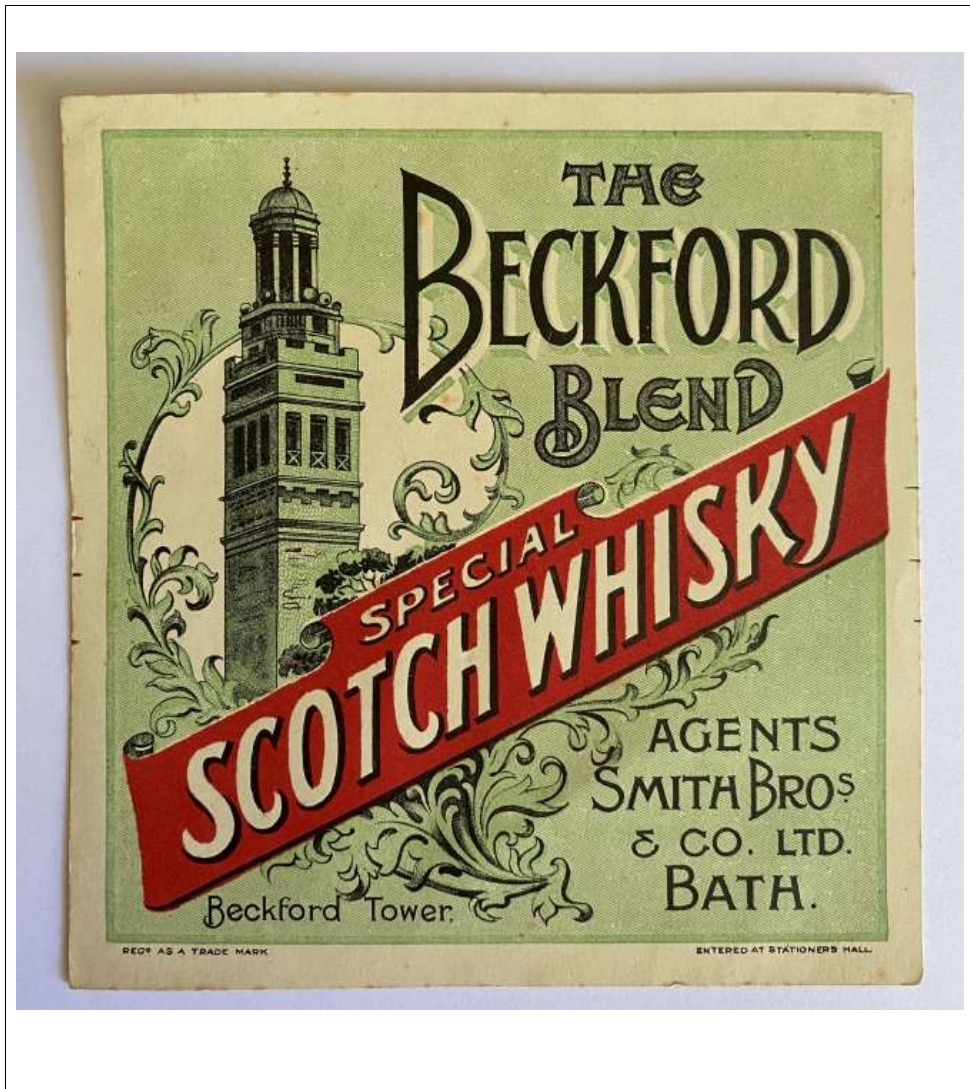




THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

NO 53 SEPTEMBER 2020



THE BECKFORD SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD ON SATURDAY 15 JUNE 2019
AT THE HOLBURNE MUSEUM, BATH

In opening the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Thomas Sheppard, Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust and Caroline Kay, Chief Executive.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Laurent Chatel, Philip Hewat-Jaboor, Jane Holland, Simon Johnson, Roger Lloyd, Jerry Nolan, Bet McLeod, Jon and Pat Millington, Patricia Reynolds and Veronica Watts.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the 23rd AGM held on 2 June 2018 were approved.

3. Chairman's Report

In November at the Travellers Club Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon gave the Beckford Lecture with the intriguing title 'When Beckford came to stay; the aesthetic, literary and emotional impact of a weekend at Powderham, Oct 1784'. This was a fascinating exploration of Beckford's relationship with William Courtenay, which we look forward to seeing it in print in the next *Beckford Journal*.

This January, 'William Beckford: Taste and Variety in Isolation' was the topic of a panel presented by Amy Frost, Marion Harney, Tom Keymer and I at the conference of the British Association of Eighteenth Century Studies held at St Hugh's College, Oxford.

I know that there are members here who took part in the Society's recent Scottish Tour which visited the National Museum in Edinburgh, Lennoxlove, the Hamilton Mausoleum and the newly restored Brodick Castle, with its fabulous collection of Beckford treasures. One poignant moment was when David Mason, a descendant of Alderman Beckford laid a wreath at the Hamilton tomb, in the Bent Cemetery. We are very grateful to Bet McLeod for her work in organising and leading the tour, and for sharing with members her deep knowledge of the Beckford and Hamilton

COVER ILLUSTRATION: Beckford Whisky label for a special blend sold by Smith & Bros from Westgate Buildings in Bath 1909. Beckford Tower Trust.

collections. Bet cannot be with us today, but in sending her apologies, said how much she enjoyed seeing old friends and meeting new; and how stimulating the conversations and questions were.

I should like to pay tribute to Mirella Billi who died suddenly on April. Mirella studied under Marcello Pagnini in Florence and taught at the universities of Udine and Florence. She was for many years professor at the University of Viterbo where she was director of the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

Her knowledge of English literature was wide ranging from Shakespeare through to modern poetry. Her translation into Italian of Beckford's *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* was published in 1995. Four years later she joined the Beckford Society and attended our AGM in Bath in 2000. Thereafter she was a regular presence at our events, especially the Beckford Lecture. She gave the 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 charm, sense of style, humour and strong opinions. Her influence will continue for she had a wide family of former students and colleagues, for whom she was a very special friend indeed. Francesca Saggini has written a tribute which will appear in the *Beckford Journal*.

I must also record the deaths of two early members of the Society. The eminent garden historian Christopher Thacker who wrote about the Fonthill landscape died last September. He was a major contributor to the 1976 Beckford exhibition in Salisbury and Bath, wrote a little booklet *Masters of the Grotto. Joseph and Josiah Lane*, and a book which explored the relationship between Fonthill, Stourhead and Painshill, and the connections between their builders.

And in January, Bernard Nevill, a distinguished fabric designer and former professor at the Royal College of Art died. He purchased the semi-ruinous stable block of Fonthill New Abbey and embarked on its restoration. He collected Beckfordiana, including the smaller version of the Beckford deathbed portrait, which he lent to the Beckford exhibitions in New York and Dulwich.

We were pleased to be able to contribute £500 towards the preparation of drawings for Beckford Tower's Development Project. Later, Caroline Kay of the Bath Preservation Trust will tell us more about the project.

Last year, I mentioned *Fonthill Recovered* edited by Caroline Dakers. It is good to report that the book has been short-listed for the William MB Berger Prize for British Art 2019. To the end of May, the book had been downloaded 6165 times.

Finally, a brief word about membership. Our membership remains at about 200. This was healthy, but it would be helpful to have more members. He asked, once again, for members to spread word about the Society and to encourage any whom might be interested to join.

4. Financial Report

The Treasurer presented the annual accounts. Income was £7,708 and expenditure £7,397 giving a surplus of £311 for the year. The accounts were approved and the Treasurer thanked for her work.

5. Election of Committee

Stephen Clarke and Mike Fraser having completed three years were willing to serve again and were unanimously elected.

6 Future Activities

This year's Beckford Lecture would be given by Dr Stephen Lloyd on ' "A fairy palace" and "a desert of magnificence": Richard Cosway's Stratford Place and William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey', at the Travellers Club on 17 October.

A visit to Powderham Castle would take place on Saturday 4 April 2020.

8. Society Publications

The last issue of *The Beckford Journal* contained Jonny Yarker's lecture on Beckford in Grand Tour Rome, Michael Cousins' Fonthill Miscellany, reviews by our President and John Wilton-Ely, and my examination of Robert Metzdorf's review of the Yale Beckford Bicentenary Exhibition

catalogue. The Editor, Bet McLeod urges members to come forward with their contributions. Finally, we are extremely grateful to the work that Bet McLeod has done as editor.

Last April saw the 50th issue of the *Newsletter*. In our last mailing, we asked whether members would be prepared to receive future issues by e-mail, which would save printing and postage costs. So far around thirty members have opted for the e-mail version; others have expressed a preference for the paper format.

9. Website

Mike Fraer reported that the website had existed for ten years in its present format and it was hoped to move to a more modern server. The site received over 1,000 visitors each month. Four issues of *The Beckford Journal* were now in line and it was hoped to add further volumes. He welcomed views from members on whether there should be a members only area.

10. Any Other Business

Chris Purser suggested that the Society should make video recordings of lectures which could be available on line.

Amy Frost advised the meeting that Charlie Courtenay would give the Tower's Beckford Birthday Lecture at the Museum of Bath Architecture on 2 October.

Sir Malcolm Jack thanked the Chairman and Committee for their work. His remarks were warmly endorsed by the meeting. 11. Date of Next Meeting

The next AGM would be on Saturday 6 June 2020.

A LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

September 2020

Dear Member,

Like many other organisations our activities have been disrupted by Covid-19. Normally I would have reported to you at the Annual General Meeting, but as this is not possible this year, I thought I would write instead.

It was good to see both familiar and new members at last year's AGM held at the Holburne Museum in Bath on 15 June. We were pleased to welcome Thomas Sheppard, Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust and Caroline Kay, Chief Executive who told us about the Beckford Tower development project. In the afternoon, Amy Frost lectured to us on 'William Beckford in the Wilderness: isolation and retreat at Fonthill and Bath'.

A special treat of our Bath day was the opportunity to visit Beckford's library at 19 Lansdown Crescent with its mahogany bookcases and yellow scagliola pilasters. We are very grateful to Michael Forsyth and Marion Harney for their generous welcome and telling us about the history of the room.

Some forty members and guests attended the Beckford lecture on 17 October, when Dr Stephen Lloyd lectured on " 'A fancy palace' and 'a desert of magnificent'", in which he compared Richard Cosway's London house at 20 Stafford Place with Fonthill Abbey. Members can look forward to reading the lecture in this year' *Beckford Journal*.

The lecture took place once again at the Travellers Club and was followed by dinner in the library. Our first such evening was in 2002 and over the years this event has become something of a tradition. To those members who have not attended, I urge you to come along to what is a very convivial evening. There is no obligation to stay to dinner for those who want to just attend the lecture.

For some time a visit to Powderham Castle has been on our list of places to visit. Charlie Courtenay's lecture in 2018 was an appropriate introduction for such an excursion, so it was particularly disappointing that our visit this April had to be cancelled. However, we have re-arranged the visit for Saturday 17 April next year.

We also regret that this year's AGM at Painshill had to be cancelled, but hope to that it will be possible to meeting to be held there next year.

The latest *Beckford Journal* was the 25th. Looking back over previous issues one is impressed by the range and depth of over 200 articles covering multiple facets of Beckford's character, works and interests, and also the fascination he has engendered in so many writers and scholars. The Society owes a debt to the editors (Jon Millington, Richard Allen, and Bet McLeod) for their work. We must also thank the contributors without whom there would be no Journal.

The Society's website, to which I must thank Mike Fraser for his work, attracts over 1,000 visitors each month and is the route by which most new members learn about and join the Society.

Finally, may I plead with you to spread word about the Society and encourage your friends and acquaintances to join.

I look forward to seeing you at future events, once the uncertainty caused by Covid-19 has passed.

Stephen Clarke

**THE INTERNATIONAL BECKFORD SOCIETY
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2020

| | 2019-2020 | | | 2018-2019 | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| | Income | Expenditure | Net Income | Income | Expenditure | Net Income |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Subscriptions | 2,713 | - | 2,713 | 3,384 | - | 3,384 |
| Gift aid repayment | 293 | - | 293 | 275 | - | 275 |
| Journal | - | 1,422 | (1,422) | - | 1,262 | (1,262) |
| Newsletters | - | 715 | (715) | - | 267 | (267) |
| Publications | 109 | - | 109 | 471 | - | 471 |
| Annual General Meeting | 669 | 753 | (84) | 825 | 1,051 | (226) |
| Annual dinner | 2,448 | 2,266 | 181 | 2,720 | 2,679 | 41 |
| Annual lecture | - | 1,149 | (1,149) | - | 722 | (722) |
| Trips/tours | 20,300 | 16,318 | 3,983 | - | - | - |
| Bibliography | - | 959 | (959) | 34 | 14 | 20 |
| Postage & misc. expenses | - | 873 | (873) | - | 903 | (903) |
| Donations | - | - | - | - | 500 | (500) |
| | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| | 26,532 | 24,456 | | 7,708 | 7,397 | |
| | ===== | ===== | | ===== | ===== | |

Net income / (deficit) for the year before FX movements **2,076** **311**

Unrealised gains/(losses) on FX movements 66 53

Net income/(deficit) for the year **2,142** **364**

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2020

| | 2020 | 2019 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| | £ | £ |
| Bibliography stock at cost less provisions | - | 959 |
| Sundry debtors | - | - |
| Deposits paid in advance | - | 13,208 |
| Cash at bank and on hand | 10,123 | 13,811 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total assets | 10,123 | 27,978 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Deposits received in advance | - | 20,020 |
| Sundry creditors | 873 | 851 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total liabilities | 873 | 20,871 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Net assets | 9,249 | 7,107 |
| | ===== | ===== |

RESERVES

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| Income reserve b/fwd | 7,107 | 6,743 |
| Net income for the year | 2,142 | 364 |
| | ----- | ----- |

Income reserve c/fwd **9,249** **7,107**

[signed]

BECKFORD SOCIETY EVENTS 2021

SATURDAY 17 APRIL

VISIT TO POWDERHAM CASTLE

Tour of Castle and Grounds

This is our postponed visit from April this year. Priority allocation of tickets will be given to those members who booked for the 2020 visit.

SATURDAY 5 JUNE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

And Guided Tour of Landscape

Painshill Park, Surrey

THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER

BECKFORD LECTURE AND DINNER

*'Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton and Hamilton Palace:
The awe-inspiring demonstration of the exalted status of the premier peer of
Scotland, and some final additions from the Beckford Bequest'.*

Dr Godfrey Evans.

Principal Curator of Decorative Arts

National Museums Scotland

Travellers Club, London SW1

Further information will be in the next Newsletter

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

University College London's Legacies of British Slave-ownership database provides a wealth of information on British slave-owning families and their estates in the colonies, together with the impact of slave-ownership on modern Britain.

The project is developing the first systematic analysis of the extent and significance of slave-ownership in the formation of modern Britain. Drawing on the census of slave-owners in the British empire created by the Slave Compensation Commission in the 1830s to manage the £20m paid in compensation to slave-owners on the liberation of colonial slaves.

The project documents people in nineteenth-century Britain who either owned slaves or otherwise benefitted financially from slavery, and examines the different legacies of slave-ownership.

The database includes members of the Beckford family and their associates.

www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs

BECKFORD LECTURE

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this year's Beckford Lecture has been postponed until 2021.

MICHAEL RUSSELL (1933 – 2020)

The death occurred on 25 March of Michael Russell, described in the *Telegraph's* obituary as 'publisher, wit and author, especially notable in the latter capacity for writing the spoof memoir *Fly Fishing: Memories of Angling Days* (1991) by J R Hartley'.

Education at Rugby and Christ Church was followed by National Service with the Blues and Royals in Cyprus. After a period spent on the Turf in which he moved from betting to ownership, he turned to publishing.

In 1973 he joined Julian Berry to form Compton Russell, and in 1977 established Michael Russell publishing. Volumes under his imprint have a distinctive house style: well produced, elegantly laid out, and often designed by Humphrey Stone. Books that would have met William Beckford's exacting standard.

There were Beckford works among the 500 titles. First, James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford* (Compton Russell, 1976), and then Virginia Surtees, *A Beckford Inheritance. The Lady Lincoln Scandal* (Michael Russell, 1977). He published Robert J Gemmett's edition of Beckford's correspondence with his bookseller George Clarke under

the title *The Consummate Collector*, 2000, in an edition of 450 copies. In 2003, appeared Gemmett's *Beckford's Fontill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon*.

He was extremely helpful to the Beckford Society in seeing Jon Millington's *William Beckford: A Bibliography* (2008) through the press. Not only did he negotiate with the printer, but generously dispatched copies of the finished book to subscribers.

JON WYNNE-TYSON (1924-2020)

Jon Wynne-Tyson, author, publisher, Quaker, activist and pacifist died on 26 March. He founded and ran Centaur Press for over forty years, selling it in 1998. Among the books he published was Boyd Alexander's study of Beckford, *England's Wealthiest Son* (1962). In 1972, he published in the Travellers' Classics series, William Beckford's *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha*, together with Beckford's original journal for 1794, with an introduction and notes by Boyd Alexander.

Wynne-Tyson's autobiographical volume, *Finding the Words: A Publishing Life*, was published by Michael Russell in 2004.

THE TURBULENT QUAKER OF SHAFTESBURY

John Stuttard's study of John Rutter *The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury*. (Gloucester: Hobnob Press for Shaftesbury & District Historical Society, 2018) is reviewed by Rod Harper in the latest issue of *Journal of Friends Historical Society*.

Rutter was a birthright Quaker and Quaker principles pervade all of his many undertakings. Rutter's interests were far and wide. He initially worked as a stationer, printer and bookseller, and then as a druggist and chemist. He went on to train as a lawyer and became a successful attorney.

He played a major part in the long campaign against the self-perpetuating oligarchy which ran Shaftesbury and the way in which this and other towns elected members of parliament. He wrote or was involved in writing twenty-three books and pamphlets, including the volumes on Fonthill.

The reviewer's conclusion is that: 'This is a very readable book, meticulously researched, full of information about the period as well as the man himself. It is well illustrated and as a bonus Stuttard has helpfully translated early 19th-century currency values into those of today'.

BECKFORD'S TOWER

Our Tower: Reconnecting Beckford's Tower and Landscape for all

Covid -19 has had an inevitable impact on development plans, but work has started on recruiting the project team, on the leaning programme and in transcribing Beckford's letters.

The project has a fundraising target of £58,000 for the development phase, which needs to be raised by June 2012. The project is grateful to Historic England who have recently confirmed a grant of £10,000, and to the other generous individuals and groups who have supported the campaign so far. Donations of any size will be gratefully received and can be sent by cheque (made payable to the Beckford Tower Trust) to Our Tower Project, c/o 1 Royal Crescent, Bath BA1 2LR.

Educational Resources

The Tower has formed a partnership with Bath Abbey to create educational resources for Primary and Secondary schools to explore Bath and its links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Both the Abbey and Tower have strong connections with this period of history: William Beckford's vast fortune was derived from his sugar plantations in Jamaica, and there are a high number of Abbey memorials to people who lived in

the West Indies, making money from crops harvested by enslaved people. We are working together to create high quality resources and workshops with an aim to make black history more visible in the curriculum. A wealth of newly researched resources including archive material and artefacts will encourage students to learn about and reflect on the impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade through the centuries and its legacy which is still experienced today.

Ruth Yoxon, Activities Officer,
Bath Preservation Trust.

Volunteer Transcription Project

Sixteen volunteers are currently engaged in transcribing William Beckford's letters as part of the *Our Tower* project. During lockdown and beyond, the Transcription Team have been quietly transcribing at home, painstakingly reading letters from digital images, the originals preserved at the Bodleian Library. About sixty letters have been transcribed clocking up over 160 hours of volunteer time. We are very grateful for all the time and effort which has gone into the transcription project so far and would like to say 'thank you' to all the volunteers. Beckford's handwriting is challenging and

some words and phrases are frustratingly illegible. He writes in French as well as English in a self-absorbed, gossipy and exuberant style. We aim to get as many first drafts as possible so that information from the letters will increase our knowledge about Beckford's life, provoke discussion and debate and will help us to tell the story of William Beckford in his own words.

Jo Johnston, Project Archivist.

The Truth Behind the Beckford Surname

In 2007 Prof Robert Beckford visited the Tower to film a television programme looking at reparation for the British Transatlantic Slave Trade. In between takes he told us his story about how he first understood where his surname came from when watching *Roots* on TV as a teenager, and what that surname, forced upon his enslaved ancestors on Beckford owned plantations, meant to him. It is a story that has stayed with us at the Tower throughout the years of developing and raising funds to start *OurTower* project. We want to design a museum where the realities behind Beckford's wealth and social exile, are told with real honesty. The Beckford family's slave ownership is central to this, and the last five months have

reinforced how important it is that this story is told. Robert Beckford and members of his family are working with us to tell the black history of the Beckford surname, and we hope to encourage more people to get involved and help us explore what it means to be a black Beckford in Britain today.

Amy Frost, Senior Curator, Bath Preservation Trust

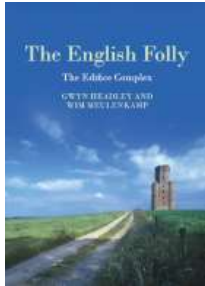


A snapshot of our *Composing Airs: Beckford and Music* display which a handful of lucky visitors saw across two weekends in March before we went into lockdown

Beckford's Tower: Let us know what you think! Various dates – September – October 2020

A limited number of visits to the Tower (which is currently closed to the public) is being offered for single households or bubbles of up to 6 people. There is no charge, but each group is being asked to allow 20 -15 minutes at the end of the visit to complete a questionnaire about their experience.

THE ENGLISH FOLLY



Since Barbara Jones' pioneering *Follies and Grottoes* (1953) there have been many books on follies written from a topographical or architectural viewpoint. Now Gym Headley and Wim Meulenkamp in *The English Folly: The Edifice Complex* (Liverpool University Press for English Heritage, 2020) investigate the lives and motives of the builders.

There are eccentrics such as Mad Jack Fuller, Sir George Sitwell and Lord Berners but others prove to be unremarkable squires, like John Newman of Barwick Park in Somerset, who built four quite extraordinary follies as boundary markers.

William Beckford is included, with an outline of his life and a short account of Fonthill. Illustrations include Wild's watercolour of the abbey with its unbuilt spire; an entrance ticket to the 1823 Fonthill sale; and a recent view of the surviving section of the abbey.

The account of the Hoares of Stourhead, includes the anecdote of Richard Colt Hoare being censured by his fellow country gentlemen for visiting Fonthill and consorting with Beckford. The final reference to Beckford is in the description of Painshill and the antique statue of Bacchus, 'which could have been bought by Beckford, and destroyed when Fonthill collapsed in [sic] 1824'. The statue was in fact bought by Beckford and displayed in the Grand Dining Room at Fonthill Splendens until sold in 1807. It is possibly this statue that is now at Anglesey Abbey.

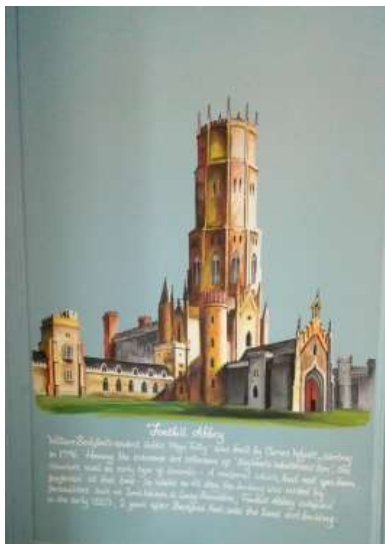
FONTHILL ESTATE

The Sunday Telegraph (14 June) had an article by Arabella Young, based on an interview with Lord Margadale, which considered the effects of Covid-19 on the Fonthill Estate and its tenants and looked at plans for the future.

The gardens of Fonthill House could not open this year, but will open for charity on 21 March, 9 May and 6 June 2021.

A FONTHILL MURAL

Coffee drinkers in Shaftesbury can now enjoy their cappuccino or espresso looking at a mural of Fonthill Abbey.



Mural by Robert Amos

The expanding coffee bar chain Coffee#1 uses artist Robert Amos for their decorative schemes. He researches local history and culture to inspire his murals, and Fonthill Abbey is among those created for the Shaftesbury branch..

Coffee#1, 26 High Street,
Shaftesbury.

BECKFORD'S PICTURES

'Here we spend our life putting up and taking down pictures', Beckford wrote from Fonthill in June 1818.

Have you ever wondered if Beckford owned a picture by a particular artist? One useful place to look is the on-line Getty Research Institute's Provenance Index, which lists over 600 records relating to pictures and sculpture once in his collection, based on entries in auction sale catalogues.

For more information on Beckford as a collector of paintings, see Jeannie Chapel's essay 'William Beckford: Collector of Old Master Paintings, Drawings and Prints' in the exhibition catalogue *William Beckford, 1760 -1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*. Yale University Press, 2001.

www.getty.edu/researchtools/provenance

BECKFORD WINS £10 DAMAGES

At the Salisbury Assizes 'A cause was also tried upon an action brought by William Beckford, esq; of Fonthill against the Rev. John Nairn of Hindon for shooting at swans, geese, and ducks, near Fonthill House --- Verdict for the plaintiff, with £10 damages'.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, Thursday 6 August 1789.

AROUND THE BOOK DEALERS



A volume containing seven items relating to Fonthill Abbey and the sale of the contents in 1823 is offered by Jarndyce, the London antiquarian bookseller. John Rutter's *A Description Guide to Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, is included together with four Phillips' sale catalogues covering 37 days of the sale. Bound in as frontispieces are two admission cards issued to Mr and Mrs Drury and 'The Miss Drury's' (sic). £2,250.
www.jarndyce.co.uk

William Beckford's copy of Maria Graham, *Letters on India...*, 1814, in a binding by Charles Lewis with spine decorated with cinquefoils and crosses, is in Bernard Quaritch's catalogue for the New York Book Fair 2020. Beckford's pencil comments on the front free endpaper include a harsh assessment of the author. (No 38) \$4,200.

The catalogue also includes (No 57) a second Beckford book, his copy of James Macdonald, *Travels through Denmark and part of Sweden, during the winter and spring of the present year 1809*. London: for Richard Phillips,

1809, in two volumes. Four pages of Beckford's pencil notes on the flyleaves abstract those passages which most interested him, covering subjects such as the landscape, womenfolk, religion, the observatory at Copenhagen, Danish literature, and Swedish children. On the latter topic he writes, 'Young children (in Sweden) from the age of one to 18 months are wrapped up in bandages ... & suspended from pegs in the wall ... where they exist in great silence & good humour', adding 'God bless them'. \$2,600.

Beckford's copy of John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset, 1796-1815*, in four volumes, is for sale from Burwood Books, Wickham Market, In a Beckford binding with heraldic motifs in the spine compartments and on the leather embossed corners. £3,750. Burwood Books. Tel 017287417.

A manuscript account of a tour from London to the West of England in the summer of 1828, written in a fine calligraphic hand over 126 pages, is for sale by Roger Collicott Books, Widecombe in the Moor, Devon at £2,500.

The traveller gives descriptions of buildings, and of his search for the picturesque often commenting on the fine views out of the stagecoach window. From Devizes

he goes to Bath, Bristol, and then by way of Bridgwater and Taunton to Devon. As he goes out of Bath he sees in the distance the tower recently erected by Mr Beckford 'which is intended as an Observatory'. 'I do not think it will add to his reputation as a Man of Taste' ... though it is difficult to judge ... when viewed at a distance'.

THIÉBAULT'S *SOUVENIRS*

Beckford's copy of an important contemporary memoir of Frederick the Great by Dieudonné Thiébault (1733 – 1807) who acted for many year's as the king's literary adviser is in Forum Auctions, London sale on 25 September, (lot 34) with an estimate of £1,500 – 2,000.



Thielbault's *Mes Souvenirs de Vingt Ans de Séjour a Berlin; ou Frédéric le Grand, sa Famille, sa Cour, son Gouvernement, son Académie, ses Écoles, et ses Amis Littérateurs et Philosophes*, Paris: F Buisson, 1804. In five volumes, in a binding for Beckford possibly by Charles Lewis. With Beckford's extensive pencil notes to front free endpapers (3pp.in vol.

1, 2pp in vol. 3, 1p. each in vol. 2, 4 & 5).

Beckford's notes mainly summarise the text rather than adding comments of his own, but show what he found interesting and act as a kind of index to the most amusing passages. In vol 1. "Mons.r Thiébault en faveur auprès des Chiens de sa Majesté" (p.276) and vol. 5, "Frederic bon Vampire" (p.403).

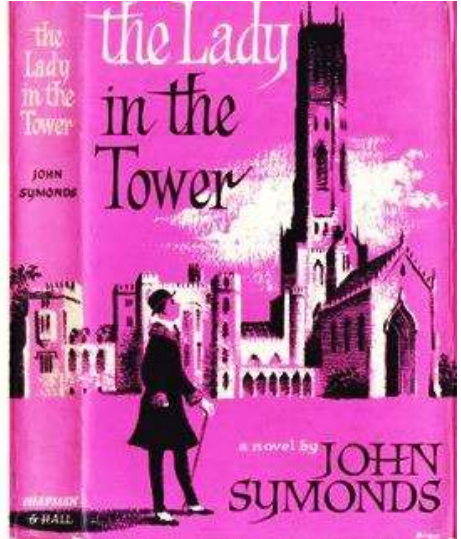
The work was later in the library of the 5th Earl of Rosebery and has his small armorial gilt label.

BECKFORD STUDIES

Simon Rowe writes on Beckford's *Insatiable Caliph: Oriental Despotism and Consumer Society* in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*.52. Winter 2019, pp 183 -199.

Joselyn Anderson (University of Toronto, Mississauga) presented a paper on 'the Fine House of a Caribbean Planter: Public Responses to the Alderman Beckford's Fonthill', at the Houses of Politicians Symposium at Manchester Metropolitan University, 29 – 30 November 2019.

THE LADY IN THE TOWER



THE LADY IN THE TOWER BY JOHN SYMONDS (1914–2006). London: Chapman and Hall, 1955. 215 pp. 19 cm. Book Society recommendation.

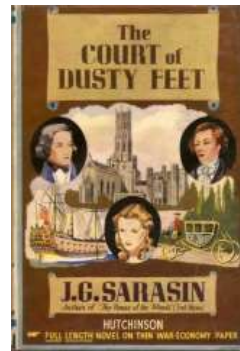
In his long career as an illustrator, Val Biro produced many striking dust jackets, and one of his best was for John Symonds's 1955 novel, *The Lady in the Tower*. At first glance Biro's depiction of Fonthill Abbey looks convincing until it becomes apparent that the south end of the Abbey appears on the left of the Great Western Hall, when it should really be on the right. It was quite a challenge to work out which contemporary view was chosen, and the most likely one turned out to be that from the west south west drawn and engraved by Thomas Higham for Rutter's *New Descriptive Guide* and reissued in *Delineations* (both 1823). Biro produced a freely adapted reverse image of all except the Lancaster Tower and three bays of King Edward's Gallery which he tacked on at the left the normal way round. The result is a triumph.

The setting of the novel is the London art world and a neo-Gothic mansion near Windsor. Charles, the narrator, is a dilettante bachelor living in Brompton Square who is trying to compile a dictionary of Victorian artists, but prefers the research to the actual recording of their lives. From time to time he encounters Amelia, a 'Florentine lady' in search of miniatures, especially those by Nicholas Hilliard, at Sotheby's and Christie's. She lives with her second husband outside Windsor at Sackett's

Court, ‘built by an architect... about a hundred years ago in imitation of Wyatt’s Fonthill Abbey’ (p. 60) ‘in the form of a cross’ (p. 181) with a ‘Two hundred and seventy-one feet’ central tower (p. 93). She invites Charles to stay at Sackett’s Court so that they can work together at the top of the tower on his dictionary. Unfortunately for him, his love for her isn’t returned, and he returns to Brompton Square, while from a gallery high up in the tower she jumps to her death on the floor of the octagon below, disillusioned by the realisation that the Hilliard miniature Charles had given her has proved to be a fake.

Contemporary reviews were favourable on the whole. Oliver Edwards wrote in *The Times* that ‘Mr John Symonds does not take too seriously any of the characters in *The Lady in the Tower*, but tells the story directly and with a touch of elegance which makes it easy to read’, while the *Spectator* described the novel as ‘That rare thing, a fictional oddity it has charm, taste and wit.’ Daniel George in *The Bookman* was moved by ‘This odd and witty novel... entertaining and with a nicely placed *frisson* of horror.’

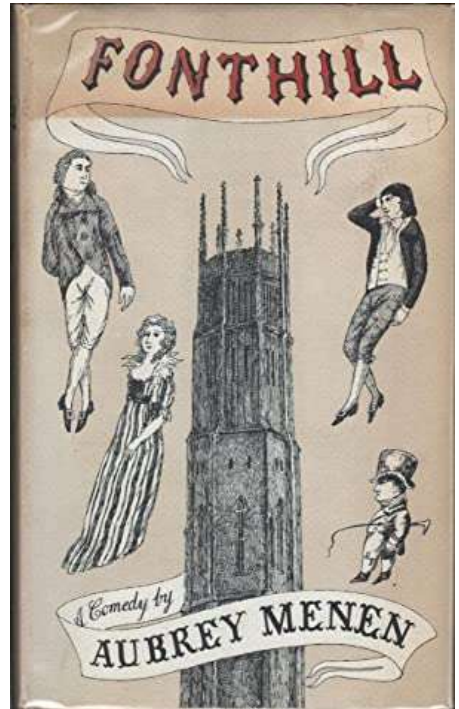
Fonthill Abbey has appeared on the dust jackets of two other novels. In *The Court of Dusty Feet* (1942), by J. G. Sarasin (pseudonym of Geraldine Gordon Salmon) Storer’s south west view of 1812 was copied by an unknown artist. Much of the novels action takes place in and around Fonthill Abbey during the Napoleonic wars. The author acknowledges the help of Mrs Walter Shaw Stewart, then the owner of the estate.



For the American edition of *Fonthill. A Comedy* (1974) by Aubrey Menen, the jacket designed by Edward Gorey depicted the upper part of the central tower surrounded by Beckford, Kitty Courtenay, Louisa and the dwarf, while for the English edition in the following year John Lawrence shows the Abbey from the south across Bitham lake. See illustrations back cover.

JON MILLINGTON

DUST JACKETS FOR *FONTHILL. A COMEDY*



Left, John Lawrence's design for the English edition, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975. On the right, Edward Gorey's design for the American edition, New York: Putnam, 1974,

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