



# THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 47 SEPTEMBER 2017

## THE BECKFORD LECTURE

DR JONNY YARKER

*Magick or mundane?  
The experience of Grand Tour Rome in the 1780s*



**TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER  
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**

## AGM

Forty-nine members attended this year's AGM held at Old Fonthill Abbey on 3 June, by kind invitation of Stephen and Bonnie Morant.

Our meeting was held in the Lancaster Tower where Stephen Morant described the work undertaken during the last six years, including the tower's restoration and the building of a new house. Changes to the landscape included removing laurels to improve views and widening the Great Avenue.

After lunch, Min Wood and Amy Frost led walks around the grounds.

We thank Stephen and Bonnie Morant for their generous hospitality.

Cover illustration:

John Robert Cozens, *The Colosseum from the North*, 1780. Watercolour. National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

MICHAEL BRIGGS (1926 – 2017)



Michael Briggs at the opening of the Landmark Trust flat, Beckford's Tower, 2000.

It is with sadness that we record the death of Michael Briggs who as Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust was instrumental in the trust taking on responsibility for Beckford's Tower in 1993.

Michael's conversations with Elizabeth Hilliard led to the Bath Preservation Trust becoming the sole trustee of the Beckford Tower Trust. Under his stewardship, major restoration of the tower was carried out between 1997 - 2000.

He was always supportive of the tower acquiring items which had once been in Beckford's collection, and the decision to form the Beckford Society was made at a meeting he hosted when Gerlof Janzen outlined his proposal to set up the society.

Michael's enthusiasm and vision took forward the work started by Leslie and Elizabeth Hilliard to secure the tower's future.

## 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.

*Magick or mundane? The experience of Grand Tour Rome in the 1780s.*

William Beckford's account of his first trip to Italy in the 1780 is held up as a classic of Grand Tour literature; but unlike many young travellers his experience seems not to have been unequivocally positive. Rejecting the established practice of employing a resident cicerone to show him the sites – 'I absolutely will have no antiquary to go prating from fragment to fragment, and tell me, that were I to stay five years in Rome, I should not see half it contained' – he spent less than a week in the city before heading to Naples. Beckford was not alone in finding the infrastructure that had developed in Rome to serve the travellers had a negative effect on experiencing the city. A series of middle-men had emerged specifically to cater for a packaged-Grand Tour. It is this system that will form the subject of the lecture, which will examine some of the ways in which the resident community of British dealers affected the behaviour of both tourists and visiting artists in Rome. Were the decades after the Seven Years War a golden age of

Grand Tour creativity, or a period of decline in which experiences became narrower?

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) and *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).

## HUGHENDEN MANOR

Nine members in bright sunshine visited Benjamin Disraeli's house at Hughenden Manor on 10 July. We were welcomed with coffee and biscuits and a most entertaining and informative talk by volunteer Richard Micallef on the life of Disraeli and his connection with the house. Hughenden, now looked after by the National Trust is much as Disraeli had left it at his death. In the library we met property manager Rob Bandy. Disraeli aged thirty had sent a copy of his novel *Contarini Fleming* to the seventy-two year old Beckford who was enchanted by what he saw as its echoes of *Vathek*, and wrote to Disraeli praising the book as "original, intense, awakening and

delightful". This started a letter and book exchange which lasted until 1837. We were shown the copy of the 1815 French version of *Vathek*, given to Disraeli by Beckford, with the rather discreet dedication, "Benjamin Disraeli Esq. from The Author", and another first edition of *Vathek* in English. Disraeli enjoyed travel greatly so it was no surprise to find that he had owned a first edition of *Italy with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*. As Disraeli said "Like all great travellers I have seen more than I can remember and remember more than I have seen". Maybe Tim Mowl should have written *his* biography?

Hughenden Manor itself was mainly Georgian in origin but had been gothicised with a brick outer shell and papier mache ceilings. Disraeli's Insignia of the Order of the Garter and his robes as Chancellor of the Exchequer were on show, even though he should have handed them back at the end of office. His study and writing slope were also on display and his presence was felt strongly throughout the house. Exhibition rooms contained many examples of Disraeli's wit: "No man is regular in his attendance at the House of Commons until he is married"; "William Gladstone has not a single redeeming defect"; and "The difference between a misfortune and a calamity is this: if Gladstone fell into the Thames

that would be a misfortune but if someone were to pull him out again, that, I suppose would be a calamity". Hughenden's landscape was beautifully and extensively planted, as Disraeli said "so that I don't have to see Wycombe at all". Shades of Beckford, his Lansdown Tower gardens and the need to shut out Bath.

**HELEN ROBERTS**

### **ELTON HALL**

On 4 Septembers, a bright early autumn day, seven members visited Elton Hall near Peterborough which has been the home of the Proby family for over three hundred and fifty years.

The house has expanded over the year, its origins going back to the reign of Henry VII with changes and additions over the centuries.

We are very grateful to Lady Proby who guided us for explaining the history of the house and family. She told us about paintings and portraits, and described the re-hanging of pictures in the dining room and of the refurbishment of the drawing room. We saw furniture which had once been in Beckford's collection, including a superb Florentine cabinet, and a pair of Japanese lacquer cabinets made by Vulliamy. There was also Luini's painting of 'Boy with Puzzle'

which, as a Leonardo, had belonged to Sir William Hamilton and later Beckford. A surprise was a Cosway miniature of Beckford's wife, Lady Margaret, one of a splendid group of portrait miniatures collected by the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carysfort. There were two libraries to delight bibliophiles. On display was Henry VIII's Prayer Book, with jottings in the king's hand and inscriptions by his children.

Finally, we had time to explore the gardens. In all, a perfect day.

### WALPOLE AND BECKFORD

Marion Harney will give a lecture 'Composers of Architecture: Walpole and Beckford' at the University of Durham on 24 October, as part of the University's Walpole and His Legacies series. Elvet Riverside Room 141. 6.15pm.

Our Chairman, Stephen Clarke, has recently brought out a new edition, in the Everyman's Library, of Horace Walpole's *Selected Letters*. Based on William Hadley's 1926 selection, it has a new introduction, select bibliography, chronology and footnotes. Arranged by subject, it is the perfect introduction to Walpole. Hardback, 638 pp., at the extraordinary low price of £16.99.

### BECKFORD AND DELAVAL

'Almost as extraordinary news as our political, is, that it has snowed ten days successively, and most part of each day. It is living in Muscovy, amid ice and revolutions; I hope lodgings will begin to let a little dear in Siberia! Beckford and Deval, two celebrated partisans, met lately at Shaftesbury, where they oppose one another: the latter said,

"Art thou the man whom men famed Beckford call?"

T'other replied,

"Art thou the much more famous Delaval?"

HORACE WALPOLE  
TO RICHARD BENTLEY  
17 MARCH 1754

*Selected Letters*, pp. 31-32

### IN THE AUCTION ROOM



Vase with view of Fonthill

A 'pottery vase decorated with a view of Eton College and Fonthill Abbey' sold for £150 in Gorrings's, Lewes, sale on 11 Sept (lot 2017).



Beckford's Oak Cabinets

A pair of oak, ebony and parcel-gilt pedestal cabinets, designed by Beckford and Goodridge once in the front drawing room at 19 Lansdown Crescent, sold for £75,000 Christie's (The Exceptional Sale) in London on 6 July (lot 7). On 4 July, Christie's sold two pairs of Italian Empire gilt wood armchairs, attributed to Lorenzo Santi, which had been in the Grand Drawing Room at Fonthill. One pair (lot 43) sold for £16,250; the other (lot 34) made £17,500

In Christie's sale of Old Master & British Drawings & Watercolours on 5 July, John Robert Cozens, watercolour view of Vietri and Raito made £75,000. When sold by Beckford in 1805 it realised 5 gns.

The library of the Irish judge William O'Brien (1832 – 1899) was sold by Sotheby's in London

on 7 June. O'Brien's interest in early printing led to his buying books from important nineteenth century sales including that of Hamilton Palace and the Sutherland Library. Four books, once in Beckford's collection and sold at the Hamilton Palace sale, were included in Sotheby's sale.

A copy of the *Orations of Aeschines and Demosthenes*, Oxford, 1715 in a binding possibly by Roger Payne, made £1,375 (lot 2). A folio, Pietro Bembo, *Historiae Venetae Libri XII*, Venice, 1551 (in a binding by Charles Lewis) sold for £2,750 (lot 38). Gaius Sallustius Crispus, *De Coniuratione Catilinae* ...and other works, Venice, 1521, fetched £2,750 (lot 300). A Venetian volume from the press of Nicolaus Jensen, 1471, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *Vitae XII Caesarum*, made £43,750 (it had sold for £16. 15s in 1882).

Forum Auctions sold on 24 May (lot 223), a copy of Britton's *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, with loosely inserted a manuscript invoice for work undertaken by H.S Westmancott at Fonthill, including 'Modelling interlacing flowers for groin over door way, Great Octagon, £3.3/'''. This lot fetched £700.

## A FONTHILL LITHOGRAPH



The autumn 2107 catalogue from Munich dealer Stephen List, offers a chalk lithograph of Fonthill Abbey ‘drawn on stone by R. Quick’, circa 1813, and suggests that the signature is the pseudonym of an amateur, possibly Beckford. The print is listed in Jon Millington’s check list of Fonthill engravings published in the *Beckford Journal*, 7 (2001)

## GROTTO BUILDERS

Margaret and Gerald Hull re-appraise the work of the grotto builders Joseph and Josiah Lane in their book *Half-Forgotten the Grotto work of Joseph lane (1717-1784) and his son Josiah (1753-1833) of Tisbury, Wiltshire*. Among the grottoes described are those at Fonthill, Wimborne St Giles, Painshill and Bowood. The book has 97 pages and is lavishly illustrated with 42 colour photographs. Available from the authors at 12 Bathwick Street, Bath, BA2 6NY. Price £10.

## BECKFORD BOOK GROUP

The next meeting of the Beckford Book Group will be on Thursday 30 November, when Bran Stoker’s *Dracula* will be discussed.

BECKFORD’S TOWER.  
7.00 – 8.00 PM £5

## POWDERHAM

Powderham, the seat of the Earls of Devon, is described by John Goodall, in an article in *Country Life*, July 21, 2017, which reveals the richness of the eighteenth century interiors, including the Music Room designed by Wyatt for Beckford’s friend William Courtenay.

## JANE AUSTEN

To mark the bicentenary of Jane Austen’s death, we offer these lines she wrote to her sister Cassandra on May 29, 1811.

“You must have heard before I can tell you that Col. Orde has married our cousin Margt. Beckford, the Marchess. of Douglas’s sister. The papers say that her father disinherits her, but I think too well of an Orde to suppose she has not a handsome independence of her own”.

## **VATHEK AND THE MONK'S PARLOUR**

When Isabel Colegate described the Monk's Parlour in Sir John Soane's house in *A Pelican in the Wilderness. Hermits, Solitaries and Recluses* (HarperCollins, 2002) she mentioned the guide to the house published in 1835. Its full title was *Description of The House and Museum in the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, The Residence of Sir John Soane*, and he asked his friend Barbara Hofland (1770-1844) to provide the text. She was a novelist and poet from Harrogate, and her account of what was then known as the Parloir of Padre Giovanni contained this not altogether unexpected reference to *Vathek*. After noting how well-equipped the Parloir was with religious books, drawings and relics, Mrs Hofland went on to say:

‘These luxuries do not quite accord with the simplicity and voluntary poverty demanded by conventual life; but they are far short of the princely luxuries of the Prior of Alcobaça, described with such inimitable humour by the author of “Vathek.” Our imagined padre is the last representative of an order to whom, after all, we are much indebted: for whilst Learning and the Arts, which followed in its train, were hidden in the cells of the monks, surely they were its preservers, and have a claim on the gratitude of those who benefit by their guardianship. If they were too indolent to examine their stores, too illiterate to estimate them, yet they did not, like the barbarous caliph, in their ignorance and bigotry therefore destroy them.’  
(p.28)

This remarkable passage is followed by Isabel Colegate's sympathetic four-page portrayal of Beckford as a hermit at Fonthill and then Bath, including a pen and ink sketch of Beckford's Tower by Catherine Fitzgerald.

JON MILLINGTON

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**ITEMS OF BECKFORDIAN INTEREST ARE VERY WELCOME**