



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

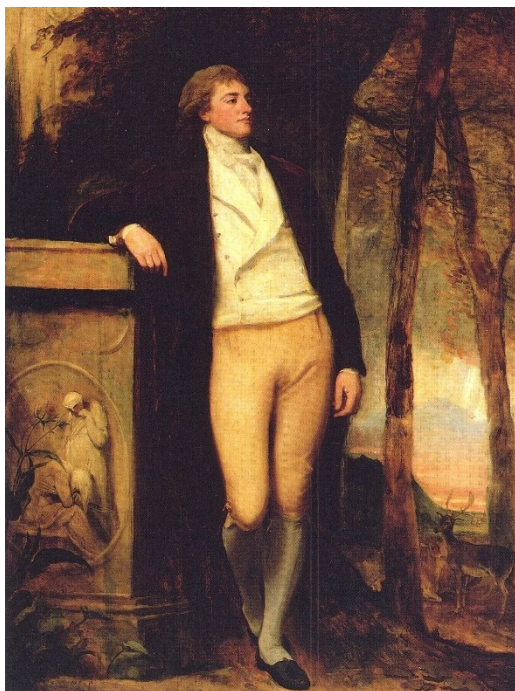
NO 49 SEPTEMBER 2018



THE BECKFORD LECTURE

CHARLIE COURTENAY, EARL OF DEVON

*When Beckford came to stay:
the aesthetic, literary and emotional impact of a weekend
at Powderham, Oct 1784*



WEDNESDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2018

AT 6.30 PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB
106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1

AGM 2018

Thirty-four members attended the Annual General Meeting held on 2 June at the Garden Museum housed in the mediaeval and Victorian church of St Mary-at-Lambeth beside Lambeth Palace.

The churchyard contains the tomb of the Tradescants, plant hunters, collectors and gardeners to Charles I, and the museum has a recreation of the Ark, the celebrated museum which was to form the basis of the Ashmolean Museum. After lunch, Michael Cousins lectured on 'Fonthill Old Park – Grottoes and Features'

FONTHILL RECOVERED

Caroline Dakers' launched her *Fonthill Recovered. A Cultural History* with a lecture at Messums Wiltshire on 18 May. Tisbury's great tithe barn, once owned by Beckford as part of the Fonthill estate, made an appropriate and spectacular setting to celebrate a book telling the history of the estate, its houses, landscape and owners.

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BECKFORD LECTURE 2018

We are delighted that Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon, has agreed to give this year's lecture - *When Beckford came to stay: the aesthetic, literary and emotional impact of a weekend at Powderham, Oct 1784.*

The lecture will be on Wednesday 28 November, at the Travellers Club, followed by dinner.

A booking form is enclosed.

SCOTTISH TOUR 2019



Brodick Castle

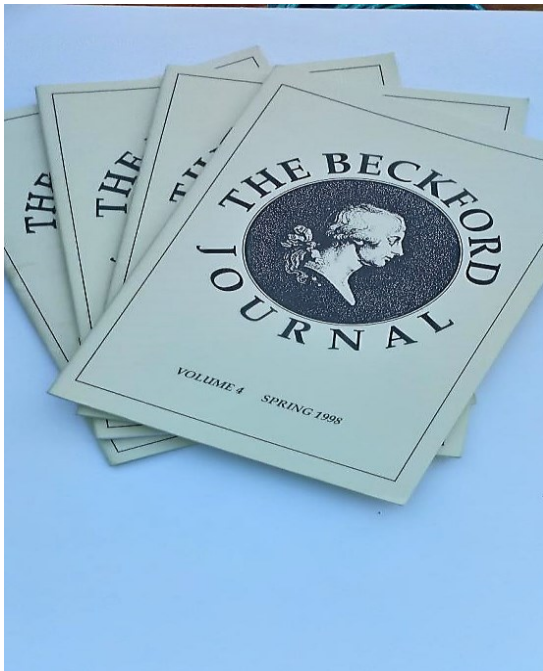
Plans have been made for a Scottish excursion (8 – 11 May 2019) which will give the opportunity to visit Brodick Castle, Lennoxlove House, and the Scottish National Museum in Edinburgh to see objects which were once in William Beckford's collection. The tour will also go to the Hamilton Mausoleum

commissioned by the 10th Duke, and Chatelherault, the hunting lodge and kennels of the 5th Duke.

The tour will be led by Dr Bet McLeod, editor of *The Beckford Journal*, and an expert on Beckford's collections.

An itinerary and booking form are enclosed.

THE BECKFORD JOURNAL ON THE WEBSITE



The first four volumes of the *Beckford Journal* (1995 -1998) are now available on the Society's website. To access, go to the 'Publications' tab, and then 'Beckford Journal' tab.

We are very grateful to Mike Fraser for scanning and getting the Journals onto the web. We plan

that over time more volumes will be added.

If you wish to complete your set of printed copies of the Journal, do get in touch with the Secretary. Copies are still available for most years, and can be purchased at £2 a copy, plus postage.

AGM 2019

Next year's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 15 June at the Holburne Museum, Bath.

Detailed information will be included in the next Newsletter.

PROFESSOR DAVID WATKIN

Professor David Watkin who died on 30 August was a distinguished architectural historian whose doctoral thesis on Thomas Hope was published as *Thomas Hope and the Neo-Classical Idea* (1968).

In his book, he drew parallels between Hope and Beckford. '[Both] shared many characteristics. The wealth of both was derived from foreign commerce rather than English rent-rolls and they both therefore resorted to surprise, splendour, and hospitality in an attempt to 'win friends and influence people'. By a curious irony neither, in fact, cared for society as such or for traditional country pursuits; and

the tendency of both was towards the creation of a strange, inward-looking cultural world’.

We were honoured when Professor Watkin gave the Beckford Lecture in 2004 on ‘Thomas Hope, Designer, Collector, Patron: New Links with Beckford’, which was printed in *Beckford Annual Lectures 2004 – 2006*.

OLD FONTHILL ABBEY OPEN DAYS 2019

The grounds of Fonthill Old Abbey will be open to the public on Sunday 5 and 19 May, from 10.00 am – 5.00 pm.

Visitors will be able to follow a variety of walks through the grounds and around Bitham Lake.

Donations at the gate will be gratefully received and will be shared between Parkinson’s UK and local charities.



‘William Beckford: Taste and Variety in Isolation’ is the title of a session the Beckford Society is proposing for a roundtable session at next year’s conference of the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

Beckford’s sense of isolation, the sense that “not an animal understands me”, is apparent in his complex response to contemporary culture. In architecture he spoke of Horace Walpole with disdain, dismissing his highly influential Gothic castle of Strawberry Hill as a “Gothic mousetrap” yet—as Marion Harney shows in her paper—he was more influenced by Walpole’s experiments in spatial dynamics and theatrical effects than he would care to acknowledge.

In literature, he viewed the conventions of contemporary fiction with distaste, in particular the fashion for weaving passages of poetry into the text: Tom Keymer analyses his novels *Azemias* (1796) and *Modern Novel Writing* (1797), to reveal them as anthologies of bad verse, to which Beckford then administers the lightest, vindictive touch to send them tumbling into absurdity.

Amy Frost considers the ways in which he envisioned his own isolation, glorying in his singularity, and the extent to which his aestheticism merged with a form of asceticism as he grew older. Finally, Stephen Clarke looks at a different moment of controversy, two hundred years after Beckford’s birth—a spectacularly hostile review of the catalogue of the Yale bicentenary Beckford exhibition of 1960—and unpicks the circumstances to

reveal the animus that underpins the review.

The BSECS Conference will be held on 4 – 6 January at St Hugh's College, Oxford. Please watch our website and that of the BSECS (www.bsecs.org.uk).

BECKFORD'S TOWER CONSERVATION PROJECT

AMY FROST, Senior Curator,
Bath Preservation Trust, writes:

Over the last few years members will have heard about ideas for a major project at Beckford's Tower, and this is now developing rapidly. We have been gathering costs and specifications for the repair works to the building and the opening up of the grotto tunnel, as well as starting to think about the feasibility of solar panels for new floodlighting, a new viewing platform on the flat roof, and the restoration of the windows.

The project will also include the interpretation of the landscape and museum and we will be working closely with a variety of community partners and groups, including the Beckford Society, to help inform what that will involve. We are proposing that the capital works to the Tower and grounds will be undertaken in 2021 with the associated activities running from 2020 into spring 2022.

We have decided to submit our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in the next funding round in the first quarter of 2019. Having initially planned on submitting in August 2018, we were advised to avoid the fierce competition of the final round of HLF's current programme and instead align our thinking with the new way in which they intend to allocate funds in the future.

Preparing the application for submission in April allows more time for detailed conversations and get your input to our ideas. We also want to gain greater certainty about the potential costs and specification of works, and to initiate our fundraising approaches.

We are extremely grateful for the support the Beckford Society has shown so far, including a donation towards the cost of having up to date architectural drawings of the Tower made, and we certainly do not intend to let the momentum slip. We intend to have a very active continuing programme of activities and stakeholder engagement from the autumn onwards.

If you would like to find out more about the project and how you can support it, please contact the Tower Administrator Courtney Fleming on 01225 460705 or tower@bptrust.org.uk

BECKFORD BIRTHDAY LECTURE

FONTHILL RECOVERED

CAROLINE DAKERS

AND NEIL BURTON

Fonthill in Wiltshire is mostly associated with William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey which collapsed in 1825 and is seen by many as a symbol of overarching ambition and folly. However, the Abbey was only one of a number of important houses built on the estate from the sixteen century, and this talk will draw on histories of art and architecture, politics and economics to tell the story of the now forgotten houses and their owners which enrich the fascinating history of this Wiltshire estate.

MONDAY 1 OCTOBER

BECKFORD'S TOWER

6.30 PM

Cost £10.

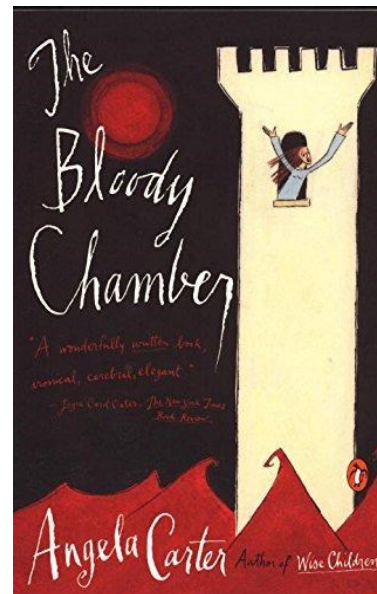
Email beckford@bptrust.org.uk

The exhibition THE BECKFORD WOMEN continues at Beckford's Tower until 28 October.

‘A temporary exhibition that presents a fascinating exploration of the creative lives and labours of several women who influenced [William Beckford]’

From Madeleine Pelling's review on the BSECS website.

BECKFORD BOOK GROUP



Join the discussion group for readings based on Gothic literature.

Angela Carter, *Bloody Chamber*

BECKFORD'S TOWER

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER

7.00 PM

GROWING UP BOOKISH

Members who attended our AGM in Bath in 2014 heard Professor Richard Wendorf's lecture in which he described his experience of living in Beckford's house at 20 Lansdown Crescent.

An account of his life with Beckford appears in *Growing Up Bookish: An Anglo-American Memoir* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2017) which charts his progress as a literary scholar and art historian, from Harvard College Library and the Boston Athenæum to the American Museum in Britain.

‘GOTHIC FANTASISTS ...’

‘Gothic fantasists will understand why we settled on a farmhouse on the Wiltshire/Dorset border. It was close to where William Beckford, that infamous nabob of worrying sexuality, built the ultimate romantic Gothic folly Fonthill Abbey in wild countryside that today is still remote and stunning. Unfortunately its legendary 200 foot octagon collapsed and the mansion that beat Disneyland to it is but a memory’.

From Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Unmasked. A Memoir*. London: Harper Collins, 2018. p.151.

IN THE AUCTION ROOM



© Christie’s Images Limited

Christie’s Old Master & British Drawings & Watercolours sale in London on 3 July included (lot 135) a splendid watercolour of Fonthill Abbey attributed to the circle of John ‘Warwick’ Smith. With an estimate of £2,000 – 3,000, it realised £6,250.

Once in the collection of Baron Dimsdale, it was previously sold at Sotheby’s, 15 March 1984, and was later with the Maclean Gallery, London.

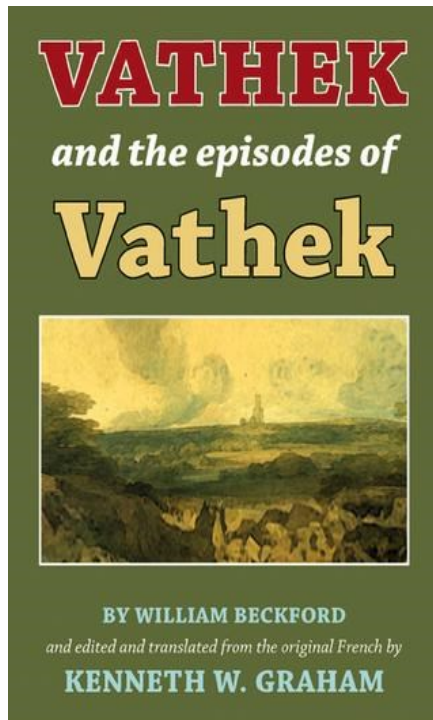
Sotheby’s Treasures sale on 4 July in London, included three lots of Beckford’s Fonthill style furniture, which had passed to his daughter the Duchess of Hamilton, then by descent to the Duchess of Montrose (1884 – 1957), and to the vendor. The first (lot 83) was a pair of ebonised, parcel-gilt and leather upholstered stools with tassel fringes, with an estimate of £15,000 – 20,000.

Also offered were (lot 84) a set of twelve ebonised, leather upholstered side chairs, estimate £80,000 – 120,000, and (lot 85) a pair of ebonised and parcel-gilt beech armchairs, estimate £40,000 – 60,000. These items were exhibited in *William Beckford 1760 – 1844: An Eye for the Magnificent* (New York, 2001-2, Dulwich, 2002. Nos 145 – 147).

The sale also included (lot 86) a Victorian silver mounted gourd bottle, which probably belonged to Beckford, and passed by descent to the Duchess of Montrose. With an estimate of £20,000 – 30,000

The four lots were unsold.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS



A modern edition of Beckford's *Vathek and the Episodes of Vathek* will be published in May 2019. The text is a new translation by Professor Kenneth Graham, which corrects many errors in earlier versions.

Of *Vathek*, prior to this edition, there were two English versions; one by Samuel Henley (1786), and the other by Herbert Grimsditch (1929). Henley published his translation without Beckford's knowledge and permission, but also imposed a system of changes to Beckford's French text for purposes of parading his own scholarship. The only solution to faulty sources is to begin again with the original documents. That is what this edition does.

The first translator of the *Episodes*, Sir Frank Marzials, worked with texts provided by Louis Melville, who found the manuscripts in the Beckford Papers, then belonging to the Duke of Hamilton. There were a number of drafts in the Beckford Papers and Melville chose the most clearly written draft prepared for Beckford by an amanuensis in the 1820s when he was considering publication. The earlier drafts were evocative of a scandal that Beckford wished to forget. Graham examined these versions when preparing the present text.

Kenneth Graham is professor emeritus at the University of Guelph in Canada, and a by-fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge. His previous publications include *The Politics of Narrative*, (1990) (a study of Godwin's *Caleb Williams*) and *William Godwin Renewed 1783 – 1834*, (2001). He edited *Vathek & The Escape from Time* (1990); and *William Beckford and the New Millennium*, (2004). His edition of *Vathek*, was published by Broadview Press (2001).

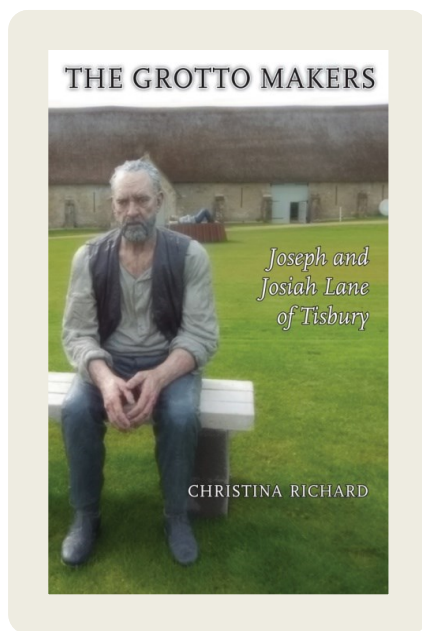
Published by Edward Everett Root
Publishers Co Ltd.
ISBN 9781912224579
Hardback. 256 pp. £75.00

Vathek and the Episodes

The publisher is offering a 20% discount on orders received by 31 October 2018.

To save £15, use code VATHEK20 when ordering via the publisher's website www.eerpublishing.com/graham-vathek.html, or from the distributors NMNi email orders@nbninternational.com Tel 44(0) 1752202301

THE GROTTO MAKERS



The cover illustration shows Sean Henry's *Seated Man* in front of Tisbury's Tithe Barn.

Christina Richard's *The Grotto Makers. Joseph and Josiah Lane of Tisbury* will be published by the Hobnob Press in October.

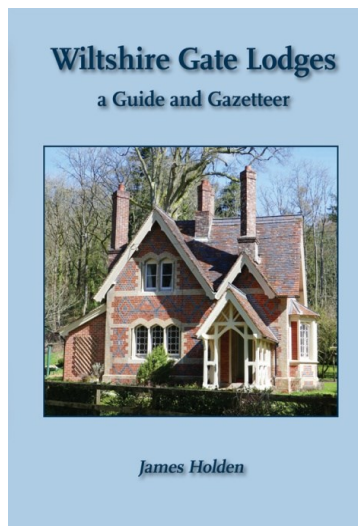
This is the story of two men from a remote Wiltshire village, father and son, stonemasons, whose lives stretched across the Georgian

period, from 1717 to 1833. They became grotto builders, men of artistic genius, acknowledged experts in the speciality, but the sort of ordinary craftsmen whose achievements are not normally recorded in the official pages of history. They were responsible for many of the mysterious, decorative, thrilling grottoes which appeared during the 18th century, from Stourhead to Fonthill, Wycombe Abbey, Wimborne St Giles, Bowood, Bowden Park, Painshill and Oatlands Park, Claremont, Castle Hill, Ascot Place, Belcombe and Norbiton House. The Lanes constructed brick, timber and limestone caverns, tunnels, bath houses, gambling dens and cascades.

Christina Richards has pierced together the story of the lives and work of Joseph and Josiah from a wide range of local and national sources, and has enhanced her account with imaginative descriptions of village and family life at the time.

WILTSHIRE GATE LODGES

The Wiltshire Buildings Record has over the years published an attractive series of small books relating to various building types, including farmhouses and cottages, and farm buildings. The latest is James Holden's *Wiltshire Gate Lodges*.



Cover illustration: West Gate Lodge, Fonthill.

This book is a comprehensive study of all the county's 300 plus lodges. Preliminary chapters describe how gate lodges came about, their architecture and how they developed over time. The lodges to the great estates are described in the context of estate history; a tour of the country highlights many of the most interesting other lodges, and a further chapter discusses the lodges to cemeteries. There is a comprehensive gazetteer for the county, describing every lodge, locating it by parish and grid reference, and giving known details of its history.

Published by Hobnob Press for the Wiltshire Buildings Record, October. Paperback. 118 pp.

THE TURBULENT QUAKER OF SHAFTESBURY

One of our members, Sir John Stuttard, has just finished researching and writing a biography of John Rutter (1796 – 1851) entitled *The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury*.

Rutter is best known to Beckfordians as the author, publisher and printer of *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (1823) as well as the various editions of *A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne* published at the time of the sale of the Abbey in 1822 and 1823. He also wrote and published other guide books including *Delineations of North West Somerset*.

But this book will show that Rutter was more than a printer and publisher. He was a polymath: a social and political reformer, public servant, lawyer and philanthropist. He challenged the corrupt and nepotistic Council of the Corporation of Shaftesbury, where he lived.

He was involved in promoting the South Western Railway, the local gas lighting works, schools, and the House of Industry, as well as total abstinence and the abolition of slavery. As a Quaker, he was committed to bringing about change to help the poor, promote education and literacy

and ensure greater equality and fairness.

The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury will be published in November by Hobnob Press on behalf of the Shaftesbury & District Historical Society, a charity which owns Gold Hill Museum in Shaftesbury, to whom net sale proceeds of this book will accrue.

HENRY VENN LANSDOWN'S GRAVE AND MONUMENT

The landscape painter Henry Venn Lansdown will be well known to Beckfordians as the author of a series of letters published in the *Bath Chronicle* in the summer of 1892 at the instigation of his daughter, Charlotte, and in book form the following year under the title *Recollections of the Late William Beckford of Fonthill, Wilts and Lansdown, Bath*.

As well as producing watercolours of Fonthill Abbey and Beckford's Tower, Henry wrote a tribute to Beckford which was published in the *Bath Herald* on 18 May 1844, reprinted on the 23rd in *The Times* and again in William Gregory's *The Beckford Family* (2nd ed., 1898). In this eulogy, Lansdown said: 'It may well be questioned whether any individual ever united greater knowledge and taste in all the

sister arts... He designed almost every building and piece of furniture that he possessed... His collection of pictures contained selections of the works of almost every painter of eminence in all ages... His house was one vast library; and there was scarcely a book that was not full of remarks in his own writing.'

Henry ended his days not at Bath, as stated in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but at Brislington House, near Bristol, a private mental asylum. He died there in January 1860, and the Death Certificate issued by the Sub-district of Keynsham noted that the cause of death was 'Collapse consequent on an attack of Acute Mania'.

His place of burial was uncertain until recently, when the Bath Record Office's website revealed that it was Bathwick (Old St Mary's and St John's) Cemetery in Bathwick Street, but with no existing memorial

However, there is one in St James's Cemetery (opened in 1862) on the Lower Bristol Road in Bath.



The headstone, which can be seen from the entrance and is reached by walking for about sixty yards after turning half right, reads:

*Sacred to the memory of
Henry Venn Lansdown. Who died
Jan^y 19th 1860. Aged 54 [55]
years.*

*And was interred at the Old
Burial Ground, Bathwick*

*Also Mary Ann, wife of the above
who died March 12th 1874.
Aged 60 years.*

*Also to the memory of Bessie.
Who died Dec^r 21st 1883. Aged
26 [35] years*

*Also Charlotte Lansdown. Who
died August 25th 1910. Aged 68
years.*

Both daughters of the above.

Bessie (Sarah Elizabeth) died unmarried at Bath, aged 35 (not 26 as stated on the headstone), and Charlotte died, also unmarried at Weston-super-Mare. Henry's two

other daughters and four sons are buried elsewhere.

Henry's father, Joseph (c.1778–1867), a coal merchant who outlived his son by seven years, is buried at Bathwick (St Mary's Churchyard) at Smallcombe Vale (Section B1, Plot B.5). Joseph's tombstone reveals that his grandson (a nephew of Henry), Thomas Powell Lansdown, who died at the age of 33 in 1859, was buried in the same grave.

JON MILLINGTON

SCULDUGGERY AT THE MERE

Mrs Gertrude Townshend Mayer in an article 'The Sultan of Lansdown Tower' published in *Temple Bar* in 1900, quoted from William Beckford's letters to his bookseller George Clarke. Mrs Mayer wrote that she had come across the letters while '... spending a few days last summer in a country house'.

As Robert Gemmett outlines in his edition of the Beckford/Clarke correspondence, Mrs Meyer was not using the originals, but a transcript made for the publisher Richard Bentley. These transcripts remained at Bentley's house, The Mere, Upton, Slough, until sold in

1944, via a bookseller, to the American collector Ray Livingstone Murray. The originals of the correspondence were discovered by booksellers during the auction of The Mere in 1961, and eventually became part of H. Bradley Martin's collection which was sold in 1990, and are now on deposit in the Beneicke Library.

The dealer Richard Ford is offering for sale two autographed postcards written by the bibliophile, antiquarian bookseller, and author of the well-known *ABC for Book Collectors* John Carter (1905 - 1975) about the disappearance of the letters during the auction. In one, to the collector and dealer Ronald Hyde, Carter writes 'My old friend Mrs Bentley has asked me to look into the question of letters and other papers, including the William Beckford ... I have had a talk today with her lawyer. I should much like to know just what you saw & said'. The second, to Mrs Bentley, 'I spent the whole day yesterday wading & probing at Hetheringtons, & I am afraid the Beckford are not there'.

John Carter pursued the matter in the pages of the TLS, telling whoever removed the letters should know that he was on the lookout for them. Richard Ford, in his catalogue description, writes that Ron Hyde told him he saw dealers 'concealing the Beckford

letters behind their back (having done surreptitious digging in the house as dealers do!) while asking Mrs Bentley if a minor lot would be worth a fiver to her'.



The Mere, Upton c.1920

HMS BECKFORD

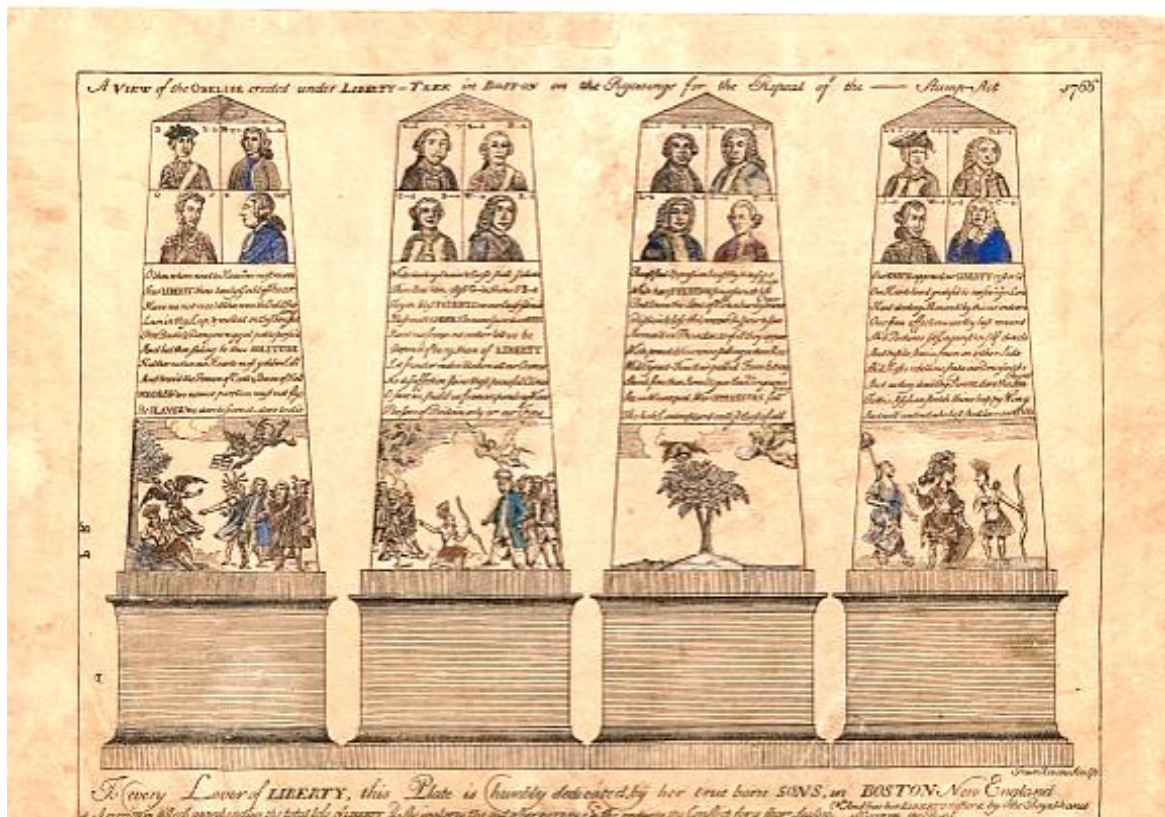
HMS Beckford was one of 20 Ford-class patrol boats built for the Royal Navy in the 1950s. Their names were chosen from villages ending in *-ford*. This one being named after Beckford, Worcestershire. After various changes of name, the ship was broken up in 2017.

A DELIGHT ...

'On Tuesday we went to the Beckford exhibition at Dulwich, which was a delight'.

Sir Roy Strong's diary entry, 18 March 2002, in *Scenes and Apparitions. Diaries 1988 -2003*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 2016.

THE OBELISK OF LIBERTY



To celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act an obelisk was erected on Boston Common on 22 May 1766.

Each of the four sides portrayed one phase in the struggle against the Stamp Act. The first, America in distress apprehending the total loss of Liberty. The second, America appeals to British patriots. The third, America endures the conflict for a short season. And the fourth, Liberty restored by the hand of George III. At the top are ten lines of verse, and portraits of the sixteen worthies who defended American liberty, including that of Alderman Beckford

Designed by Paul Revere (1735 – 1818) the obelisk was made of translucent oiled paper on a thin frame, illuminated from within by 280 lamps. Fireworks were attached to the obelisk which caused it to catch fire. All that remains is Revere's engraving of his creation.