



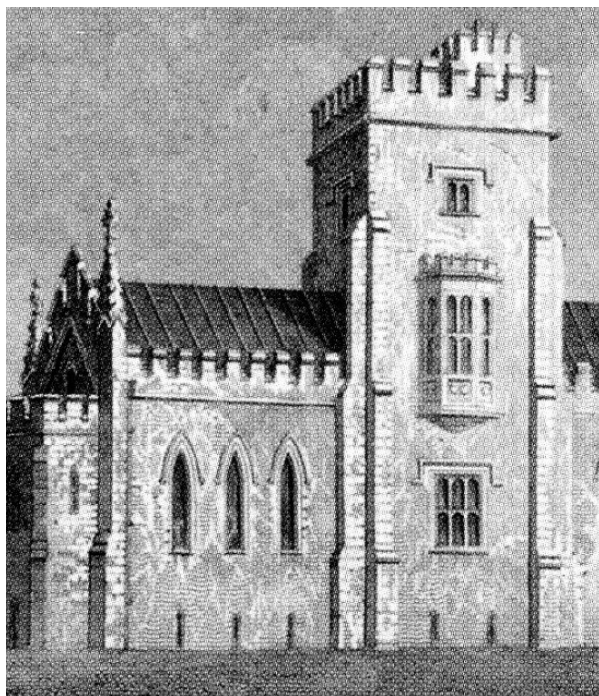
# **THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER**



**NO 46 MARCH 2017**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**SATURDAY 3 JUNE 2017**



**OLD FONTHILL ABBEY**

**WILTSHIRE**

*AGENDA AND BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED*

## BECKFORD LECTURE 2016

The Beckford Lecture was held on 24 November when Professor Didier Girard, Professor of European Literature at François Rabelais University, Tours lectured on 'Beckford's Magick'.

The lecture will be published in this year's *Beckford Journal*.

## BECKFORD LECTURE 2017

This year's Beckford Lecture will be given by Dr Jonny Yarker at the Travellers Club in London on Tuesday 28 November.

Jonny Yarker is director of the picture dealer Lowell Libson and has published widely on the Grand Tour, including contributions to *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth Century Rome* (Yale, 2010), *The English Prize, the Capture of the Westmorland* (Yale, 2012) and the recent Richard Wilson exhibition. He is currently working on an account of the banker and dealer Thomas Jenkins (1722-1798).

Cover illustration. Detail from T. Higham's engraving after J Martin's drawing: 'View of the West, & North Fronts', 1823

## OLD FONTHILL ABBEY OPEN DAYS 2017



The grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sunday 30 April and Sunday 14 May.

Visitors will be able to follow a variety of marked walks through bluebells, rhododendrons and around Bitham Lake (please note, some paths are very steep and rough).

Refreshments all day: homemade soup, barbecued sausages and delicious cakes. Dogs on leads are very welcome.

Donations at the gate will be gratefully received and, as in previous years, shared between Parkinson'sUK and local charities.

Entry is via Stonegate Lodge (on the Hindon – Newton lane) SP3 6PS

## *Visits*

### **HUGHENDEN MANOR MONDAY 10 JULY**

The young Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) admired Beckford's work and sent him a copy of *Contarini Fleming* in 1832. It led to an exchange of books and letters and a meeting at the King's Theatre in 1834.

Disraeli bought the Hughenden estate, near High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, in 1848 on his selection as leader of the Conservatives, as it was felt fitting that he should have a place in the country.

The house was a plain brick Georgian building, but in 1862-3 was remodelled. The architect E. P. Lamb refaced the exterior in brick and added an ornamental parapet and much Gothic decoration. Simon Jenkins suggested that 'The house might be a cottage in the grounds of Pugin's House of Commons'.

An exhibition *Disraeli the Collector: Treasures and Tresses* exploring the collecting habits of Disraeli and his wife is being shown this year. It runs until 16 July.

Jerry Nolan gives an account of the friendship between Beckford and Disraeli, "Brief Encounter of

Beckford and Disraeli, or The Radical Pair of 'Oriental Voluptuaries' ", *Beckford Journal* 8 (2002), 66-78

A booking form is enclosed

### **ELTON HALL MONDAY 4 SEPTEMBER**

Elton Hall near Peterborough has been home to the Proby family since 1660. It is an enchanting and romantic place with a Gothic south elevation ('a mix of Gothick features that might have come from a Horace Walpole sketchbook') set at right angle to a classical, French inspired south elevation.

The interior, Simon Jenkins describes as being 'a mirror to the exterior but is crammed with antiquarian surprises ... each room seems to adopt a new style, as if to challenge the eye'. There are wonderful pictures, furniture and libraries. The collection includes two Japanese lacquer cabinets made for Beckford by Vulliamy and a pietre dure cabinet which belonged to both Beckford and the Duke of Hamilton. Among the pictures is Luini's 'Boy with Puzzle' that Beckford purchased from at Sir William Hamilton's sale.

A booking form for the visit is enclosed.

## BECKFORD'S TOWER

### LECTURE

**WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL  
AT BECKFORD'S TOWER  
6.30 PM £5**

*Not for him?* Why Beckford did not live at the Royal Crescent.

As part of the celebrations for the Royal Crescent's 250 years, Dr Amy Frost, Curator of Beckford's Tower, explores why William Beckford choose a different crescent to live in when he came to Bath.

### THE BECKFORD SCANDAL

To mark the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, a new booklet explores William Beckford's exile from England and reveals why he sought escape in Bath creating Beckford's Tower.

Available at Beckford's Tower and on-line, from May

## Past Events

### VISIT TO HADLOW TOWER



Hadlow Tower photograph by David Allen

On 29th September about 30 members of the Society enjoyed a visit to Hadlow Tower in Kent.

Expectations rose as we caught glimpses of the 175-foot Gothic tower from the surrounding countryside and through the narrow lanes of the village of Hadlow, and were amply fulfilled. A huge Gothic mansion called Hadlow Castle was begun by Walter Barton (who took the name May after receiving an inheritance from his uncle) and finished by his death in 1823; the tower was added to the mansion by his son Walter Barton May in 1835-38.

The mansion was inspired by Gothic revival architecture such as Horace Walpole's Strawberry

Hill, though its interior was Classical Italianate. The octagonal Tower in particular was inspired by Fonthill Abbey, and one wonders if Walter Barton May identified with William Beckford. His reasons for building such an extravagant Gothic folly are unknown; his wife left him in 1836 and he lived there with his sister. The mansion was demolished in the mid-twentieth century, but the stable block and Tower survive. Although at 175 feet it is about 100 feet lower than Fonthill, it still gives us some impression of the sublime impact that Fonthill Abbey must have had; its massing and outline require only an atmospheric sky to make the illusion complete.

The property went through several ownerships, and steadily deteriorated through the 1990s. Efforts to rescue it from dereliction began in 2001, but despite many setbacks, an extensive renovation programme with money from the Heritage Lottery Fund was completed in 2012-13. The historic facade has been beautifully re-rendered, external crockets and mouldings have been repaired or replaced with modern copies, and the top lantern that had to be removed in 1994 because it was near collapse was rebuilt, with a new steel core to support it. In the interior, the basement is now a well-designed

museum with informative displays; the next three floors have been designed as smart holiday accommodation with modern facilities very cleverly squeezed into the turrets and odd angles, with extremely high-quality oak floors and door cases; and the top three stories are a minimalist hollow space with a high-tech circular steel stairs winding up to the lantern. Enthusiastic local volunteers made our visit very enjoyable and rewarding. Unfortunately this success story has come to a crashing end, because the Vivat Trust which ran it has gone into liquidation, and the Tower has had to be put on the market. Any Beckfordian who might wish to reside there would need very strong knee-joints despite the lift to the first three floors. Our visit may well have been the last public opening for some time to come.

RICTOR NORTON

## VISIT TO OXFORD

Twenty members visited Oxford on 21 October when our day started with a tour of parts of the Bodleian Library including the Divinity School and Convocation House. We next went to the Weston Library where a selection of books and manuscripts from the Beckford Papers (Beckford's personal archive, presented by Blackwells to the Bodleian in 1984) were displayed for us.

Among the items were the 'Red Copy Book', the journal of a visit to Portugal and Spain 1787-88, and one of the suppressed copies of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (1783).

After lunch, we visited Lincoln College by kind invitation of the Rector, Professor Henry Woudhuysen who gave a fascinating tour of the college including the Hall and Chapel with its splendid enamelled glass. We also saw the library now housed in the former church of All Saints. The day ended with tea in Rector's drawing room overlooking the Turl. In all, a perfect Oxford day.

## ARIOSTO

I continue reading Dante with all my might and Ariosto with all my main', Beckford wrote to his half-sister Elizabeth from Geneva in 1779.

The five hundredth anniversary of the publication of Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* was celebrated last year by an extraordinary and beautiful exhibition in Ferrara at the Palazzo de Diamanti. The question set by the exhibition's curators was: 'What did Ariosto see when he closed his eyes?', and was answered by a galaxy of images from the ancient world

through to the Renaissance, leading the visitor on a journey through Ariosto's universe. Displayed as a mysteriously lit moon, was the bronze sphere, dating from the first century which once crowned the Vatican obelisk. Weapons, tapestries, sculptures, and works by Mantegna, Leonardo, Michelangelo and Titian evoked the poet's world.

Among manuscripts, was a copy of Varthema's *Itinerario in Egitto, Arabia Felice, Persia, India, Borneo, Etiopia*, now in the State Library of Berlin which was once in the Hamilton collection. One suspects it originally belonged to Beckford who owned a copy of an edition printed in Rome (1510).

Beckford's own copy of *Orlando Furioso*, Venice, 1630, was sold at auction in Bubb Kuyper, Harlem, on 23 November last year (lot 2513) for €500.

## IN THE AUCTION ROOM

### TRANSFER WARE

Lawrences of Crewkerne sold the collection of a Somerset blue and white enthusiast Anthony Pugh-Thomas on 13 October 2016. Several lots included images of Fonthill. A Carey's 'Irish Scenery' series platter sold for £270 (lot 1376); four Boyle

‘Antique Scenery’ series items including a Fonthill tea plate (mistakenly marked ‘Wingfield Castle, Suffolk’ sold for £70 (lot 1198); and two ‘Passion Flower’ border series platters, one of Fonthill made £240 (lot 1299).

The US-based Transfer Collectors’ Club has a searchable database of British transfer-printed patterns produced between 1750 and 1900. The online resource, free to club members and available to others for a fee, includes information on over 13,500 transfer items. [transcollectorsclub.org](http://transcollectorsclub.org).

## BANKER’S DRAFT

A letter from William Beckford asking the his bankers Messrs Morland, Auriol & Co to ‘furnish Mr Clarke with one hundred pounds’, dated 13 Oct 1823, was sold by International Autograph Auctions, Nottingham on 17 December last year, (lot 144) for £260. William Clarke served as Beckford’s bookseller and published for twenty years.

## BOOKS

Bonham’s in New York, on 8 June 2016, sold a group of books from the collection of Robert Gemmett. A first edition of *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, 1780, (lot 45) made \$500. A first

English edition of *Vathek*, London, 1786 (lot 46) sold for \$937, and the first Paris edition, 1787, (lot 47) \$2,500. A copy of George Carleton, *The Memoirs of Captain George Carleton*, Edinburgh, 1808, in a Fonthill binding with Beckford’s notes (lot 48) made \$2,000.



From *Letters to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux*

Sir Brooke Faulkner, *Letters to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux*, 1837 with six pages of notes by Beckford and a drawing for a cabinet at Lansdown Tower (lot 51) made \$3,125.

Sotheby’s in Paris offered for sale on 5 October a selection of books from the hunting and hawking library of the Counts du Verne. Included was Beckford’s Aldine edition (Venice, 1517) of Greek poems on hunting and fishing, *De Piscibus Libri V. Eiusdem de Venatione Libri III*,



attributed to Oppien of Cilicia and Oppien of Syria, (lot 194).

In London, on 29 November, Sotheby's sold Beckford's copy of Bartolomeo Marliani's book on classical Rome, *Urbis Romae Topographia*, Rome, 1544. Sold at the Hamilton Palace sale in 1882 for £3.5s, it was later in the collection of the Earl of Rosebery and sold for £380 in 1975. Forty-one years later it made (lot 164) £5,625.

### BECKFORD'S DIBDEN

Miscellany Seventy-Two from the Buck Row Book Shop, San Francisco offers William Beckford's copy of Thomas Dibdin's *The Library Companion*, 1824. This was one of the books from the collection of Robert Gemmett sold by Bonhams in June 2016.

A large paper copy, in two volumes, it has a Fonthill style binding by Charles Lewis, with three and a half pages of notes in Beckford's hand. Beckford refers to Dibdin as 'P.D' for 'Puppy Dibdin', and makes numerous caustic remarks. Referring to Dibdin's assessment of works by Lisitzki as 'a rare book and if in sound condition well worth a guinea', Beckford writes "Foreigners in general have no objection to what we should call stinking oil provided it smacks of the fruit – to be sure this 'golden

guinea' smacks pretty strongly of the P.D. and then who relish this somewhat irreverend author's flippant familiar style may be perfectly pleased with such small jocularities'.

### A FONTHILL SKETCH



Somerset & Wood, the internet-based picture dealers, recently sold a grisaille watercolour of Fonthill Abbey, from the sketch book of Fanny Atkinson, c. 1845. The drawing is based on an earlier engraving of Fonthill.

### PRINCE OF WALES

'The Prince of Wales, when last in the West, viewed Mr Beckford's fine house, &c. at Fonthill'.

*Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazette*, 25 Sept 1794.



## BECKFORD AND HAMILTON MANUSCRIPTS



Detail of illumination, Saint Jerome, *Epistolae*, Venice, last quarter 15<sup>th</sup> century (MS Beckford 221)

Beckford and Hamilton illuminated manuscripts from the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin were included in last year's exhibition *Botticelli and Treasures from the Hamilton Collection* at the Courtauld Gallery. The centrepiece was the drawings by Botticelli for Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The catalogue's introduction gives an account of the sale by the 12<sup>th</sup> Duke of Hamilton of the manuscripts to Berlin in 1882, and the stir it created on both sides of the Channel.

There are descriptions and illustrations of ten manuscripts which once belonged to Beckford and give an indication of the scope and quality of his collection. Included are superb 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian manuscripts of works by Horace, Petrarch and St Jerome.

Dagmar Korbacher (ed.) *Botticelli and Treasures from the Hamilton Collection*. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016)

## SOME BECKFORDIAN REFERENCES

John Vallins has contributed a country diary to the *Guardian* for many years. 'Fonthill' (13 December 1998) is included in his *Wessex Diaries: Sketches from life in Hardy Country*, Flagon Press, Chard, 2011. p. 125.

Adrian Teal, cartoonist and caricaturist, includes William Beckford in *The Gin-Lane Gazette*, a mock eighteenth century news sheet. The issue for December 1786 has a report 'Remarks upon Mr. William Beckford's new novel and his illicit & infamous amour with Master Courtenay'. London: Unbound, 2012.

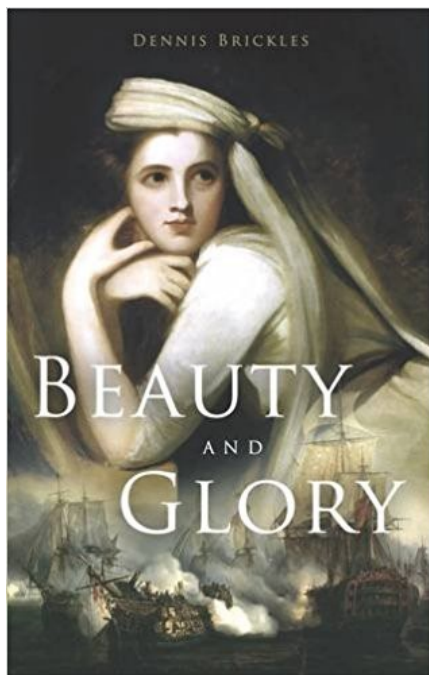
William Beckford is included in Jon Crabb's *Decadence: A Literary Anthology* (London: British Library, 2016). Appearing alongside De Quincey, Huysmans, Pater and Bulwer Lytton, in a section entitled 'An Aesthetical Instinct - Prophets'. There is an account of Beckford from Henry Venn Lansdown's reminiscences, a short extract from *Vathek*, and two engravings of Fonthill.

Gerard Luckhurst in 'The beauty that rose out of ruin', describes the recent restoration of Monseratte, the estate at Sintra in Portugal once leased by William

Beckford. *Country Life*, 18 January 2017, 38 – 42.

Malcolm Jack's review of Laurent Châtel's *William Beckford. The Elusive Orientalist* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016) appeared in *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 March 2017, 16.

## ***BEAUTY AND GLORY***



Over the years Beckford and Fonthill have appeared in novels. Now Dennis Brickles uses Beckford, Sir William Hamilton, Emma and Nelson as players in his novel *Beauty and Glory*. (York: Oakdale Books, 2016).

In his acknowledgment, he writes 'Most of the characters that I

name did exist, and in the case of the more famous of them I have tried to keep to the facts whenever possible ... I hope that readers will forgive me if, from time to time, I have used a novelist's license a little too freely for their liking'.

The novel opens with the visit to Fonthill by the Hamiltons and Nelson at Christmas 1800, and moves backwards in time to present Emma's story against a backdrop of a Europe in turmoil. A young Neapolitan musician links the lives of the protagonists.

There are glimpses of Beckford's sojourns in Portugal and Paris, and of his relationship with Catherine, the first Lady Hamilton. The novel includes an 'afterward' giving a synopsis of the main characters' lives after the novel's end.

## **COUNT OF CHAMBORD**

'Duc of Bordeaux [Henri, Count of Chambord] left by GWR for West of England ... His Royal Highness arrived at Bath in the evening visiting the residence of Mr Beckford and the Lansdown Tower'.

*Gardener's Chronicle*,  
Vol 3 (1843) 914

### **‘WITH TOUCHES OF VATHEK’.**

‘He had become meagre in figure, his skimpy but genteel coat would be buttoned over his breast, as he recounted his dream-adventures, adventures that were half Edgar Allan Poe, half Anderson, with touches of Vathek and Lord Byron and George Macdonald: perhaps more than a touch of the last’.

From, D. H Lawrence’s novel, *The Lost Girl*, 1920.

### **MRS NORTON’S VATHEK**

In his interview in the *Beckford Journal* (22) 2016, Robert Gemmett mentions he is working on an article about a dramatic version of *Vathek* by Caroline Norton, the granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. This has now been published as ‘The Lost Manuscript of Caroline Norton’s Vathek’ in *Notes and Queries* (March 2017) 64(1) 86-95

### **BATH AUCTIONS**

Browsing the online British Newspaper Archive, now offering over 15 million pages, produces a number of references to Bath sales in the second-half

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which included items with a Beckford provenance. The sale of the contents of No 7, Royal Crescent for Fredk. Janine (7 Oct 1863) offered from the library ‘a 6-light chandelier from Beckford’s sale’. And the sale of the contents of Stanley Villa, Weston Park (1 Dec 1863) offered ‘six various cabinets, with dove marble tops, purchased by the late Mrs Rogers at Mr Beckford’s sale’.

### **FONTHILL AS SCENERY**

‘Fonthill Abbey & Grounds’ and ‘King Edward’s Gallery at Fonthill’ were depicted in scenery for a variety evening at the New Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on 3 January 1824 which included the opera *Artaxerxes*, a farce *Fish out of Water*, and Christmas Pantomime *Harlequin and the Flying Chest*.

### **SWINBURNE**

Algernon Charles Swinburne spent his boyhood at East Dene a Tudor-Gothic house at Bonchurch in the Isle of Wight. The house was built c. 1825-31 for Mr Harry Surman to a design by a Mr Beazley.

When advertised for sale in 1833, the auctioneer George Robins stated ‘the whole of the interior is of solid oak, the furniture throughout exhibits specimens of carving that the classical taste of Mr Beckford will venerate and acknowledge’.

## MR BECKFORD'S SALE FONTHILL

'The general sensation the auction at Fonthill excited last week, can hardly be conceived. Even the harvest but little restrained the popular curiosity. From Salisbury, Andover, Bath, Weymouth, &c. &c. all the subordinate towns, the villas, and even the hamlets in their respective vicinities, the roads swarmed all the morning with shoals of the young and gay, slaving as they could to this exhibition; and long before noon, every chamber in the house, as well as the adjacent grounds, were crowded with genteel people; the court and stable-yard with carriages, and all the gates, doors, and passages, with lackeys and beggars. The auction was in the great hall where an organ, 16 ft. high and 15 ft. wide, is placed. This very handsome instrument, built and finished in such superlative taste, that is said to have cost nearly 2000l, played till the business of the day commenced.

The auctioneer began with an eulogium on the goods to be exposed, and stated them to be the most splendid and transcendent he ever had the honour of bringing to the hammer. Indeed there was not an item which might not, both for the value and magnificence, suit any palace in Europe. Not a stool, or tripod, or spring blind, or window curtain, brought so little as a guinea. – Some marble slabs went at more than 100 guineas each. A bust of Homer was knocked down at 27, and that of Virgil at 19 gs. A young lady inadvertently had placed herself by a fine statue of the *Venus de Medicis*: When this delicate and beautiful article was put up, a gentleman enquired "Which of the two was meant?" The auctioneer modestly replied, "The one was above all price, and he was authorised only to dispose of the other." Every thing in the room fitted *a la Turque* sold immensely high. The richness of the hangings, all silk or satin, of superlative quality – the brilliant French plates of glass which decorated and enlivened every side of the room – the sofas formed in most sumptuous stile of Oriental magnificence- the chairs and stools, all gilt, with burnished gold, attracted every eye, and it was laughable to see even the Wiltshire farmers furnishing their homely parlours the gorgeous accumulations of inordinate fortune, and effeminate taste... Some articles sold, notwithstanding, much under value. Even the organ went to no more than 290l. and every one thought it fell, into good hands – the Rev Mr. Ogle, brother-in-law to Mr. Sheridan, M.P. ...'

An account of the sale of the contents of Fonthill Splendens,  
*Bury and Norwich Post*, Wednesday 2 September 1801.

**THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER  
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