

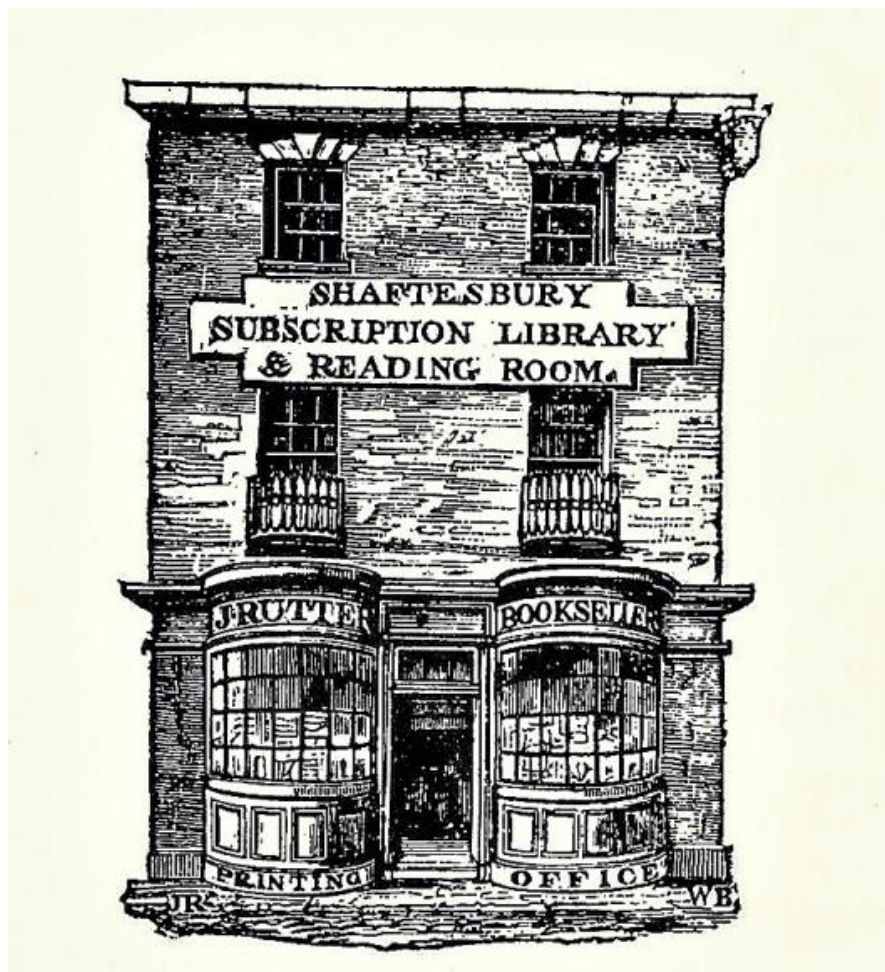


THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

NO. 56 APRIL 2022



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 11 JUNE



AT GOLD HILL MUSEUM
SHAFTESBURY
BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

BECKFORD LECTURE 2021

Forty members and guests attended the annual Beckford lecture on 21 October, when Dr Godfrey Evans lectured on ‘Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton and Hamilton Palace: the awe-inspiring demonstration of exalted status of the premier peer of Scotland, and some final additions from the Beckford bequest’.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year’s AGM will be held at Shaftesbury’s Gold Hill Museum on Saturday 11 June. This is the town of John Rutter the printer and publisher and author of *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*.

It will give members the opportunity to see *Fonthill Fever* a display commemorating the 200th anniversary of the 1822 and 1823 Fonthill sales.

After lunch, we will go to New Wardour Castle, the mansion designed in 1770 by James Paine for the 8th Earl of Arundel, to visit the Catholic Chapel, described as ‘the grandest Catholic church built in England since the reformation.

A booking form for the day is enclosed.

Cover illustration: William Barnes, engraving of John Rutter’s library, bookshop and printing office. Courtesy, Dorset County Museum. (Barnes Collection: Scrapbook VII).

BECKFORD LECTURE 2022

This year’s Beckford Lecture ‘Twilight and Storm: William Beckford and John Robert Cozens’ will be given by Timothy Wilcox .

The lecture (followed by dinner) will be on Thursday 17th November at the Travellers Club, London SW1.

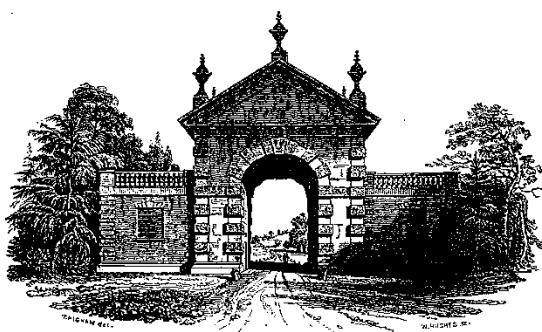
FONTHILL OPEN DAYS 2022



The grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open on Sundays 1st and 15th May (10.30 – 5.00). When visitors will be able to explore marked paths through bluebell woods and around the lake. There will be Beckford books to browse and homemade refreshments all day.

Dogs are welcome on leads. Some paths are steep and rugged. In the event of high winds, the grounds must close.

Donations at gate. Suggest £5+ In aid of ParkinsonsUK and local charities. Enter by Stonegate Lodge SP3 6SP on the Hindon – Newtown lane.



The gardens of Fonthill House, will be open, by kind invitation of Lord Margadale, on Sunday 8th May (12.00 – 5.00), in aid of Beckford's Tower and Museum. Admission £10 on line; £12 on the gate. Children under 12 free. Dogs welcome on leads.

Fonthill House, Tisbury SP3 5RZ.

Book on line at:

www.fonthill.co.uk/gardens

www.beckfordstower.org.uk/events

PHILIP HEWAT-JABOOR
(1953 – 2022)



We are saddened by the death on March 31st of Philip Hewat-Jaboor, a Vice-President of the Beckford Society. His enthusiasm and great knowledge of Beckford as a collector led to the ground-breaking

William Beckford: An Eye for the Magnificent exhibition in New York and the Dulwich Picture Gallery (2001-2002). He also co-curated *Thomas Hope. Regency Designer* (New York and V&A, 2008).

Philip was our first member when we announced the Society's formation. Shortly afterwards, he generously provided a list of acquaintances from the worlds of museums, collectors and dealers whom he thought would be interested in joining.

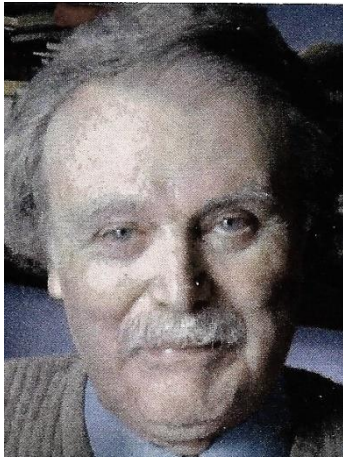
In 1997, he became a member of the Council of Management of Beckford's Tower providing much support over the years, including smoothing the way for the Tower's exhibition at Christie's in 1998, giving much advice during the tower's 2000 restoration, and more recently, with the acquisition of the Beckford deathbed portrait.

After school, Philip attended the Sotheby's works of art course and continued to work for the auction house specialising in 18th and 19th century furniture and works of art, before developing the company's client advisory service. In 1982 he started on his own as a consultant working with collectors, museums and designers. He became Chairman of London's Masterpiece Fair in 2012.

We will miss his friendship, sense of style and connoisseur's eye, and send condolences to his family and partner Rod Keenan.

A tribute by Bet McLeod, co-curator of *William Beckford: An Eye for the Magnificent*, will appear in this year's *Beckford Journal*.

JERRY NOLAN (1936 – 2021)



Jerry Nolan, a regular contributor to the *Beckford Journal*, died on 19th October. He joined the Society in 1996 after reading an announcement in *Apollo*, and each year between 1997 and 2009 submitted articles on subjects as diverse as Beckford and Apocalyptic Art, *Liber Veritatis* and Alderman Beckford.

He was born in Castleisland, County Kerry where his father was the chemist and vet. After a Jesuit education and three years as a seminarian in Spain, he studied at University College, Dublin. On

graduation, he moved to England to begin a career in teaching, first in Manchester before moving to Gunnersbury Grammar School in West London. Thereafter, Chiswick remained the centre of his life.

On retirement, he was awarded an M.Phil. from Trinity College, Dublin for his study of the writer and radical Edward Martyn. He wrote and lectured (in among other places: Monaco, Dublin and Cairo) about marginalised writers. He edited the British Association of Irish Studies Newsletter (1997 – 2002), and every year attended the Aldeburgh and Wexford festivals.

His *Beckford Journal* articles were re-published in *Beckford of Lansdown: A Homage for the 250th Anniversary of his Birth*, which appeared under the imprint of The Agathopolis Company, his self-publishing company. His other writings on Beckford include *Extraordinary Views at Lansdown Tower: a Play in Three Scenes with an Epilogue* (2008) which dramatized Beckford's meetings with Cyrus Redding. He contributed essays to the *Thomas Hope: Regency Designer* (2008) catalogue, and the new edition of Hope's *Anastasius*, Long Riders Guild Press, 2008, for which he transcribed the text.

JANE HOLLAND

Jane Holland, who died on 13 September, was a niece of Boyd Alexander who wrote extensively about William Beckford over many years.

Jane's mother Mary Alexander was the sister of Boyd and wife of the Rev Eric Hart Dyke. Through her maternal line she was descended from Sir Michael Shaw-Stewart and Lady Octavia Grosvenor of Fonthill.

DONLD SERRELL THOMAS (1934 - 2022)

Professor D. S. Thomas, who died on 20 January, was a writer and professor emeritus of Cardiff University. He published extensively including Victorian-era historical crime and detective fiction. *A Life Within Life* (1982) a biography of Robert Browning was runner-up for the Whitbread Prize, and his collection of poetry *Points of Contrast* (1963) won the Eric Gregory award. He had been a member of the Beckford Society since 1996.

BECKFORD'S DEATHBED PORTRAIT



Thanks to support from the Arts Council/V&A Purchase Grant and the Art Fund together with individual donations – including members of the Beckford Society – Beckford's Tower was able to acquire Beckford's deathbed portrait, when it was sold at Christie's, London on 10 February. Painted by Willes Maddox, it was formerly in the collection of the late Professor Bernard Nevill.

The picture is within a rosewood box frame, surrounded by brass and gilt decorations: fleur-de-lis, Latimer crosses, and cinquefoils.

It is now exhibited at Beckford's Tower.

BECKFORD'S TOWER *OUR TOWER PROJECT*

The project to restore Beckford's Tower and tell the story of the landmark and its creator, William Beckford, in new ways, enters an important phase this year.

In response to consultation, the museum re-opened in March with fresh interpretation to test some of the possible themes and stories that may form the basis of the museum in the future.

The Tower Trust is anxious for visitors to see the displays and comment on what you see. This evaluation will allow the project to finalise the interpretation plan ready for the museum's re-launch, scheduled for 2024.

Alongside the public fundraising appeal, support is sought from foundations, and other organisations. Commitment has been already been received from Historic England, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Pilgrim Trust, The Medlock Charitable Trust and Bath and North East Somerset Council towards the total fundraising target of £400,000.

The Beckford Tower Trust is very grateful to members of the Beckford Society who have already donated to the appeal. There is still some way to go to reach the fundraising

target, so if you interested in making a donation but have not yet done so, an appeal leaflet is enclosed with this Newsletter.

THE GROTTO TUNNEL



The Grotto Tunnel, from Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*, 1844

Restoration of the grotto tunnel which formed part of Beckford's ride between his home in Lansdown Crescent and the Tower is one of the aims of the 'Our Tower' project.

Last August, a preliminary excavation was undertaken to relocate the tunnel and establish its condition after having been buried for so long. At the end of a day, and almost 3.5m down, the grotto was exposed. The survey revealed that it was, for the most part, in good condition. It has now been backfilled whilst plans are made to make it a safe and exciting experience for future visitors.

BECKFORD'S TOWER IS OPEN ON
SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS (11.00 – 4.00)
UNTIL 30 OCTOBER

PEVSNER'S *WILTSHIRE*



When Nikolaus Pevsner's *Wiltshire*, in the Buildings of England series, was first published in 1963, William Beckford was described as 'author of *Vathek* and a nabob of ill repute'. However, in the volume's introduction, Pevsner writes: 'Wiltshire with amazement saw the most daring piece of Gothic Romanticism grow to the skies ... It must have been wonderful when it was new, however, ostentatious and preposterous it was'.

He describes visiting the remains of the Abbey: 'It is an eerie experience', he writes, 'to visit Fonthill Abbey now. One drives through the woods, once Beckford's grounds and still reminiscent of some of his planting, and reaches a ruin of modest size.'

Bridget Cherry's revision, published in 1975, added some 72 pages to the volume and made a few changes to the Fonthill entry. The central tower is now 'c. 275 ft. high', as opposed to Pevsner's '225 ft. high to the top of pinnacles'. The architect of Alderman Beckford's mansion is identified as 'Hoare a City brickmaker' and the locations of some pieces from the building are given.

Last year saw the publication of Julian Orbach's handsome new edition, with over 900 pages and 118 colour photographs. There is a new entry for Fonthill Gifford, including a plan of the Fonthill estate. The great Archway is illustrated in colour. In the introduction, the tower has increased to '280 ft. high'.

This new volume is an essential travelling companion for anyone seeking to explore the buildings of 'the county of the cottage', as Pevsner described Wiltshire in his dedication. For he had a small cottage retreat at Little Town, beside Broad Town, in the north of the county. Pevsner and his wife Lola are buried nearby at Clyffe Pypard.

Julian Orbach, Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry, *Wiltshire* (The Buildings of England), London: Yale University Press, 2021.

VATHEK'S CUL DE SAC IN FRANCE

A recently acquired copy of the Paris 1787 *Vathek* bears the signature of Jean-François Boissonade de Fontarabie (1774-1857), a distinguished French Academician, Greek scholar, bibliophile, and all-round *érudit*. Boissonade's library included many English novels, from Swift to Bulwer Lytton. From 1807-09 he wrote reviews in the *Journal des débats*, including Lewis's *The Monk*, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*.¹ But the virtues of *Vathek* passed him by.

Boissonade may have had no idea that it was by an Englishman, but the sale catalogue of his c.7000 books does not even class it with the *Romans et contes orientaux*.² It shows up at the bottom of the barrel, in a "miscellaneous" section of shorter, unrelated works bound together for convenience and economy. Lot 6733 is "Recueil de pièces, 3 vols. in octavo," vol. 3 comprising *Vathek, conte Arabe* (Paris 1787), *Essai sur la lecture* by Bollioud de Mermet (Amsterdam and Lyon, 1765), and *Coup d'oeil philosophique sur le règne de St. Louis* by Manuel Damiette, 1786.

Perhaps a dealer spotted an item of value, broke up the volume, and wrote "William Beckford" on the wrapper in an elegant French hand. Someone else sidelined many passages in pencil, well chosen to outline the plot and mark the most salient ideas. At all events, this illustrates what Laurent Châtel calls the "invisibility" of *Vathek* in France,³ and an opportunity missed.

JOSCELYN GODWIN

¹ For Boissonade's book reviews, see Philippe Le Bas, *Notice bibliographique et littéraire sur M. J. Fr. Boissonade* (Paris: Lahure, 1857), 48-51. Accessed through Google Books.

² *Catalogue des livres composant la bibliothèque de feu M. J. Fr. Boissonade*. (Paris: Silvestre, 1859), 341-46. Accessed through Google Books.

³ Laurent Châtel, *William Beckford: the Elusive Orientalist* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 157.

BECKFORD IN THE *PICTORIAL TIMES*

In May 1842 Herbert Ingram launched the weekly *Illustrated London News* with sixteen pages at a cost of sixpence. In this venture he was assisted by the publisher and writer Henry Vizetelly (1820–1894), but it was not long before they fell out, and within a year this announcement appeared in *The Sun* on 8 March 1843 (p. 5):

‘PICTORIAL TIMES.—On SATURDAY, the 18th of MARCH, will be published the First Number of a Weekly Newspaper, entitled THE PICTORIAL TIMES, with 30 beautiful Wood-Engravings, illustrating the chief Occurrences and Subjects of Interest recorded in its columns. It is presumed that the Illustrations of this Journal will be found greatly to surpass any that have yet appeared in connexion with Periodical Literature. Prospectuses may be obtained at the Office, 135, Fleet-street, and of all Booksellers and Newsvendors throughout the Kingdom.’

The founders of this venture were the twenty-two-year-old Vizetelly, his brother James and Andrew Spottiswoode, and it was in direct competition with the *Illustrated London News* but in a slightly smaller format. Both periodicals cost sixpence, had the same number of pages and were published weekly on Saturdays, but on 26 Aug 1843 the Preface to Volume 1 made it clear that, in contrast to the *ILN*, there would be no politics:

‘At our outset, we pledged ourselves to make the PICTORIAL TIMES the graphic history of the world. We can confidently appeal to the following pages, in proof that we have so far fulfilled our promise. We, at the same time, avowed it to be our principle to eschew all party politics; to consider only the POLITICS OF THE HUMAN HEART, in no way narrowing ourselves to the objects of any one class of statesmen.’

Beckford made several appearances in the *Pictorial Times*, the first being a well laid out whole-page article, ‘Death of the Author of “Vathek”–Fonthill Abbey’ (18 May 1844, p. 308) copied verbatim from the previous week’s *Athenaeum*. It was illustrated by a south-west view of Fonthill Abbey copied from Storer’s *Description of Fonthill Abbey* (1812), Goodridge’s lithograph ‘Lansdown Tower, Bath’, c.1827 and the portrait medallion of Beckford by Joseph Piat Sauvage, c.1792, first published in the *European Magazine* for September 1797.

A week later (25 May 1844, p. 331) Henry Venn Lansdown’s obituary in the *Bath Herald* for 18 May was reprinted, while the top half of the following page was taken up with ‘Funeral of the Late Mr. Beckford’. Here, a splendid view of the cortège leaving Lansdown Crescent, as imagined by the artist, headed an account culled from the *Bath Chronicle* and other local papers.

DEATH OF THE AUTHOR OF "VATHEK."—FONTHILL ABBEY.

Most truly does the "Athenaeum" remind us that "the old nobilities of literature are departing from us with that kind of regularity which marks the closing of an era. We have now to record the death of the once famous author of 'Vathek,' and former proprietor of Fonthill Abbey, William Beckford, Esq., son of the celebrated Alderman Beckford, a remarkable man, whose taste was cultivated to the highest possible point of refinement to which it could be carried by the assistance of great wealth, which he seems to have sacrificed willingly for the most exquisite sensations that could be attained from the elegant enjoyment of letters and arts. His mind delighted to revel in visions of oriental luxuriance, which at first he registered in the splendid romance of 'Vathek,' originally (about 1786) published in French and English. The English version was republished in 1815. Mr. Beckford was desirous of realising in life what he had only imagined in literature; and it was at Fonthill Abbey that he accumulated all those treasures which are such objects of interest to the virtuoso and the tourist, but which Mr. Beckford, with luxurious selfishness, exclusively consecrated to his own private benefit. The abbey itself was a costly specimen of the modern Gothic, in which the proprietor lived in a sort of eastern state, secluded with its rich collection of paintings and curiosities from public inspection. When the expenditure which this mode of life occasioned had reduced his pecuniary resources, and the sale of the building with its unique contents was consequently projected, all the world rushed to visit an edifice which had been so carefully guarded from intrusion, and so frequently described as a 'palace of enchantment.' The county of Wilts was filled with pleasure hunters from all quarters—'He is fortunate,' says the 'Times' of 1822, 'who finds a vacant chair within twenty miles of Fonthill; the solitude of a private apartment is a luxury which few can hope for.' . . . 'Faust himself could not take his ease at this moment within a dozen leagues of Fonthill.' . . . 'The beds through the county are (literally) doing double duty; people who come in from a distance during the night must wait to go to bed until others get up in the morning.' . . . 'Not a farmhouse, however humble—not a cottage near Fonthill, but gives shelter to fashion, to beauty, and rank; ostrich plumes, which by their very waving we can trace back to Piccadilly, are seen nodding at a cusp of window over a depopulated poultry yard.' But we must forbear quoting further from this amusing *pen d'opéra*. The estate of Fonthill was purchased by Alderman Beckford. Soon after it came into his possession the fine old house was destroyed by fire; when the mischief done was communicated to him, the impetuous merchant, conscious of immense wealth, said coolly, 'Well, let it be rebuilt; and it was so, in a style of extraordinary splendour. The situation, however, was bad; and the author of 'Vathek,' when it became his, had



MR. BECKFORD (from a Portrait taken many years since).

it demolished, and erected, with the aid of Mr. Wyatt, the architect, the Fonthill Abbey known to the public, on a better site, at an outlay of more than £200,000. Mr. Beckford could also, like his father, endure great disaster and loss equally unmoved. The abbey tower, which stood on the highest point of ground, and was itself 276 feet high, caught fire at the top, while in the course of erection, and a great part was destroyed. The owner, however, so far from suffering annoyance from the accident, enjoyed the burning crest as a sublime spectacle, regardless of the fact that what the flames were devouring would cost a fortune to repair. The erections, nevertheless, was not delayed; all the means of the county were called into requisition to complete it; even the royal works of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, were abandoned, that 400 men might be employed night and day on Fonthill Abbey. These men relieved each other by regular watches, and during the longest and darkest nights of winter, the astonished traveller might see the tower rising under their hands, the trowel and the torch being associated in the work, and presented an exhibition which Mr. Beckford delighted to contemplate. But pleasure is in the pursuit, not the attainment of an object, and the proprietor ultimately parted with this gorgeous creation of his own taste, with the same *sans-froid* with which he witnessed the conflagration of the lofty tower.

"It was nearly fifty years after the publication of 'Vathek,' that, in 1825, Mr. Beckford published his 'Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha,' which he had taken in 1795, and which were republished in 1840, together with an epistolary record of his observations in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, between the years 1780 and 1794. These are marked, as he himself intimates, 'with the bloom and heyday of youthful spirits and youthful confidence, at a period when the older order of things existed with all its picturesque pomps and absurdities, when Venice enjoyed her *Fiumi* and sub-marine dungeons, France her *Bastille*, the Peninsula her *Holy Inquisition*.' With none of these subjects, however, are the letters occupied; but with delineations of landscape, and the effects of natural phenomena. These literary efforts appear to have exhausted their author's productive powers. In a word, he seems soon to have been 'used-up,' and then to have discontinued the search after new sensations, or to have been content to live without them. Mr.

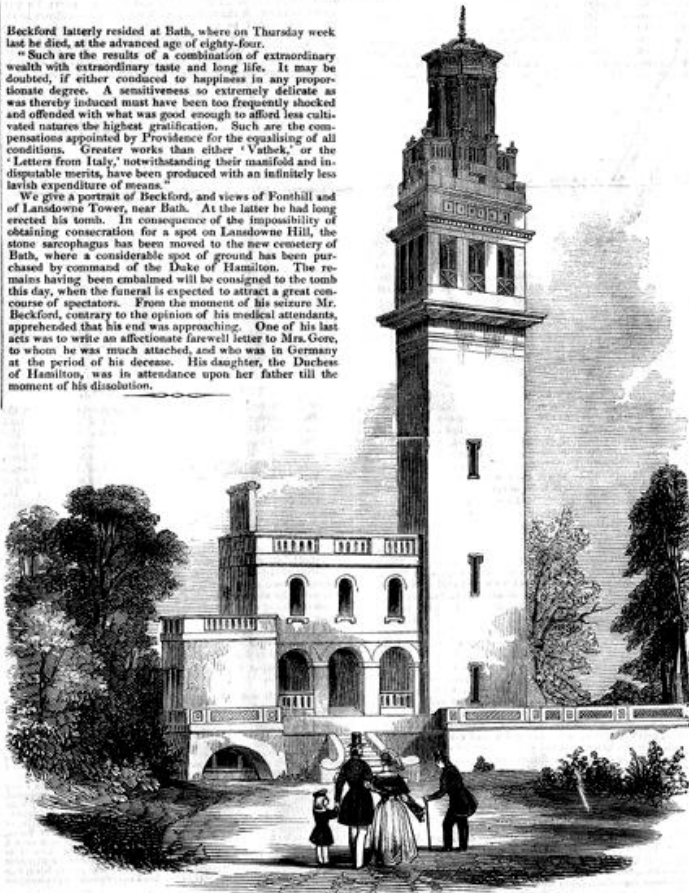


FONTHILL ABBEY.

Beckford latterly resided at Bath, where on Thursday week last he died, at the advanced age of eighty-four.

"Such are the results of a combination of extraordinary wealth with extraordinary taste and long life. It may be doubted, if either conducted to happiness in any proportionate degree. A sensitiveness so extremely delicate as was thereby induced must have been too frequently shocked and offended with what was good enough to afford less cultivated natures the highest gratification. Such are the compensations appointed by Providence for the equalizing of all conditions. Greater works than either 'Vathek,' or the 'Letters from Italy,' notwithstanding their manifold and indisputable merits, have been produced with an infinitely less lavish expenditure of means."

We give a portrait of Beckford, and views of Fonthill and of Lansdowne Tower, near Bath. At the latter he had long erected his tomb. In consequence of the impossibility of obtaining consecration for a spot on Lansdowne Hill, the stone sarcophagus has been moved to the new cemetery of Bath, where a considerable spot of ground has been purchased by command of the Duke of Hamilton. The remains having been embalmed will be consigned to the tomb this day, when the funeral is expected to attract a great concourse of spectators. From the moment of his seizure Mr. Beckford, contrary to the opinion of his medical attendants, apprehended that his end was approaching. One of his last acts was to write an affectionate farewell letter to Mrs. Gore, to whom he was much attached, and who was in Germany at the period of his decease. His daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, was in attendance upon her father till the moment of his dissolution.



LANSDOWNE TOWER, NEAR BATH.

The *Pictorial Times* continued to be interested in Beckford, as was evident from the paragraph on his will on October 12 (p. 227). ‘The will of this celebrated man has been proved at Doctors’ Commons... His property has been sworn to as under 80,000*l*... He gives to his daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, the bulk of his property... and desires to be buried near Lansdowne Tower. The will is very short.’

Not to be outdone by the *ILN*, the *Pictorial Times* also covered the nine-day sale of Beckford’s property, although much more briefly. Their three-page article (with the first two whole page) on 22 Nov 1845 (pp. 328–330) was headed ‘Lansdown Tower, “The delight of the eyes.”’, and included a woodcut of the Tower from the SE, a vignette of the Embattled Gateway and five groups of ‘Articles of Vertu’, all copied from Willes Maddox’s images in Edmund’s English’s *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* (1844). On the second page were four further engravings of ‘Articles of Vertu’. Half a page of comments on the sale could be found in the next week’s issue: ‘Sale of the Lansdowne Tower Property’ on p. 34, ‘We have watched with great and increasing interest the progress of the sale of a very small portion of the treasures collected at Lansdowne Tower by the late William Beckford, Esq; and never did we witness such competition for what nine tenths of the world would regard as trifles... In quitting this interesting subject, we have to acknowledge our obligation to Charles Empson, Esq., of the Bath Museum [actually a dealership in books, paintings, and objets d’art at 7 Terrace Walk, close to Bath Abbey], for much of the exclusive information we have been able to communicate.’

Within five years the *Pictorial Times*, unable to compete in an increasingly crowded market, ceased publication after 252 issues on 8 January 1848. Meanwhile the *ILN* continued as a weekly until 1971, with the main competitor in the late nineteenth century being *The Graphic*.

The *Pictorial Times* may be consulted online [at Pictorial Times in British Newspaper Archive](#).

JON MILLINGTON

A HAMILTON FAMILY SILHOUETTE



A set of four silhouette cut-out conversation pieces (1830 -1831), sold on 17 January by Bamfords Auctioneers, Derby (lot 1512) included one showing Susan, Duchess of Hamilton, her daughter Lady Susan Pelham-Clinton (Countess of Lincoln) and Miss Margueretta Crawford of Ardmillan.

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