

## REX WHISTLER



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Rex Whistler. The Fonthill Gateway.

Illustration courtesy of Salisbury Museum

The artist and illustrator Rex Whistler (1905 – 1944) was often in Wiltshire. He was a friend of Stephen Tennant, who lived at Wilsford, and of Siegfried Sassoon who lived at Heytesbury. But it was his friendship with Edith Olivier, who lived in Wilton, that brought him most frequently to the county.

In 2013, the Salisbury Museum acquired his archive consisting of thousands of drawings, book illustrations and mural designs.

Rex made sketches wherever he went. In a sketchbook kept in 1926 (1926A) amongst many other architectural details and designs - including 'Design for my tomb' - is a watercolour of the grotto at Amesbury Abbey, and sketches of the entrance gates to Amesbury and Fonthill.

In late 1942, he was undertaking tank training with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Welsh Guards, on the Fonthill Estate, exercises over a landscape once walked by Beckford. He was killed in Normandy in 1944.



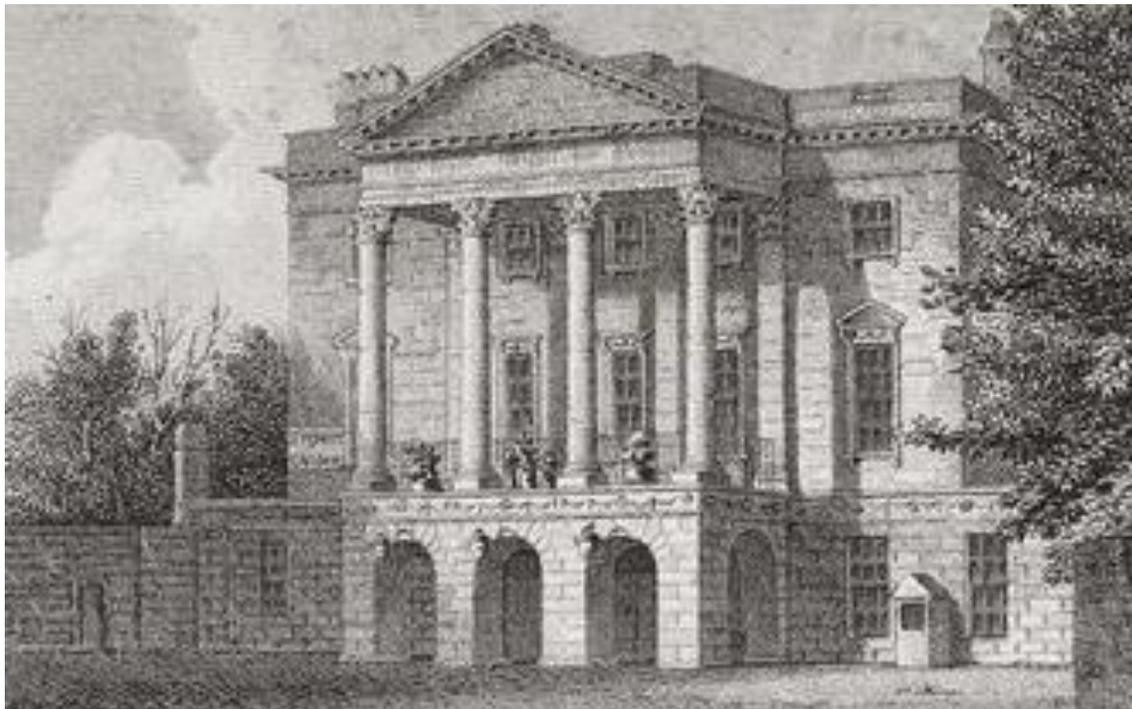
# **THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER**



**NO 50 APRIL 2019**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**SATURDAY 15 JUNE 2019**



**AT THE HOLBURNE MUSEUM**

**BATH**

**BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED**



Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon and A.J., Countess of Devon, with our Chairman, Stephen Clarke; President, Sir Malcolm Jack; and Committee Member, Dr Amy Frost at the Beckford Lecture last November.

## BECKFORD LECTURE 2018

Forty members and guests attended the annual Beckford Lecture on 28 November, when Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon lectured on *When Beckford came to stay: the aesthetic, literary and emotional impact of a weekend at Powderham, Oct 1784*.

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

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## BRITISH SOCIETY FOR EIGHTEENTH CENTURY STUDIES

‘William Beckford: Taste and Variety in Isolation’ was the topic of a panel at this year’s conference of the British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies held at St Hugh’s College Oxford in January. Papers were presented by our Chairman, Stephen Clarke, together with Amy Frost, Marion Harney, and Tom Keymer.

AGM 2019  
SATURDAY 15 JUNE

This year's Annual General Meeting will again be held at the Holburne Museum, in Bath. We last met at the Holburne in 2014.

After lunch, Dr Amy Frost will talk on 'William Beckford in the Wilderness: isolation and retreat at Fonthill and Bath'.

A leaflet about the AGM is enclosed with this Newsletter.

BECKFORD LECTURE 2019

We are pleased to announce that Dr Stephen Lloyd will give this year's lecture, "A fairy palace" and "a desert of magnificence": Richard Cosway's Stratford Place and William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey'.

Stephen Lloyd is a historian of art, and Curator of the Derby Collection, Knowsley Hall, Merseyside. He curated the Richard & Maria Cosway: Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion exhibition (NPG Edinburgh and London, 1995-6). He worked as Senior Curator of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

The lecture on Thursday 17 October, at the Travellers Club, London SW1, will be followed by dinner.

OLD FONTHILL ABBEY  
GROUNDS

The grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sundays 5 and 19 May.  
10.30am – 5.00pm.



Visitors will be able to explore marked paths through bluebell woods, rhododendrons and around Bitham Lake. (please note: some paths are steep and rugged). The grounds will close in high winds.

Refreshments all day: barbecued sausages, soup and cakes.

In aid of ParkinsonsUK and local charities. Donations at the gate.

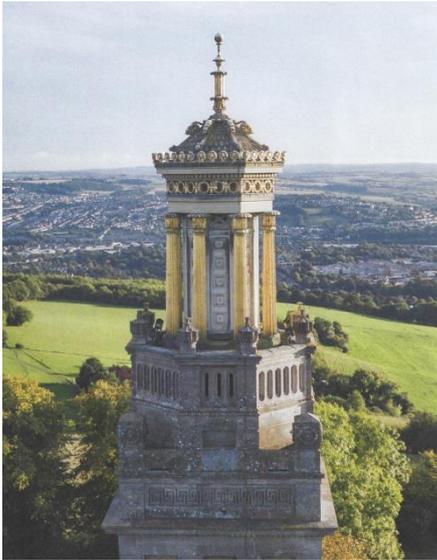
Entry is by Stonegate Lodge SP3 6SP on the Hindon – Newtown Lane.

THE LANDMARK TRUST

The Landmark Trust flat at Beckford's Tower will be open to the public on Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 September, 10.00am – 4.00pm.

The History Albums relating to each Landmark Trust property, including Beckford's Tower, are now available on line. [www.landmarktrust.org.uk/about-us/history-albums](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/about-us/history-albums) .

## BECKFORD'S TOWER



### ‘OUR TOWER’

We are very excited to announce that the National Heritage Fund bid for a major project at Beckford's Tower has been submitted. We will find out by mid-June if we have been successful in securing the first phase funding.

This project is driven by conservation needs of Beckford's Tower which led to the building being placed on the National 'At Risk' Register, recognising that despite timely maintenance over the last twenty years we lack the financial resources to meet this urgent need. We are applying now, to make the most of an opportunity to engage with new residents of the housing estate at Ensleigh across the road from the Tower,

which includes a care home, school, and 800 residents.

We are applying for £2,587,900 towards a total project cost of £2,877,400. We are aiming to raise nearly £300,000 that will secure the Tower's future.

These funds will cover conservation works, land acquisition, community projects and new building work including iron window grilles and gates. Special project elements include new footpaths, opening the Grotto Tunnel and basement areas, lighting the top of the Tower, a new roof top walkway, interpretation of the landscape and for the first time, a specially designed museum with new interpretation and narratives about William Beckford. New standards will enable us to display items from Beckford's collection not seen before. A Library and Archive project will make resources available to researchers.

This project relies on us working with many partners and we are thrilled to have the support of colleagues at B&NES, Historic England, The Landmark Trust, and the National Trust, the World Heritage Site Committee and many local groups.

If you can help with the fundraising or feel able to support the project yourself, please contact Claire Dixon at [cdixon@bptrust.org.uk](mailto:cdixon@bptrust.org.uk) who will be very happy to hear from you.

I will give an update on progress at the AGM in Bath on 15 June.

AMY FROST  
[afrost@bptrust.org.uk](mailto:afrost@bptrust.org.uk)

## NEWS AND EVENTS

Beckford's Tower is open at weekends until 27 October.

### EXHIBITION AT BECKFORD'S TOWER: *Pictures and Souvenirs*

William Beckford spent a lifetime travelling Europe, visiting famous cities and exploring unusual landscapes. Every destination saw new items enter his collection and every journey resulted in new writings and ideas. He recorded these travels in words but also in images, through artists commissioned to travel with him, or sketches in his own hand. The exhibition explores how Beckford captured his travels at a time before the invention of photography, and how others have recorded their visits to his tower in Bath.

## BECKFORD BOOK GROUP MEETINGS

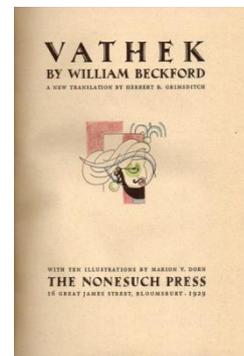
TUESDAY 25 JUNE

*Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier

7.00 - 8.30pm at the Beckford Bottle Shop, Saville Row, Bath . Admission £5 which includes a glass of wine.

TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER

*Vathek* by William Beckford



*Vathek*. Nonesuch Press edition, 1929

7.00 - 8.30pm at Beckford's Tower. Admission £5

## BECKFORD BIRTHDAY LECTURE

WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER

Charles Courtenay, Earl of Devon, will speak about William Beckford's time at Powderham Castle.

The Museum of Bath Architecture  
6.30pm. £10

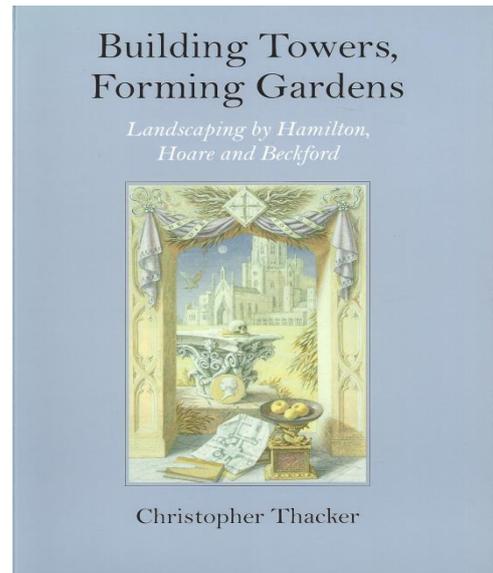
## CHRISTOPHER THACKER

Christopher Thacker the eminent garden historian who wrote about the Fonthill landscape, died on 22 September.

Thacker published works on Voltaire and taught French literature at Reading University before leaving to devote his life to garden history. He was employed by English Heritage as their first Garden Historian, to compile the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England covering 1100 gardens and parks. His books on garden history include *The History of Gardens* (1979) and *The Genius of Gardening: the History of Gardens in Britain and Ireland* (1994).

He was responsible for the gardens and landscape section of the William Beckford exhibition in Salisbury and Bath (1976).

Beckford was a key figure in *The Wilderness Pleases* (1983), his study of the Sublime and the growth of Romanticism. 'I know of no picture of a 'landscape garden' as forbidding as this' he wrote of Turner's view of Bitham Lake. 'This scene is natural, it is sublime; it pleased William Beckford, but it was wilder than any 'garden' had been before, and no one would ever go so far again'.



He returned to Beckford when he explored the relationship between Fonthill and the gardens of Stourhead and Painshill, and the connections between their builders in *Building Towers, Forming Gardens: Landscaping of Hamilton, Hoare and Beckford* (2002).

Many Beckfordians treasure his little book *Masters of the Grotto: Joseph & Josiah Lane* (1976) on the grottoes at Painshill, Stourhead and Fonthill

## PROFESSOR BERNARD NEVILL

The death occurred on 30 January of the textile designer Professor Bernard Nevill, who in 1977 purchased the semi-ruinous stable block of William Burn's Fonthill Abbey, designed in the 1850s for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Westminster.

Nevill was a lecturer at St Martin's and the Royal College of Art 1959 – 74. He was a design consultant and director at Liberty and Co, 1961-1972 when he re-established Liberty Prints as a major source of fashion textiles. He also designed textiles for Sekers International, Cantoni in Italy, Ten Cate in Holland, Unitika in Japan, and KBC in Germany.

He redesigned and supervised the restoration of Lennoxlove (1988-89) and Eastnor, 1989.

In 1975, he bought West House in Glebe Place, designed by Philip Webb for the artist George Bryce. The house with Neville's cluttered and eclectic collection was used for setting for the 1987 film *Withnail and I*.

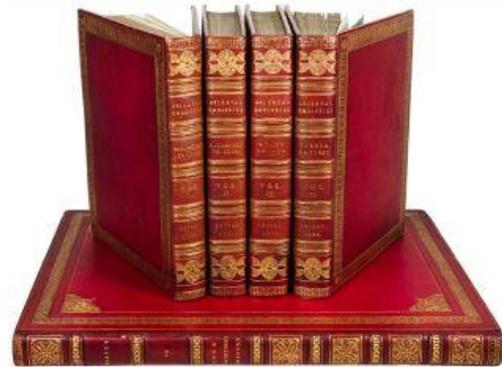
Collecting for Neville was a disease. He told friends he had to rescue beautiful objects, even when he had no use for them.

Although he started restoration of the Fonthill stable block, it was never finished. As Veronica Horwell wrote in the *Guardian* (27 Feb) Neville's 'excitement was in acquiring, planning, planting and rearranging. Another delivery of architectural salvage was forever scheduled: carved staircase, marble fireplace, fragment of a swimming pool'.

Illness forced him to sell both Fonthill and West House in 2011.

In *Who's Who*, he listed his recreations as: looking at large well-built walls and buildings; passionate conversationalist, collector, bibliophile, tree-worship, chamber music.

#### *BRITISH EMBASSIES TO CHINA, BURMA AND TIBET*



Beckford's library was rich in travel books. A New York bookseller is offering Beckford's uniformly bound set of Sir George Staunton, Michael Symes, and Samuel Turner, *The British Embassies to China, Burma and Tibet*, London, 1800. This large paper set of three works in five volumes, has many extra illustrations, including added proof impressions of the plates.

Available from Donald A Heald Books, New York. \$125,000.

#### IN THE AUCTION ROOM

An interesting collection of Beckfordiana was offered at Aldridges, Bath on 29 January, comprising twenty-nine lots of books and manuscripts. Included were works by Beckford, guides to Fonthill Abbey, auction catalogues, biographies and

exhibition catalogues, and even, eighteen volumes of *The Beckford Journal*.

There were books from Beckford's collection. Evesque de Cyropolis, *Histoire des Choses Memorables Advenues en la Primitie Eglise* ..., 1580, bound by C. Lewis, made £780. Philip Thicknesse, *A Year's Journey Through The Pais Bas, or Austrian Netherlands*, 1786, sold for £740. A second edition of *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, 1824, made £210. A first edition of *Vathek*, 1786, made £940.

Perhaps the most interesting lot (255) was an autograph letter from Beckford to the antiquary John Britton. Written from Bath on 11 September 1823, he compliments Britton on his *Illustrations, Graphic & Literary of Fonthill Abbey*. A postscript says: 'Forgive the haste & hurry, I have a great deal to do – fencing, gardening, etc'. This sold for £1,250.

Beckford's copy of John Dunton, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London* ... 1818. Two volumes, which had also been in the collection of Lord Rosebery was sold by Forum Auctions (lot 112) on 7 March for £360.



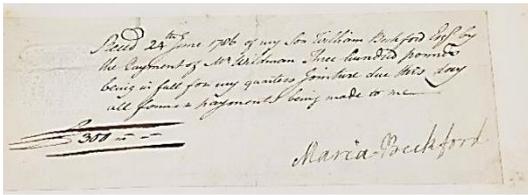
The Raphael from Yeaton Peverey Hall.

Trevanion & Dean's sale on 9 March included paintings and furniture from Yeaton Peverey Hall, Shropshire. One of the paintings (lot 498) a copy of Raphael's Virgin with Christ, John the Baptist and St Elizabeth sold for £2,600. It had previously been sold as part of the collection of Ernest Onians, at Sothebys in Oct 1995 (lot 140), when its provenance was given as 'William Beckford, Fonthill, No 22. His sale lot 273, as P. Veronese'.

In Bonhams sale, in London on 27 March (lot 191) was a collection of autograph letters – principally 19<sup>th</sup> century - contained in several albums and folders. There was one Beckford item: a banker's draft, signed by William Beckford and written from Fonthill on 21 May 1822, drawn on Morlands & Co 'to furnish Chavalier Franchi with £100'. The lot made £7,562 (including buyer's premium).

Gardiner Houlgate, auctioneers in Corsham, Wiltshire, offered on 28 March, a grangerised copy of Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill*, 1823.

Added to the volume was a mezzotint portrait of Alderman Beckford, together with four manuscripts, including, a letter from Alderman Beckford to his Bristol agent, John Curtis.



Mrs Beckford's receipt.

There a signed receipt from Mrs Beckford for her quarterly (£300) jointure; and an invoice and receipt from William Beckford's first bookseller Theophilus Thornton. Also, an invoice, with detailed description of work undertaken, on instruction of John Soane, from the master-mason James Nelson for the Tapestry Room chimneypiece at Fonthill Splendens.

### 'FUNKING BECKFORD'

In past issues, we have noted various writers who have toyed with the idea of writing about Beckford. Here are two more.

RAYNER HEPPENSTALL (1911 - 1981) novelist, literary critic, and BBC producer.

[Lyme Regis] 12 May 1972

'A young second-hand bookseller has just moved down by the bridge from premises up the hill... Browsing, I discovered a copy of the Melville-Marzials parallel-text edition of Beckford's other Arabian tales, to my mind wrongly titled *The Episodes of Vathek*. The shop is called Serendip.

The Beckford acquisition somewhat revived an old project for translating the other tales in the manner if the Rev. Samuel Henley's *Vathek* and regrouping all four as I conceive Beckford may have intended them finally to stand. On the other hand, I had begun to toy with the notion of a murder mystery set in a renamed Lyme Regis ...'

From *The Master Eccentric. The Journals of Rayner Heppenstall 1969 - 1981*. Ed. By Jonathan Goodman. Allison & Busby, 1986. P 96 - 97.

FORREST REID (1875 - 1947) novelist, literary critic and translator.

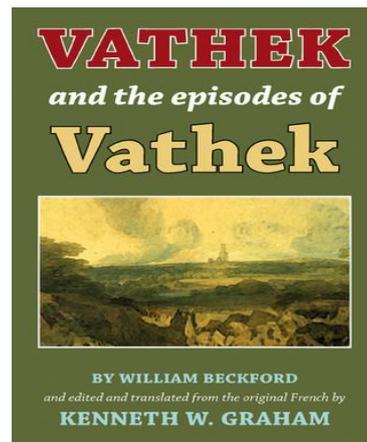
'André Raffalovich had written urging me to do a novel about the youth of Beckford. This he seemed to think would be an ideal subject for me, and his letter was accompanied by Lewis Melville's biography... I read the biography

and could see that despite the contradictions, evasions, and ambiguities, it contained a subject; but obviously there were pitfalls as well, and a great deal of preliminary spade work would be necessary. In fact, the more I pondered the thing, the more difficult it appeared ... I read all of B's published work, except *Azemias* and *Modern Novel Writing* (both unobtainable): but there were private writings, too, one ought to consult, unless everything was to be imagined ... I felt strongly drawn to the experiments in magic, there was the ordinary everyday life lived on a scale far too princely for me to hope to picture successfully. Beckford himself I thought I could do and the mysterious William, and the dabblings in magic, but ... I trust nobody will treat it who is not in sympathy with its astonishing hero; and what, I suppose, tempted me was that I was in sympathy – at any rate with the love of nature, the love of animals, the love of music, the friendship theme, the interest in magic.

After fudging Beckford ... I actually began to take notes for a novel about Chatterton ...'

From Forrest Reid, *Private Road*, Faber & Faber, 1940. Chapter VII.

## VATHEK AND THE EPISODES



A modern edition, in English, of Beckford's *Vathek* and *The Episodes of Vathek* is now available.

Prior to this edition, there were two translations of *Vathek*, those by Samuel Henley (1786), and Herbert Grimsditch (1929).

Sir Frank Marzials, the translator of *The Episodes* (1912), worked on material provided by Lewis Melville, who found the manuscript among the Beckford Papers. There were several drafts and Melville chose the most clearly written one made by an amanuensis in the 1820s.

Kenneth W. Graham, a distinguished Beckford scholar, provides new translations based on an examination of early editions and manuscripts.

xvi + 244 pages. Hardback. £75  
Brighton, Edward Everett Root  
Publishers, 2019  
ISBN 978-1-9-12224-57-9

## WILLIAM BECKFORD IN *THE RADIO TIMES*

EDMUND VALE'S delightful *Curiosities of Town and Countryside*, published by Batsford in the autumn of 1940, contained a colour frontispiece of Maddox's 1844 view of Beckford's Tower from the east and a small photo of the Tower facing page 128, yet neither are mentioned anywhere in the text.

However, this lacuna was redeemed by Eric Fraser's splendid wood engraving of Fonthill Abbey on page 142 executed for *Radio Times*.



Woodcut by Eric Fraser

It accompanied Denis Constanduros's half-hour play, 'The Caliph of Fonthill', broadcast on 9 September 1940. The play was repeated on 2 May 1944, the centenary of Beckford's death.

Now, thanks to a new BBC website, <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/>, the contents of every issue of *Radio Times* going back to its first appearance in 1923 and continuing up to 2009 are available online. This means that you can call up the page of *Radio Times* from 1940 where Eric Fraser's engraving first appeared, and the cut-down version from 1944.

Searching for Beckford and Fonthill produces some fascinating results, including long-forgotten talks and readings from his *Travel Diaries*.

Looking at this invaluable website reminded me that after Denis Constanduros's later play about Beckford, 'The Romantic Sickness' was broadcast on Radio 4 on 30 May 1978, I wrote to him in Salisbury to ask if he by any chance had a spare copy of the script. He very kindly send me one, and I see from the top page (of thirty-four A4 size) that it was recorded in Christchurch, Bristol, on 6–7 July 1977. He died on 23 October 1978, aged 68.

JON MILLINGTON

