

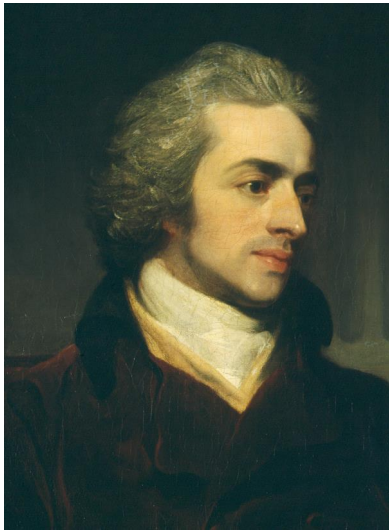


# THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 51 SEPTEMBER 2019

THE BECKFORD LECTURE



DR STEPHEN LLOYD

*“A fairy palace” and “a desert of magnificence”:  
Richard Cosway’s 20 Stratford Place and William  
Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey.*

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2019  
AT 6.30 PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB  
106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1

## AGM 2019

Thirty-two members attended the Annual General Meeting at the Holburne Museum, in Bath.

We were pleased to welcome Thomas Sheppard, Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust and Caroline Kay, Chief Executive, who outlined the scope of the Beckford Tower development project which included essential conservation work to the lantern and new window grilles. The project would engage with the local community, and the redesigned museum would have new interpretations and narratives about William Beckford.

An application had been submitted to the National Heritage Fund. If approved, the Beckford Tower Trust would need to raise £400,000. Caroline welcomed hearing from members, who would be kept informed of the project's progress.

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

The day ended with a visit to the library at 19 Lansdown Crescent. It was fascinating to see this

Beckford interior with its mahogany bookcases, divided by yellow scagliola pilasters.

We are very grateful to Michael Forsyth and Marion Harney for so kindly welcoming us and revealing the history of the room, and even allowing us to look into cupboards to see the drawers, in all sizes, in which Beckford kept his collections.

## BECKFORD LECTURE 2019

Dr Stephen Lloyd will give this year's lecture, "'A fairy palace" and "a desert of magnificence": Richard Cosway's 20 Stratford Place and William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey'.

Stephen Lloyd is a historian of art, and Curator of the Derby Collection, Knowsley Hall. 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.

A booking form is enclosed.

COVER ILLUSTRATIONS:  
John Hoppner, *William Beckford* (Salford Museum and Art Gallery, currently on loan to Beckford's Tower); Richard Cosway, *Self-portrait in Vandyke Dress* (National Trust, Attingham Park)

## PROFESSOR MIRELLA BILLI



Photograph: David Wiltshire

It is with sadness that we record the death of Professor Mirella Billi who died suddenly in April. She was a devoted supporter of the Society and a regularly attended the Beckford Lecture.

She taught at the Universities of Udine and Florence and for many years was a professor at the University of Viterbo, where she was director of the School of Foreign Languages and Literature.

Her translation into Italian of Beckford's *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* was published in 1995. She gave the Beckford Lecture in 2003 on Italy's impact on Beckford. Members who came on our Naples tour in 2007 will remember her reciting, by heart, passages of Leopardi standing beside the

column which covers the poet's grave in Parco Virgiliano.

We will greatly miss her presence at our meetings, for her wide-ranging knowledge, charm and sense of style. Her influence will continue for she had a wide family of students and colleagues, for whom she was a very special person.

A tribute by Francesca Saggini will appear in this year's *Beckford Journal*.

### A VISIT TO POWDERHAM SATURDAY 4 APRIL 2020

We are planning a visit to Powderham Castle, the seat of the Earls of Devon, on Saturday 4 April next year.

Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon, will guide us around the house, grounds and belvedere.

Powderham is six miles south of Exeter. If you are interesting in joining the visit, please let the Secretary know.

#### OLD FONTHILL ABBEY OPEN DAYS 2020

For your diary, the grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sunday 3 and 17 May

## SCOTTISH EXCURSION

Our Scottish tour in May gave us an opportunity to see many of the pictures and objects inherited by Beckford's daughter, Susan Euphemia, Duchess of Hamilton.

We started in Edinburgh with a visit to the National Museum where Dr Godfrey Evans showed us Beckford and Hamilton items.

Next, we went to Lennoxlove a 15<sup>th</sup> century Pele tower extended over subsequent centuries and purchased by the 14<sup>th</sup> Duke of Hamilton in 1946. It is a virtual gallery of Hamilton family portraits with furniture and objects from Hamilton Palace.

On our second day, we went to the Hamilton Mausoleum commissioned in 1842 by the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke to designs by David Hamilton and completed by David Bryce and Alexander Ritchie five years after the duke's death. At Bent Cemetery, David Mason, a descendant of Alderman Beckford, laid a wreath on the Hamilton memorial commemorating members of the Hamilton family, including Susan Euphemia, wife of the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke, who was re-interred here in 1921 when the mausoleum seemed in danger of collapse due to coal mining.

Lunch was at Chatelherault, designed by William Adam as a hunting lodge and kennels for the

5<sup>th</sup> Duke, before we travelled to Ardrossan for the ferry to Arran.



At Brodick Castle, Bet McLeod talks about items from Beckford's collection.

On Arran, we visited Brodick Castle a Hamilton dower house, which was enlarged and transformed for Beckford's grandson the 11<sup>th</sup> Duke and his wife Princes Marie of Baden. Following the castle's recent restoration, a room devoted to objects once in Beckford's collection has been created.

On our journey back to Edinburgh, we stopped briefly at Eglington Park, site of the celebrated tournament staged in 1839.

We were blessed with good weather throughout the tour. At each property the guides were knowledgeable and enthusiastic. We owe great thanks to Bet McLeod, who planned and lead the tour, and shared with us her deep knowledge of the Beckford and Hamilton collections.

## BECKFORD'S TOWER

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

EXHIBITION AT BECKFORD'S TOWER: *Pictures and Postcards: Beckford's Souvenirs*

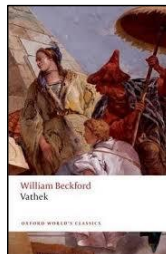
William Beckford spent a lifetime travelling Europe, visiting famous cities and exploring unusual landscapes. Every destination saw new items enter his collection and every journey resulted in new writings and ideas. He recorded these travels in words but also in images, through artists commissioned to travel with him, or sketches in his own hand.

The exhibition explores how Beckford captured his travels before the invention of photography, and how others have recorded their visits to his tower.

Courtney Fleming will lead a *Twilight Tour of Lansdown Cemetery* on 29 and 31 October, 5.00pm – 6.30pm. Tickets £10. Book on Tower's website or tel 01225 460705.

## BECKFORD BOOK GROUP

WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER  
*Vathek* by William Beckford



Oxford World Classics edition, 2013

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 in 1784.

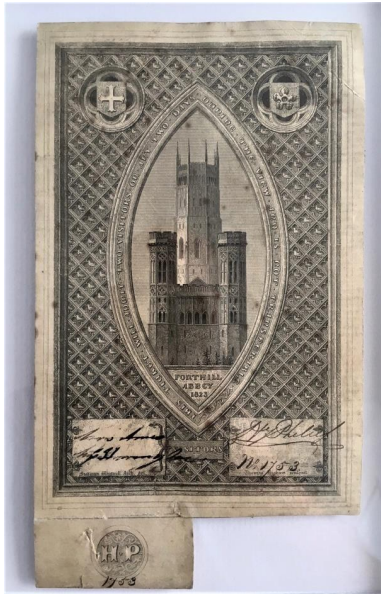
6.30pm.

MUSEUM OF BATH  
ARCHITECTURE

Tickets £15 must be booked in advance.

Visit. [www.beckfordstower.org.uk](http://www.beckfordstower.org.uk)

, IN THE SALEROOM



Dominic Winter's sale on 24 July sold an entry ticket to the Fonthill 1823 sale. Numbered 1753 and signed by the auctioneer Harry Phillips, it sold for £640 (lot 1753).

A large quantity of plans and architectural drawings relating to Fonthill New Abbey designed by William Burn achieved a hammer price of £6,400 at Clarke's, Semley on 8 June (lot 44).

A silver-gilt inkstand by Isaac Linger, London, 1715, engraved twice with the cypher of William III, which possibly belonged to William Beckford before passing to the Dukes of Hamilton, was

sold by Sotheby's on 3 July for £12,500 (lot 106).

A number of books from William Beckford's library have been offered at auction in recent months. At Forum Auctions, London on 30 May, the Beckford-Rosebery-Dalrymple copy of Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes) *Annals of Scotland*. Edinburgh, 1797, in three volumes, bound by Kalthoeber, made £2,600 (lot 364). Also, at Forum Auctions at their sale on 7 March, John Dutton, *The Life and Errors of John Dutton, Citizen of London ...* 1818, in two volumes in a calf binding, with autograph note on front endpaper of vol.1, sold for £360 (lot 112).

At Gorrings's. Lewes on 15 July three books from Beckford's collection were offered for sale. G Russell, *A Tour through Sicily*, 1819, with notes by Beckford made £750 (lot 96).

Beckford's copies of Augustus von Kotzebue's travels were also offered. *Travels from Berlin, through Switzerland to Paris*, 1804, in 3 vols, with 8 pages of Beckford's notes, sold for £3,000 (lot 96A). His *Travels through Italy*, 1806, in four volumes with 10 pages of Beckford's notes, fetched £2,800 (lot 96B). These had earlier been sold in the 1975 Rosebery sale (lots 163 and 164).

Timothy Mowl in *William Beckford: Composing for Mozart* comments on Beckford's obsession with death and burial. One of Beckford's books on death, Jacques Benigne Winslow, *The Uncertainty of Signs of Death*, 1746, was sold by Lawrence's, Crewkerne 6 September for £460 (lot 393).

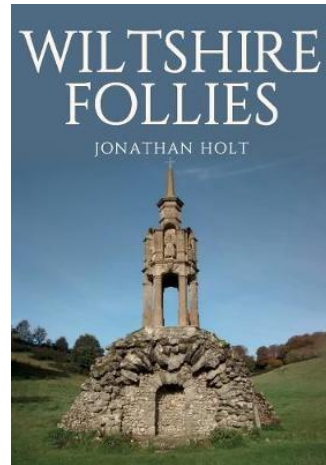
#### BETJEMAN ON FONTHILL

'Fonthill Abbey is chief of the monkish follies, though now nothing remains of it but a magnificent site, a few rare bushes and a small Gothic wing. But the monkish follies were, for the most part, designed to improve the landscape'.

John Betjeman's thoughts on Fonthill are made in an article 'Gentlemen's Follies' published in 1938. His starting point is Lord Berner's Faringdon Folly and the objections to it raised by the local council 'shocked at anyone spending his money in such a purely decorative way – that was the real objection which the local council made, though it never expressed itself honestly'.

*Country Fair. The Country Life Annual for 1938*, and *Coming Home*, 1997 (ed. by Candida Lycett Green) pp 81-84.

#### WILTSHIRE FOLLIES



Fonthill, 'probably the most intriguing estate of all Wiltshire's landed estates', is included in Jonathan Holt's well-illustrated *Wiltshire Follies*, which surveys the county's buildings of architectural fancy.

The author has previously published books on Dorset Follies (2000) and Somerset Follies (2007) and is editor of *Follies*, the magazine of the Folly Fellowship.

Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2019.  
ISBN 978 1 4456 8490 1 (ebook)  
ISBN 978 1 4456 8489 5 (print)



## SOME RECENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Phyllis Richardson, *House of Fiction. From Pemberley to Brideshead, Great British Houses in Literature and Life*, gives a general account of Beckford and Fonthill, with descriptions of Fonthill Splendens and the Abbey. 'Fonthill Abbey lives on, like a ghostly presence, in paintings, drawings and poetry. The name sounds like it should be a novel itself ... It is as if Beckford's greater gift to the Gothic tradition was his fallen abbey, rather than either the built object or his galloping tale of Oriental treasure and necromancy'. London: Unbound, 2017. pp 50 – 59

Mark Purcell, *The Country House Library*, London: Yale University Press, 2017, makes reference to Beckford's books, libraries and sales. pp. 172, 252.

Samuel Rowe, 'Beckford's Insatiable Caliph: Oriental Despotism and Consumer Society'. *Eighteenth Century Studies*. 2019. Vol. 52(2) pp 183-199.



Benjamin West's portrait of Maria Beckford is used as the cover image for an issue of *Early Music* which publishes David Hunter's 'The Beckfords in England and Italy: a case study in the musical uses of profits of slavery'. *Early Music*, 2018. Vol.46 (2) pp. 285-298.

M-C Newbold, 'Gothic piles and cynical follies revisited; a quizzical tour through country house literature of the long eighteenth century' *Nordic Journal of English Studies*. 2018. Vol.17 no.1 pp 85 -103



## BRADSHAW'S 1861 HAND-BOOK

Fonthill Abbey, the largest park in the county, belongs to Albert Morrison, Esq., but formerly the seat of Beckford, the author of that most original eastern story, "Caliph Vathek," who here lived in most selfish retirement, not seeing or being noticed by any one.

Lansdown Hill, 813 feet high ... has a cemetery, two large colleges ... and a striking campanile tower, built by Beckford, of Fonthill, who died here in 1844, and is buried in the cemetery. He wrote "Caliph Vathek," a most original story, which created quite a "furore" in those days. His daughter, the beautiful Sally (sic) Beckford, is Dowager Duchess of Hamilton.

From Bradshaw's *Descriptive Railway Hand-book of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1861

## THE VASTNESS OF THE PANORAMA

'But it is from the summit that the vastness of the panorama, stretching far and away on all sides of Dundry, may be seen in its fullness of grandeur. From the formation of the ground you can almost look quite round you: retracing the view from the heights above Bristol to Ashton, you continue your survey over a wooded vale, bounded by Wraxall and Backwell Hills, and others contiguous to the Channel. From Bishop Sutton in the south the eye passes on over an elevated outline 'further east,' until it pauses upon that singular freak of folly and senility, Beckford's Tower, in the neighbourhood of Bath; so that the vision, if it be not by this time exhausted with admiration, may still pass on in almost uninterrupted survey and a circle to the point from which it started, and rest once more upon the blue summit of the Monmouthshire hills which may be seen rising in the distant background behind Vincent's Rocks'.

The view from Dundry Hill described by John Leech in his 'Churchgoer' article, *Bristol Times*, 28 September 1844, reprinted in John Leech, *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*. Ed. by Alan Sutton. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1982. pp. 141-2

## A BECKFORD CASKET



A Venetian parcel-giltwood, gilt-bronze and rock crystal casket made in about 1600, which once belonged to William Beckford, was sold in Christie's 'Masterpieces from the Rothschild Collection' on 4 July for £731,250.

This was one of a pair of caskets sold at the Fonthill 1823 sale (lots 1142 and 1143 on the twenty-ninth day), when it was described as 'very curious reliquaries' having belonged to Pope Paul V Borghese. Such caskets were traditionally used to house costly linen blessed by the Pope, and given by him to leading Catholic families.

Purchased by Robert Hume at the Fonthill sale on behalf of Robert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grosvenor, and later in the collection of Baron Gustave de Rothschild (1829 – 1911), the pendant casket was sold by Sotheby's, Monaco in 1975, and is now in the Hanns Schell Collection, Graz. It was included in the *William Beckford: An Eye for the Magnificent* exhibition (no. 105)

## VIEWS OF FONTHILL ABBEY PRINTED AT BEDFORD'S LITHOGRAPHIC PRESS

Most of the views of Fonthill Abbey offered during the sales of 1822 and 1823 were line engravings. However, lithographs were also popular, and among the publishers was Thomas Bedford of Bristol, an enterprising stationer and bookseller who was baptised at Warminster in 1778 and died in Bristol in 1862, aged 74. Until recently, three editions of his view of the Abbey were known. In the first, the Abbey is seen from the south west within an oval, and is signed 'BS. 1822.' The oval format was retained for

the second edition, but the entire view was redrawn with the Abbey centrally placed in a slightly more southerly aspect. For the third edition, now rectangular, the image of the Abbey is the same as that in the second edition, but the trees have been redrawn and below the title is the legend 'Bristol. Printed at T. Bedford's Lithographic Press, 23 Broad S<sup>t</sup>.' These editions were described in the catalogue of the *Souvenirs of Fonthill* exhibition of 1994 (Nos. L1, L2 and L3), and listed in the 2001 *Beckford Journal* (p. 57).



A further edition has recently come to light, [illustrated above] identical to the third, but now the image is surrounded by a narrow border, with a neater title. Presumably the first edition was published in 1822, and the other three may well have appeared in the same year, or by 1824 at the latest. Bedford placed an advertisement in *The Bristol Mirror* of Saturday, 27 July 1822: 'LITHOGRAPHY. T. BEDFORD respectfully informs his Friends and the Public that he has added a LITHOGRAPHIC PRESS to his present Establishment as a BOOKSELLER and STATIONER, and to which he solicits their kind patronage and support...'. A month earlier he announced that he had just published nine lithographs of Blaise Hamlet under the title HENBURY COTTAGES and that 'In a few days will be Published EIGHT VIEWS OF BRISTOL SCENERY'. (Abbey, *Scenery*, 1952, No. 72). He published other views, but printing posters and the like was probably the main business of his lithographic press which remained in operation for some twenty years. *Matthews's Directory of Bristol* confirms that it was established at his premises at 23 Broad Street in 1822 and had moved to 49 High Street by the beginning of 1825.

JON MILLINGTON

## ROSSI'S STATUE OF ST ANTHONY



Photograph: Courtney Fleming

John Charles Felix Rossi's statue of St Anthony of Padua is currently on display at the Palacio de Monserrate at Sintra after a three year extension of the original loan to the 'Monserrate Revisited' exhibition which surveyed the collection of Sir Francis Cook.

The statue was acquired by Cook at auction on account of its connection with William Beckford. Cook also acquired the porphyry slab upon which the statue stood when in Lansdown Tower, but is not present at Monserratte.

António Nunes Pereira, Director of Parques de Sintra, has said that the statue will remain on display at Monserrate until the end of May 2021. The statue is the property of a Catholic Community and the Parques de Sintra intends to make a reproduction, as close to the original as possible, to replace the statue once the loan period expires.

COURTNEY FLEMING

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