



# THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

NO. 58 MARCH 2023



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 24 JUNE 2023



**AT THE GEORGIAN GROUP  
6 FIZROY SQUARE, LONDON W1T 5DX  
BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED**

## **BECKFORD LECTURE 2022**

Thirty-six members and guests attended the annual Beckford Lecture on 17 November when Timothy Wilcox lectured on 'Twilight and Storm: William Beckford and John Robert Cozens'.

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

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

This year's AGM will be held in London on Saturday 24 June, when we will meet at 6 Fitzroy Square, the headquarters of the Georgian Group.

This will be our second meeting in Fitzroy Square, the first being in 2009.

After lunch, David Adshead, Director Georgian Group will give a talk 'The Georgian Group: Then and Now'.

Our day will end with the opportunity to visit the exhibition 'Highlights from the Collection of Clive and Jane Wainwright' at H. Blairman & Son, Queen Anne's Gate.

An agenda for the AGM and booking form are enclosed.

## **FONTHILL OPEN DAYS 2023**

The grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sundays 30 April and 14 May, from 10am to 5pm.



Visitors, including dogs on leads, are invited take a good hike or gentle stroll around the woods and lake. There will be homemade cakes and soup, and Buttlings's prize-winning bangers on the barbecue, together with tea and coffee. The openings are in aid of Cure Parkinsons and local charities

The bluebells should be at their best on 30 April and rhododendrons on 14 May. There will be a table of books to browse explaining the history of the estate.

In the event of high winds, if Stourhead NT closes, then the Fonthill grounds will also close. If in doubt, please check the NT website.

Donations (£8 suggested) at the gate. Please bring cash. (SP3 6SP) on the Hindon Newtown lane.

The gardens of Fonthill House will be open by kind invitation of Lord Margadale on Sundays 19 March, 23 April and 11 June.

The 19 March opening is in aid of the NGS, 23 April for the Cherubim Music Trust; and 11 June for National Federation of Retired Service Animals.

See the Fonthill Estate website <https://fonthill.co.uk> for more information.

## THE FONTHILL ARCH

The Beckford Arms is offering the chance to stay in one half of the great Archway at Fonthill.

Accommodation is arranged over three floors. On the ground floor, a sitting room and kitchen. The first floor has a large bedroom and en-suite bathroom. The top floor, full-size bunk beds.

Fiona Duncan in a review in the *Daily Telegraph* (3 Dec 2022) felt she 'could live here forever'.

From £295 per night, including breakfast. [www.beckfordarms.com](http://www.beckfordarms.com)

## IN THE SALEROOM

Beckford's copy of Estienne Binet, *Abregé des vies des principaux fondateurs des religions de l'église*

... Antwerp, 1678, in a dark green binding by Charles Smith, failed to find a buyer when offered by Bonhams in the Fine Books and Manuscript Sale in London on 9 November 2022 (lot 47).

Johann Hausmann, *Reise durch Skandinavien in den jahren 1806 und 1807*, Gottingen, 1812-1818. Four volumes [of five] in a Fonthill binding sold for £340 at Dominic Winters sale on 16 Nov 2022 (lot 359).



A Dihl et Guerhard (Paris) porcelain plate, c.1814, decorated with a large pink rose was offered by Woolley and Wallis in their Fine Pottery and Porcelain Sale on 21 February.

The British Museum has two similar plates with a Fonthill Abbey provenance and the auctioneer suggested that this is one of six (actually four) plates listed in the 1822 and 1823 auction catalogues. The plate was sold for £550 (lot 600).

## PHILIPPA BISHOP (1929 – 2022)



The death occurred in December of Philippa Bishop, one of the founding members of the Beckford Society.

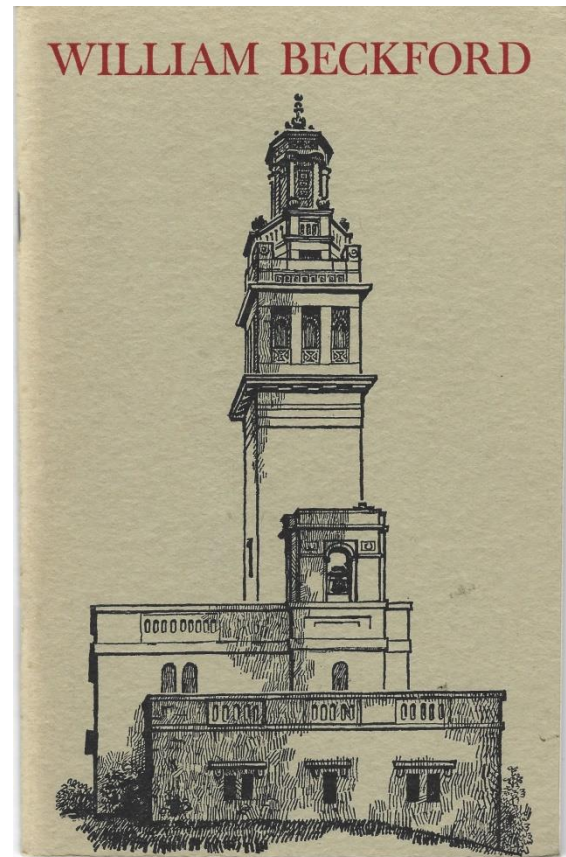
At Oxford, where she read history, she had memories of attending Kenneth Clark's Slade Lectures. After graduation she assisted John Masefield before working on the literary pages of the *New Statesmen*.

Then came a period of teaching and travelling in Italy, where she spent a year in Rome, before undertaking museum training at Birmingham Museum and Art gallery. She later moved to be Keeper of Art at Leicester Museum.

She moved to Bath upon appointment as Curator of the Holburne Museum and spent the rest of her life in the city. She was Curator of the Holburne 1961-1966 and 1977-1985.

In 1966 she organised the Holburne's exhibition devoted to William Beckford. The catalogue with Peter Summer's description of

Beckford's walk remains a collectors' piece.



William Beckford exhibition catalogue, 1966

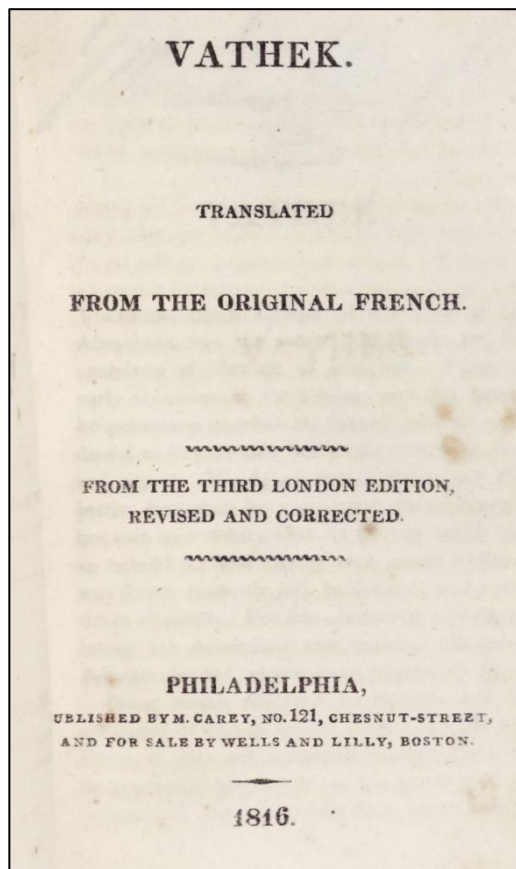
In retirement, she supported Leslie and Elisabeth Hilliard by taking on the role of administrator of Beckford's Tower. Gerlof Janzen when visiting Bath in 1993 wanted to see Beckford's Tower and was welcomed by Philippa. Learning there was no Beckford Society, he thought it should not be too difficult to organise one. The result was the foundation of the Beckford Society.

Philippa was the Society's first Treasurer and led the first excursion, to Fonthill, in October 1996.

## VATHEK IN AMERICA

How long did it take for the first American edition of *Vathek* to appear?

Robert J. Gemmett in a recent article outlines the publication history of early American editions of Beckford's novel.



Though first published in England in 1786, it took thirty years for an American edition to appear. In 1816, Matthew Carey published it in Philadelphia in conjunction with Wells and Lilly.

Two more editions were published in 1834, the year when Beckford's *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and*

*Portugal* was both serialized and issued in book form in America.

The American book trade flourished in the early nineteenth century on account of the fact that America's copyright act (1790) protected only authors resident in the USA.

Occasionally, two publishers would bring out the same book almost simultaneously, as happened with the 1834 editions of *Vathek*. Using correspondence between the publishers, Gemmett shows how the matter was resolved.

*Vathek* received mixed reviews. One editor declaring. 'We just say in our poor judgement, that a more disgusting, and execrable production ... never issued from the English or American press'.

However, at least 15 more American editions appeared between those of 1834 and the end of the century, one being that included by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her collection of standard masterpieces in 1873.

Robert J. Gemmett, 'William Beckford's *Vathek* and the American Book Trade'. *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 69. pp 317-323.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjac/101>

## **BECKFORD'S TOWER**

Work is steadily progressing on the Our Tower project.

At the time of writing we are busy reviewing tenders for the principal contractor, and once appointed, work on the Tower site will start moving fairly quickly. The museum rooms are being emptied out and the collection packed for storage.

The architectural archives in the basement are being catalogued. These are primarily items discovered in the disused heating chamber at the base of the staircase during the 1997-2000 structural restoration, including fragments of plasterwork from the Belvedere ceiling, and some believed to be from the now lost Sanctuary ceiling. All the items have been catalogued and photographed and packed into new storage boxes, ready for temporary storage at the Museum of Bath Architecture. They will return to the newly fitted out basement at the Tower when the building works are complete.

In the landscape, recent work to trees in the Lime Avenue has opened up the view along the pathway to and from the location of the Grotto Tunnel. This offers a taster of what the route between the Tower and the Grotto Tunnel will be like once the

new pathways and work to the paddocks are completed. Bath and North East Somerset Council have undertaken significant winter clearing in Lansdown Cemetery, opening up in particular the section thought to be of 'common graves' adjacent to the Tower.

The necessary felling of a large tree in the cemetery has also provided some large pieces of timber that B&NES have donated to Beckford's Tower with the aim of carving into benches. These will form ideal seats from which to admire the view across the landscape when the project is completed in Spring 2024.

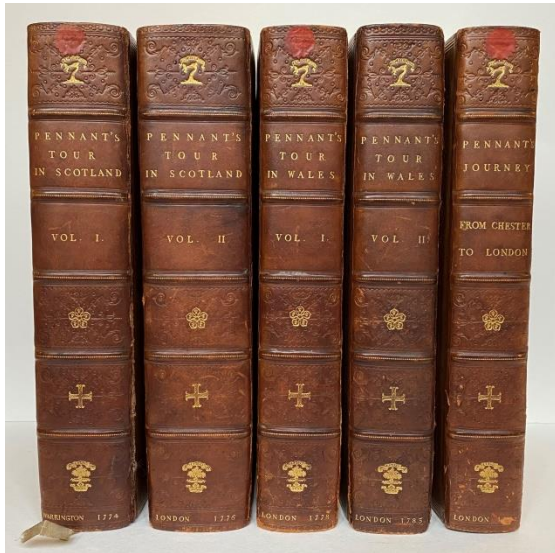
AMY FROST

## **A NEW ACQUISITION**

Following Beckford's death in 1844 the entire contents of his library, numbering just under 11,000 volumes, moved from Bath to Hamilton Palace in Scotland. It was eventually broken up during the Hamilton Palace library sales in 1882/83 when Beckford's books became scattered amongst collectors and dealers.

At the Tower we have a small collection of Beckford volumes, which has recently been doubled thanks to a generous donation from the Friends of the National Libraries of 31 printed books from the

Blavatnik-Honresfield Library. The books were part of the Honresfield Library, saved for the UK when the Friends of the National Libraries raised £15million to acquire it, with half the funds coming from Sir Leonard Blavatnik.



Some Beckford volumes from the Blavatnik-Honresfield Library

The volumes donated to the Tower include some fine Beckford bindings, as well as several books with pages of Beckford's own handwritten notes. We are busy cataloguing the new books and planning how they can be displayed in a changing programme when the Tower reopens.

AMY FROST

## BECKFORD FILM FROM 1966

At the time of 'Mr. Beckford's Arabian Banquet', an extravaganza held as part of the 1966 Bath Festival, a film of his life was discussed. Among those involved were Barbara Robertson, organiser of the Banquet and many other events, James Babb, Librarian Emeritus at Yale, and Peter Summers, Bursar of Kingswood School, Bath. Under the name the 'Stylites Film Group', boys at the School had already made a film and now undertook to tackle Beckford's life.

With encouragement from Peter Summers, part-author of the catalogue of the William Beckford exhibition at the Holburne Museum, the film was directed by Andrew Barnett, while Mark Goodridge played Beckford and the script was by Alan Charles Scott. A review by Jo Bayne in the *Bath Chronicle* on 8 November 1967, the day before the premiere, explained that it 'concentrated on the romantic aspects of Beckford's life, and his story is told partly in straight documentary style and partly in fantasy sequences mixing 18th century images with Beatles music.' There is a copy of the film in the Beinecke Library at Yale.

This twenty-six minute film, mostly in colour, moves between the present and the past, and begins with glimpses in black and white of the Arabian Banquet at the Assembly Rooms. Then, at Fonthill Splendens, Beckford pretends to shoot his tutor, Drysdale, who drops his armful of books in alarm. After being scolded by his mother, Beckford witnesses his youthful drawings on eastern themes being burnt. He walks contemplatively through the grounds, gazing wistfully at the Lake and Boathouse.

Beckford sets off in a Rolls-Royce for a lengthy twenty-first birthday party filmed in black and white, with music by the Beatles. In the next scene he marries, and the couple visit Powderham Castle, where Beckford paces up and down outside Kitty's bedroom and then bids farewell to Kitty's twelve sisters who are ranged down the stairs. On returning to Fonthill, he is pursued through the grounds by unseen people, and enters a tunnel under the road by Fonthill Lake while being taunted by onlookers from a ventilation shaft above. Seagulls over a ship suggest a journey, perhaps to Lisbon.

Wyatt is then seen in his chaotic office with an overflowing in box, and then he and Beckford stand in front of the unfinished Abbey studying plans. After seeing the Abbey in ruins, the film ends with a sequence at present day Lansdown, beginning at Beckford's house, then proceeding via the Embattled Gateway and Grotto Tunnel to his tomb and finally, his Tower.



At Fonthill, March 1967

One day in March 1967 Peter Summers drove my wife and me to Fonthill together with some of the film's cast. In the photograph taken during a break in filming, are (l-r): a cast member, Mark Goodridge in costume as Beckford, Andrew Barnett, Alan Scott, Peter Summers, and my wife of a few months, Pat. In the film (but not clearly identifiable), Peter, Pat, two others and I can be seen mocking Beckford from the top of the ventilation shaft while he runs through the tunnel by Fonthill Lake.

JON MILLINGTON



**FRANCIS SKULLAY'S  
*BIDCOMBE HILL***

'The poet Bowles and God knows how many other versifiers are indulging themselves to their hearts content'. WILLIAM BECKFORD, 2 September 1822.

Earlier than the verse of the Rev William Lisle Bowles, is that of another Wiltshire cleric the Rev. Francis Skullay whose *Bidcombe Hill* was first published in 1808. Bidcombe Hill was close to Skullay's Parsonage at Horningsham, the village at the gates of Longleat, and for many years the hill had been the object of his walks and contemplation.

Invoking the spirit of John Denham, whose 1642 poem 'Cooper's Hill' established the genre of landscape poetry, Skullay surveys, in over 1,500 lines, the hills and features of the surrounding terrain looking as far as the 'feint view of the Welsh Mountains'. Nearer are the Mendip Hills, Scratchbury and Battlebury hills, Stonehenge, Glastonbury Tor, Wardour Castle, Alfred's Tower at Stourhead, Marston House, Longleat and finally his own village of Horningsham.

Contemplating the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey his train of

thought moves on to the dissolution of the monasteries in France:

'But while in melancholy guise I muse

O'er the fallen grandeur of monastic domes,

A modern Abbey rises to the view  
Mocking the majesty of ancient days.

No more the sight of Glastonbury Tor

Excite regrets that interest the soul;  
The prouder pile from Fonthill's fir-clad mount

Bursts on the sight and brighter dreams inspires.

Thron'd on an eminence its turrets rise

In height superior to the distant hills  
Which crown the view. Around its giant base

Is spread an artificial wilderness  
Where gadding brambles wander,  
and where grow

Trees of all tints and shrubs from every clime'.

Skurray then recalls Nelson's visit to Fonthill and Lady Hamilton's performance of her 'attitudes':

'Lo! When the doors on massy hinges turn'd,

Upon the burnish'd glass the torches shed

Their flaring light ...

Lo! Agrippina mingles with the guests.

Her frantic gestures and impassion'd  
 air  
 Pourtray the tempests that convulses  
 her soul.  
 In her clench'd hands she grasps the  
 urn which holds  
 The perfum'd ashes of her murder'd  
 lord.  
 She holds it up to Heaven; imploring  
 the gods;  
 Then whirls it round her glowing  
 countrymen,  
 And summons Roman valour to  
 avenge  
 Her lost Germanicus. – The  
 admiring crowd  
 Do homage by their tears ...'

Skurray next makes allusion to  
 Nelson's victories and heroic death.

Francis Skullay was born at  
 Beckington in Somerset in 1797  
 educated at Bath Grammar School  
 (his maternal grandfather was five  
 times Mayor of Bath) and Merton  
 College, Oxford. He was perpetual  
 curate of Horningsham,  
 Somersetshire Fellow at Lincoln  
 College, Oxford, and held the living  
 of Winterbourne cum Stapleton,  
 Dorset.

Three editions of *Bidcombe Hill*  
 were published, the first in 1808, the  
 second in 1824 (which also  
 contained an essay on local poetry)  
 and the third in 1844. He also  
 published *A Metrical Version of the*

*Book of Psalms*, 1827, *Shepherd's  
 Garland*, 1832, *Sonnets Composed  
 on Various Occasions*, 1845, and  
 volumes of sermons.



John Sergeant, Interior of the  
 Parsonage, Horningsham. © V&A

A painting by John Sergeant,  
 c.1844, now in the V&A, shows  
 Skullay and his niece in the room at  
 Horningsham Parsonage built as his  
 picture gallery. In pride of place  
 above the fireplace is Angelica  
 Kauffman's Portrait of a Bearded  
 Prelate then described as by  
 Guercino. Other paintings were  
 attributed to Titian, Sassoferrato,  
 Solimena, and Ruisdael. He died at  
 Horningsham on 10 March 1844.

## ABBÉ ANGE DENIS MARQUIN

Among Beckford's small court at Fonthill, which included Gregorio Franchi, artist 'Warwick' Smith, dwarf Pierre and physician Dr Josephus Ehrhart, was the Abbé Macquin, who assisted as librarian and adviser on heraldry. He was born at Meaux in 1756, ordained for the priesthood and later became professor of rhetoric and belles-letters. Hostile to the French Revolution, he fled to England in 1792.

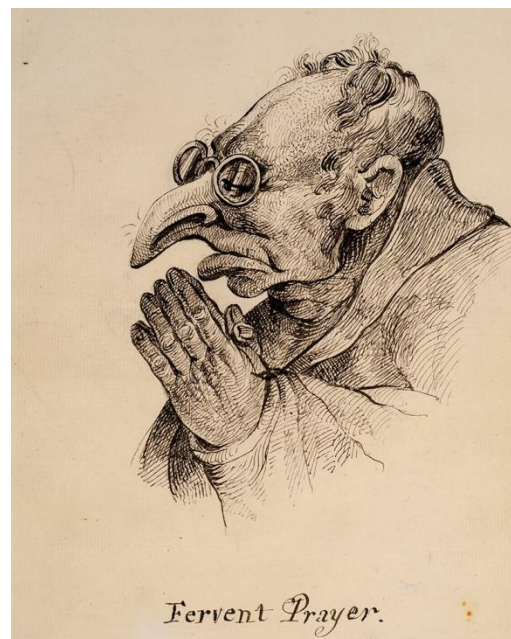
In Hastings he learned English and supported himself and assisted some of his 'suffering companions in misfortune' by the sale of his sketches of local scenery. An introduction to the Norroy King of Arms resulted in his appointment as heraldic draughtsman to the College of Arms.

He wrote on heraldic and other subjects. His Latin poem, *Tabella Cibaria* (1820) was written in response to a challenge to enumerate all the intricacies of French hotels and eating houses' bills of fare in decent Latin verse. The poem's 220 lines are supported by over 70 pages of notes in English, together with an appendix on Wine.

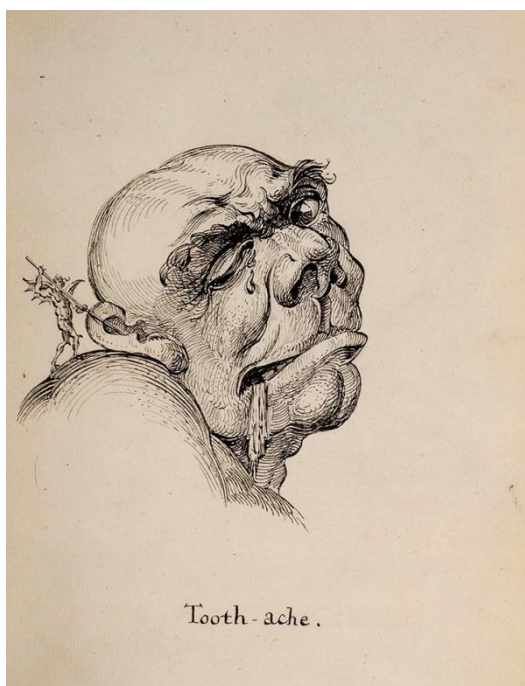
We get glimpses of the Abbé in Beckford's correspondence. 'Never

have I seen such eating and drinking, He swallows *everything*, he tastes *everything*, he mixes everything up inside himself: milk, then a collation, then *lonchon*, then dinner, then supper accompanied by a vast deal of rum. If he does not die, if he does not become a fountain of maladies, he most have the special favour not of the Supreme pontiff but of the Eternal Father himself'. He was also very loquacious: '... my God how he talks! Mr Still's windmill does not go faster on the windiest days of the century'.

During the summer of 1822, when Fonthill Fever gripped the public imagination, Macquin contributed a series of four articles on Fonthill, together with a drawing and poem to the *Literary Gazette*.



Abbé Macquin, 'Fervent Prayer'.



The Abbé's skill as a draughtsman and his sense of humour and satire is revealed in an album containing a fantastic collection of a hundred pen and ink drawings (made between 1812 – 1819) depicting various distorted and twisted facial expressions of human characteristics, feelings and actions, including curiosity, disappointment, laughter, hope and arrogance.

The album is for sale from David Brass Rare Books of Calabasas, California. A full description with illustrations is on the website [davidbrassrarebooks.com](http://davidbrassrarebooks.com)

Macquin designed Nelson's funeral car and prepared the design for the new throne in the House of Lords. He died two hundred years ago on 17 July 1823 and was buried at St John's Church, Horsleydown.

Photographs by courtesy of David Brass Rare Books Inc.

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