. He is General Editor of *The Review of English Studies* and co-General Editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*. He is the author of many critical essays and books, including the Oxford World Classics editions of Johnson's *Rasselas*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Richardson's *Pamela*. In 2013, OUP published his edition of Beckford's *Vathek*.

The lecture will be followed by dinner.

A booking form is enclosed.

## H.G.M. LEIGHTON FSA

It is with regret we record the death on 26 August of Gerard Leighton. He had many antiquarian interests being Chairman of the Somerset Record Society, and among other offices, had served as Chairman of the Wells Cathedral Fabric Committee.

He was a loyal supporter of the Beckford Society. His eagle-eye often spotted items of Beckfordian interest which he conveyed in notes and letters written in his distinctive hand.

## BECKFORD'S TOWER

The exhibition *Beckford's Biographers* continues until Sunday 1 November.

The Beckford Book Group which explores writings (loosely) related to the work of William Beckford continues to meet quarterly.

The September meeting discussed *Vathek*. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 3 December at 7 pm, when *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens will be considered. Admission £5.

## TURNER'S WESSEX

Members who attended the AGM in Salisbury were able to visit the exhibition *Turner's Wessex - Architecture and Ambition* which concentrated on the young artist, at the time he was forging his reputation at the Royal Academy, and his relationship with two Wiltshire landowners Sir Richard Colt Hoare and William Beckford.

Turner produced a series of watercolours of Salisbury and its Cathedral for Colt Hoare which were displayed in the library at Stourhead. In the exhibition they were reunited for the first time since 1883, together with views of some of the major landmarks of the city.

At the centre of the exhibition were some of the watercolours and sketches of Fonthill made in response to Beckford's invitation to the artist to visit Fonthill. The sketches provide fascinating insights into the history and construction of the Abbey. Wyatt's model, on loan from Beckford's Tower, enabled visitors to see at close range the legendary building glimpsed from afar in Turner's paintings.

The exhibition received good press coverage. *The Times* (27 May) devoted two pages to the show. Martin Gayford's review

in *The Spectator* (18 July) had the headline 'There's not a trace of shaving foam in sight in the early Turners on show ...'. He recounts how towards the end of his life, a critical barb got under the artist's skin ' "Soapsuds and whitewash!" Turner apparently snorted, repeatedly to himself'. However, until now no one has traced the perpetrator of this memorable tart comment. Now we know. It was the scandalous, super-rich patron and novelist William Beckford, who made it in 1831 while taking a visitor on a tour of his collection. They paused in front of a watercolour of Fonthill Abbey ... The guest remarked that the painter did not paint like that these days. "Oh!", exclaimed Beckford. "Gracious God! No! He paints now as if his brains and imagination were mixed upon his palette with soapsuds and lather"'.

This information will not be news to those who purchased our *Conversations with Beckford* (edited by Jon Millington) which records Beckford's remark in a conversation with 'H', published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1844.

A beautifully illustrated book by the exhibition's curator Ian Warrell accompanied the exhibition. Published by Scala (price £25) it is something to delight both Turner and Beckford enthusiasts.

## SCOTTISH TOUR



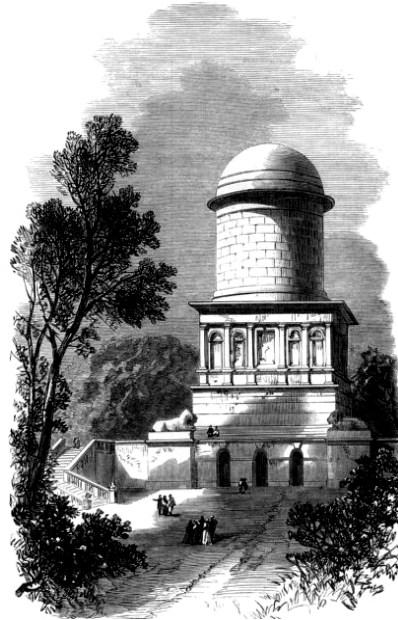
George Mackie's cover to Brodick's  
*Guidebook*, 1973

Early in 2000, we made an enjoyable four-day excursion to Scotland with visits to Brodick Castle, the Hamilton Mausoleum and museums in Glasgow and Edinburgh with objects which had once been in Beckford's collection.

We are planning another Scottish tour, again to be led by Bet McLeod, in autumn 2016 or spring 2017 (timing will depend on the reopening date of the new galleries of Art and Design at National Museum Scotland).

Would members who are interested in participating, please let the Secretary know, so we can gauge the level of support before starting on more detailed planning. It would also be helpful

to know whether you have a preference for autumn 2016 or spring 2017.



The Hamilton Mausoleum

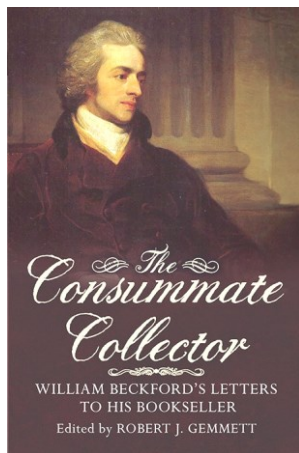
### NEW MEMBERS WANTED

If the Beckford Society is to flourish, we need more members!

Please do spread word about the Society to any friends and acquaintances who might be interested. The Secretary will happily send a sample copy of the Beckford Journal, if you feel this might help.

General information and joining instructions can be found on our website ([beckfordsociety.org](http://beckfordsociety.org))

## ***THE CONSUMMATE COLLECTOR***



Buyers who paid £39 for the first edition of *The Consummate Collector* published in 2000 in a limited edition of 450 copies, may well be reluctant to spend a further £35 on its successor. If so, they could be missing one of the most important Beckford publications to have appeared for many years. Readers can now experience all the vigour and immediacy of Beckford's style, something that was less apparent in the earlier edition. For the first time we can join Beckford as rages against the dilatoriness of his then bookseller and agent, George Clarke.

An early quotation from 30 January 1831 gives some idea of Beckford's mood. Suckaby's was, of course, Beckford's insulting name for Sotheby's. In the first edition the letter appeared as: 'I rather expected that you would have mentioned to me, before this time, a print

sale coming next Tuesday or Wednesday (I forgot which) at Suckaby's. It contains book plates, engravers' proofs, which I wish looked over and reported before it be too late ...'

Whereas in the second the italics, which indicate Beckford's underlinings, wonderfully convey Beckford's frustration and impatience: '*I rather expected that you would have mentioned to me, before this time, a print sale coming next Tuesday or Wednesday (I forgot which) at Suckaby's. It contains book plates, engravers' proofs, which I wish looked over & reported before it be too late ...*'

Three appendices are valuable new additions, especially the first, 'The Library of William Beckford, Esq. Fonthill Abbey, Wilts.', an extract from William Clarke's *Repertorium Bibliographicum*, published by William Clarke in 1819. It is a fascinating list of those books that Beckford most cherished, and is not otherwise readily available.

Eight pages of black and white illustrations in the first edition have now been replaced by double that number, all well-chosen and mostly in colour. Robert Gemmett's notes are far more comprehensive in the new edition but, as is common

practice nowadays, they are all grouped together at the end of the book, rather than being placed beneath each letter, as they were formerly. To make them more accessible, it is worthwhile having to hand a table (enclosed with this Newsletter) which gives ranges of text pages and the corresponding page of endnotes. This avoids trying to determine which of the fifty-two pages of endnotes is the one wanted. Not only will this help them to be located more readily, but for those who like to browse the endnote pages, it will direct them to the range of text pages which have given rise to a note that takes their fancy.

The new edition of *The Consummate Collector* is a fine contribution to the Beckford canon and will give great pleasure to everyone interested in this extraordinary man.

*The Consummate Collector: William Beckford's Letters to his Bookseller.* Edited by Robert J. Gemmett. Fonthill Media, 2014. 285 pp.

JON MILLINGTON

## AN ESTATE FOR THE DUKE?



Duke of Wellington,  
after Thomas Lawrence 1820

‘On October 4 1822 (Benjamin Dean) Wyatt wrote excitedly (to Wellington) that another estate was available for sale. William Beckford’s Fonthill, Wiltshire. The asking price of £315,000 was, he reported a bargain. Of the Abbey – built of course by his father – he wrote ‘(in my belief) it is unparalleled in beauty as a residence, by any place in the world ... a very large sum of money would be saved by your grace in purchasing the estate with the building upon it instead of building an entire new house. Stratfield Saye he suggested could be disposed of if necessary or the Duke might choose to maintain two seats.

Wellington was clearly interested in the purchase of Fonthill, but fortunately for him, it never came to fruition. Just three years later the central spire of this gargantuan building famously collapsed with catastrophic results’.

From *Country Life*, 8 April 2015 (page 56) in an article where John Goddard describes the search for a suitable house for the nation to give to the Duke of Wellington after Waterloo.

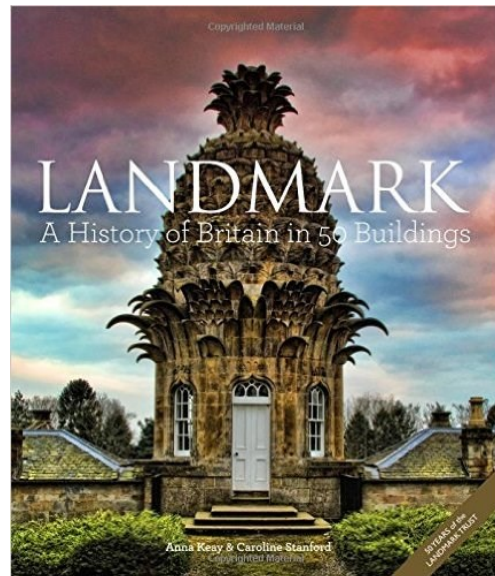
‘The Duke of Wellington, it is said, has declared Fonthill to be “the finest thing in Europe”’.

William Hazlitt, 1824

### **A MONUMENT OF REGENCY BRIO**

Beckford’s Tower is one of the buildings included in *Landmark: A History of Britain in 50 Buildings* (Frances Lincoln, 2015). This sumptuously illustrated book celebrates the achievements of the Landmark Trust over its half-century. With a forward by Griff Rhys Jones and entries on individual buildings by the Trust’s Director

Anna Keay and Historian Caroline Stanford



The section on Beckford’s Tower, sub-titled ‘A Monument of Regency Brio’, gives an outline of Beckford’s life together with illustrations showing the interiors of the Trust’s apartment. (pp. 206-209).

It was Theo Williams, a trustee of both the Landmark and the Beckford Tower Trust, who was the magician who brought these parties together with such a happy result. On taking on the ground floor of the Tower, it was decided to re-create ‘an important and well-documented interior, to an extent that Landmark had not attempted before’ (p.21).

Thanks to the vision of Sir John Smith, Landmark’s founder, so many curious and interesting



buildings: towers, castles, cottages and follies, have been preserved. Not only have they been saved and restored, but now provide holiday accommodation. It is an extraordinary and very British phenomenon.

### HANS WERNER HENZE ON BECKFORD

The autobiographical volume of the German composer Hans Werner Henze, *Bohemian Fifths* (English translation, Faber & Faber, 1998) contains several references to Beckford.

When staying in Naples he remembered that 'Beneath us was the Old English embassy, where Goethe and William Beckford had once been guests of the Hamiltons'. (p. 143).

He describes the scenery (by Lila de Nobili) for the third act of the Covent Garden production of the ballet *Ondine*, as seeming to be set 'in the great hall of the neo-Gothic Fonthill Abbey, which William Beckford had built between 1799 and 1807 in the Wiltshire village of Fonthill Gifford not far from Salisbury, but which was now not more than a ruin'. (p.152).

And in writing of *Venus und Adonis*: 'There will be seven bolero-like dance numbers ...

The planet Mars is reddish gold there, as though on fire - Adonis by contrast, exists only in the mind. Perhaps he is a little like young Gulchenronz in Beckford's *Vathek*'. (p. 481).

### THE OBELISK AND THE ENGLISHMAN

A new biography of John William Bankes of Kingston Lacy, friend of Byron, and pioneer Egyptologist, recounts his visit to Fonthill in 1811 when dressed in the 'the clothes of a poor labourer and put on a smock frock and ragged hat and trousers and in this masquerade climbed the wall and pales' (pp. 62-64).

Although concentrating on Bankes's contribution to Egyptology, the author gives an account of his early life, where at Cambridge one contemporary noted that he had 'fitted up some of his rooms in imitation of a Catholic Chapel and used to have the Singing Boys in dress suitable to the occasion, come and sing there for him'.

Bankes employed Sir Charles Barry to remodel Kingston Lacy House. His final years, following a sexual scandal, were spent in exile in France and Venice, where he commissioned and purchased decorations and works of art for his family home.

Dorothy U. Seyler, *The Obelisk and the Englishman. The Pioneering Discoveries of Egyptologist William Bankes*. New York, Prometheus Books, 2015. 304 pp.

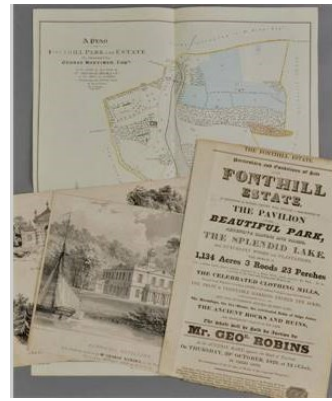
## IN THE SALEROOM



Coming up for sale at Sworders at Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex on 20 October is a copy of Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower*, 1844. Lot 98 estimate £500-800.



A set of four late eighteenth-century decanters with diamond cut body and armorial panel, engraved with the Hamilton family crest and motto sold for £13,420 at Lawrences of Crewkerne on 16 July. Provenance suggested they had belonged to William Beckford.



Dominic Winter, of South Cerney, offered on 16 September: *Particulars and Conditions of Sale of the Fonthill Estate* 'so renowned in Modern History, will include a description of The Pavilion and its Beautiful Park, extensive Manors and Farms, The Splendid Lake, and Luxuriant Woods and Plantations ... the whole to be Sold by Auction by Mr Geoe. Robins at the Auction Mart, opposite the Bank of England, on Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1829 ...in three lots' (8 pp. slim folio) together with '*A Plan of Fonthill Park and Estate, The Property of Mr George Mortimer, Esqre. To be Sold by Auction, by Mr George Robins ...*', lithographed by W. Day, 1829, and two lithographed views by Day.

The Fonthill sale was occasioned by George Mortimer's attempt to dispose of parts of estate in the autumn of 1829. The first two lots were unsold, although James Morrison eventually acquired the

Pavilion and part of the estate. The third lot (Lawn Farm) was bought by John Benett of Pythouse.

In the same Dominic Winter sale, large paper copies of John Nicols, *Historical Notices of Fonthill Abbey*, 1836, and John Britton, *The History and Antiquities of the See and Cathedral Church of Winchester*, 1817 sold for £680.

Four books which had once been in William Beckford's collection were sold at Sotheby's on 30 September in the sale of the fourth part of the travel and exploration library of Franklin Brooke-Hitching.

James H Robinson, *Journal of an Expedition 1400 miles up the Orinoco ...*, 1822. The Beckford-Rosebery copy with two pages of notes by Beckford. (Lot 1073, sold for £1,875).

Beckford owned two copies of the 1655 edition of Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*. One in a Grolier style binding by J. Mackenzie, had been purchased for Beckford by George Clarke at the Hanrott sale in 1834. Beckford wrote to Clarke: 'I am not much surprised at the want of rectification so apparent in Handrot's (sic) books. We cannot be too careful

in this particular'. (Lot 1261, sold for £11,500).

John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, 1790 in a binding by Kalthoeber (Lot 1341, sold for £15,000).

Robert Wilson, *The Travels of that Well-known Pedestrian, Robert Wilson ...*, 1807, in Beckford binding with crosses and cinquefoils. (Lot 1367, sold for £11,875).

A set of six engravings based on George Robertson's views of the Jamaican estate of William Beckford (of Somerley) were sold for £2,000 at Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury on 23 September.

#### THE BECKFORD JOURNAL

Back numbers of the *Beckford Journal* are currently available for all years, with the exception of Vols. 1 and 2. If you would like additional copies of any issue or just want to complete your set, please let the Secretary know.

For a limited period, back numbers are available at £2.00 each (to include UK second class postage).

A contents list is on our website [beckfordsociety.org](http://beckfordsociety.org).

## TWO 1804 ADVERTISEMENTS

In 1789, at a time when there were no public art galleries in England, an American from Charleston, John Wilson, founded a commercial enterprise in King Street, St James which he called the European Museum. Here he sold works of art, mounted exhibitions and conducted auctions, and advertised them in the London papers, chiefly the *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post*. The European Museum survived until 1823 when the premises were taken over by James Christie, whose firm have been there ever since. One of the items in a column of society news in the *Morning Post* for 27 January 1804 read: 'This day, some beautiful windows of painted glass, intended for the Gothic Abbey, at Fonthill, will be publicly exhibited at the European Museum, St James's Square'. Over the next ten days Wilson advertised this glass at least four times, but without the word 'Fonthill'. Perhaps Beckford didn't want any publicity, but it would be fascinating to know which stained glass windows were exhibited.

Later in 1804, an advertisement in *The Times* of 21 September informed the public that: 'Speedily will be published, Letters addressed to William Beckford, Esq. at Paris, and at Fonthill; and to John Pedley, Esq. his Agent, from Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1801, to Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1804; with an Introduction and Remarks, by J. Lettice D.D.' It is doubtful that this work was ever published, since no public library holds a copy. Moreover, it is not mentioned in M. J. Barber's *The Vicar's Tin Box. The Life of John Lettice. Vicar of Peasmarsh 1785-1832*. Might there be a copy in the mysterious Tin Box which also contained a manuscript of Lettice's memoirs, including his recollections of Beckford and his daughters? Unfortunately the box has never been found. The Rev. John Lettice was Beckford's tutor from 1772 to 1781, and later to his daughters.

JON MILLINGTON

**THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER  
IS EDITED BY  
SIDNEY BLACKMORE  
THE TIMBER COTTAGE  
CROCKERTON  
WARMINSTER  
WILTSHIRE BA12 8AX  
Email [sidney.blackmore@btinternet.com](mailto:sidney.blackmore@btinternet.com)**