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## *Contents*

There formed thy Paradise: William Beckford in Portugal

MALCOLM JACK 5

Founding or finding the Beckford Society:  
Some Reminiscences of a Vice-President

GERLOF JANZEN 27

John Martin Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746–1813)*  
*Architect to George III*

A Review by STEPHEN CLARKE 33

Portraits of William Beckford

STEPHEN LLOYD 39

A Commentary on William Beckford  
A Transcription by BET MCLEOD 49

Anthony Hobson: A Memoir

DIANA BERRY 51

Notes on Contributors 64



# *There formed thy Paradise: William Beckford in Portugal*

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MALCOLM JACK

*This paper is based on an illustrated lecture given as The Beckford Society's Eighteenth Annual Lecture, delivered on Thursday 20th November 2014 at the Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1.*

William Beckford's arrival in Lisbon in May 1787 caused an immediate stir. The closed, gossipy society of Lisbon was agog at the arrival of this milordly young man of enormous wealth.

The French ambassador, the Marquis de Bombelles observes in his *Journal*:

The arrival of one of the richest men in England, who put into port with three boats that belong to him, caused a considerable public stir among the inhabitants of Lisbon. The person in question is Mr Beckford, a young man of twenty five years of age, son of the famous Alderman and Lord Mayor who, in his time had played a prominent part in parliamentary debates in Great Britain. Even though this gentleman [the Alderman] had spent much of his fortune in keeping a number of illegitimate children, his legitimate son still inherited ten thousand pounds sterling in income and fifty thousand pounds sterling [in addition] as well as huge and superb possessions on the island of Jamaica. It is said that Mr Beckford had a disposable net income of thirty thousand Louis a year.<sup>1</sup>

Nor did the young English gentleman play down his wealth and social position in any way. He arrived, as Rose Macaulay records, with a retinue of twenty to thirty servants as fewer would not have given the impression he wished to create. As she tartly puts it:

He did not see why he should not have a biscuit properly made, with a glass of sherry, nor courtiers to arrange his goings out or comings in, nor valets to see to his clothes, nor lackeys to run his errands, nor a few grooms to mind his horses and chaise, nor a footman to run behind them; in fact all the attendants, including doctor, tailor, halter, barber, musicians and chef, of whom a travelling gentleman might find himself in need.<sup>2</sup>

Beckford was indeed no ordinary traveller but intended to live in a stately manner however short his visits were. He relates, with a hint of condescension, that the Portuguese admired the ‘elegant’ and ‘antique’ English furniture, well varnished and ancient, which he brought with him to Lisbon.<sup>3</sup> His fine pieces, which included a bed, were meant to impress upon the locals that someone of princely status had arrived in their midst. They also are evidence of that theatrical trait in his character which led to displays of flourishing opulence even if, as we know, his private life style was modest and even austere.

If the furniture he brought from England showed the style of the Grand Tourist Extraordinary, Beckford’s library of books indicated that the visitor was unusually well-read and learned. We know from his own diary references that he had brought a considerable selection of travel literature with him to Portugal. From teenage days at Fonthill Splendens Beckford had been reading accounts of the Portuguese explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, among which Luis Vaz de Camões *Lusíads* is the epic. When he arrived in Lisbon in 1787, he had with him, among other tomes, the six volumes of J.A. de Colmenar’s *Délices de L’Espagne et de Portugal* (1715) and Udal ap Rhys’ *Account of the most remarkable Places and Curiosities in Spain and Portugal* (1749). Schooled in this background, the young aesthete knew what to look for in the buildings and palaces of Iberia. When he wanted to roam further in his imagination, he could read C. Cullen’s new translation of Abbé Clavigero’s *History of Mexico*, (1787), containing controversial criticism of the iniquities of Spanish colonialism, or he could turn entirely to fiction in such works as Frances Brooke’s tragic tale, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763), whose chilling pages,

must have resonated in a young man who had already experienced tragedy and setbacks. However, in a country of Inquisition, the arrival of a large consignment of foreign books aroused suspicion. Beckford records that two months after his arrival, 'due to the negligence of Customs House officers' they had still not been delivered.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that, despite the bravura of his arrival, by the time Beckford came to Portugal at the age of twenty six in 1787, he had experienced every kind of emotional trauma, which included public shame, the death of his wife, plagiarism of his literary work, and ostracism from English society, something that would endure for the rest of his life. Lady Margaret's death cast a dark shadow over him; painful memories of her are recorded throughout the Portuguese diary even on the sunniest of days. His exclusion from English Society, where he felt that he had a legitimate place, embittered him considerably and coloured his attitude to the English community whom he met in Lisbon. Although his *hauteur* is also that of the immensely wealthy man who had no need of a profession let alone of carrying on trade, there is a sense of fragility on every page of the diary, a sense of loneliness and alienation added to by the obstreperous behaviour of the Honourable Robert Walpole, the British envoy, who blocked his introduction at the Portuguese court.

Given this state of mind the most significant thing that happened to Beckford soon after his arrival in Portugal was his meeting up with the aristocratic Marialva family. In the very first entry of his diary, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, Beckford tells us that he went from his own house nearby to the Marialva's palace in Belém where the Abbade Xavier whom he had already befriended, 'was upon the watch at the door.'<sup>5</sup> Beckford was surprised at the sparse interior of the palace, the Quinta da Praia, with its indifferent pictures of saints and madonnas. Although impressed by the semi-feudal manner of living of the Marialvas, he never put aside his first impression of the lack of refinement and comfort in the homes of the Portuguese *fidalgos*. Some of his comments are of course meant to enhance his own status as a connoisseur, especially in the published version of his diary (the *Sketches*) which

was devoured by middle- class readers in England, but it is also the case that a collection of furniture and paintings owned by the Marialvas had been destroyed, as were so many other collections in Lisbon homes, by the earthquake of 1755.<sup>6</sup>

Although the earthquake of 1755 caused no topographical change to the city, the damage to life and to buildings from the eruption, as well as from the fires and flooding that followed, was immense. The quake itself, which came without warning on the fine morning of November 1st, lasted for ten minutes but was followed by two further shocks which brought down roofs, walls, and whole edifices in the central, most populous part of the city. When the rumbling stopped, a cloud of suffocating dust darkened the brilliant sky. Hours later another quake hit the western part of the city and that was followed by seismic waves which rose over the quays and foreshore and flooded central Lisbon, drowning many of its resident who had survived the tremors. Among the many significant buildings destroyed was the Royal Palace along the foreshore with its priceless collections of books and furniture amassed by King João V in the early part of the century.

Like other disasters at different times, the earthquake gave one politician an opportunity to rally the nation and that person was the Marquis of Pombal, the King's first minister who seized control of government. Pombal's ruthless determination to reconstruct the city after telling the King that they must first 'bury the dead and feed the living' was executed with great precision and speed. The city was divided into a number of districts and detailed plans to demolish ruined buildings and restore water supplies were put into effect. Not only did the prompt action on burial prevent an epidemic but Pombal's efficiency and a certain regard for fairness to all citizens, went some way to restoring the morale of a traumatised nation. Thousands of wooden structures were erected including Beckford's first house, situated to the west of the city near the royal palace of the Necessidades which had survived unscathed. The most significant rebuilding took place in the 'Baixa' area of central Lisbon where

the grid system, with its innovative street lighting and the plain but elegant facades, provided accommodation for the hub of trade and business as it still does today.

Among the old aristocratic families, the Marialvas were the most distinguished. Even during Pombal's reign of terror in which he removed anyone whom he considered a political enemy, the Marialvas remained untouched, protected by the King who told his minister to act as he thought fit with the rest of the aristocracy but to beware of how he interfered with the Royal Equerry, the Marquis of Marialva. The Marialva household was headed by the old Fourth Marquis, a notorious *bon vivant* whose extravagant style of living and colourful entourage impressed the young English visitor. His son, later the fifth Marquis, was Dom Diogo, at that time forty seven years of age. Despite or perhaps because of the age difference, Dom Diogo and Beckford became close friends, the Marquis moved by a genuine, somewhat paternal affection for the young Englishman. For his part, Beckford seems to be content to be adopted by the family which included Dom Diogo's wife, their children Dom Pedro and Donna Henriqueta, and the Marquis's illegitimate half-brother, the Grand Prior of Aviz and the Abbade Xavier, a nonagenarian friend whom we have met waiting at the door. It was Beckford's first experience of family life.

The relationship with the Marialvas suited both sides for other reasons. It was not long before the Marchioness began to look upon the dashing and wealthy foreigner as a suitable husband for her daughter Donna Henriqueta. Like most of the Portuguese nobility, the Marialvas led an expensive, court-based life and their resources were stretched. Careless management exacerbated their financial problems.<sup>7</sup> For his part, Beckford soon appreciated Dom Diogo's position as a constant attender on the Queen and something of a favourite who might be able to arrange for a presentation to the monarch and in that way open the way for re-establishment at home as a person of status. The problem proved to be courtly etiquette – the Queen only received foreigners formally if they were introduced by

their own ambassadors and Walpole refused to oblige. The envoy's motives for refusing to sponsor Beckford are not entirely clear. There is no doubt that Beckford's notoriety followed him abroad. At home his enemies, Pitt and Loughborough, exerted considerable influence in keeping him beyond the social and political pale; they made sure that instructions were sent to Lisbon about the handling of the 'Beckford case.' Whether Walpole exceeded the brief he was given from London is difficult to judge. He was a seasoned diplomat who had been in post at Lisbon for fifteen years by the time of Beckford's arrival and was persuasive enough to influence Portuguese ministers in their foreign policy decisions. He was therefore a formidable opponent with influence in the Portuguese government. There was also the obvious personality clash between the two men – the somewhat dour and time-serving envoy must have found Beckford's grand seigneurial manner unpalatable; rumours of the visitor's lavish life style and his intimacy with the prestigious Marialvas must have added to the ambassador's resentment. Whatever the reason and despite an interview with the Prime Minister, arranged by Marialva, which ended with Beckford storming out of the antechamber leaving the embarrassed Marquis to deal with the ruffled Prime Minister, Walpole maintained his veto on the presentation. Beckford's diary refers repeatedly to his frustration over this matter, somewhat airbrushed from the published version.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, however, there was plenty of entertainment to keep him amused. One of the spectacular events he witnessed was that of the Patriarch of Lisbon, a title conferred on the Cardinal of Lisbon by the Pope earlier in the century, leading a glittering procession through the streets of the city on the day of Corpus Christi. The Patriarch was borne forward like a pontiff under an ornate canopy while priests and acolytes in attendance followed, dressed in the trappings of their ceremonial robes. Canons blasted out and bells pealed in the incense filled air of the city; crowds formed along the way to watch the stately procession. The louche and colourful spectacle appealed greatly to Beckford's sense of pomp and drama. He himself could

indulge in histrionic proclivities by attending Mass at various churches in the city, affecting serious and solemn attitudes, crossing himself incessantly and startling the ever faithful Dr Verdeil who was always in attendance, by his air of self-abasement. In his diary Beckford records the effect of his behaviour on those around him with adolescent glee; he says that he finds it difficult to suppress a chuckle during the scenes at Mass.

A number of Portuguese noblemen, aware of his intimacy with the influential Marialvas came to pay their respects to Beckford. One of them was Pombal's son, the second marquis. He is described as being 'worn down with gambling and lechery' though possessed of 'an ease and fashion in address not common in Portugal.'<sup>9</sup> Although he himself was endowed with a considerable fortune, Pombal confided to Beckford that his father died in debt, contracted in supporting the apparatus of a statesman. The two men seemed to get on well. Pombal showed an interest in the career of the Alderman and in details of Beckford's home in Fonthill. They had much in common: both were the sons of famous fathers who were never quite accepted by the highest society; both remained outsiders despite their considerable wealth.

Beckford did not spend all his time cavorting with nobles. His countryman's enjoyment of outdoors is also evident in the *Journal*. He loved to gallop along the open coast near to his home in Belém, with its view of the waters of the great Tagus estuary, or to saunter in the nearby valley of Alcántara 'among orchards of orange and lemon brightened up by the showers . . . lately fallen.'<sup>10</sup> He expresses a spontaneous delight in the southern abundance of fruit and flowers. A pleasant terrace he passes, irregular and picturesque, with knots of carnations in the wall is enchanting; the evening air is balsamic. Giant aloes and palms add to the exotic scenery.

Meanwhile, a potentially dangerous relationship was forming between Beckford and the teenage Dom Pedro de Marialva, later the sixth and last Marquis. Early in the *Journal*, Beckford expresses his fear of getting 'into a scrape',<sup>11</sup> mindful no doubt of the penalty

he had paid for his involvement with the young Courtenay at home. However, although Dom Pedro proved attentive, perhaps mercifully, he was also passive and a trifle dull. But he was not the only object of Beckford's attention. There is an underlying excitement in his comments on Portuguese youths whom he discovers 'are composed of more inflammable materials than other mortals.'<sup>12</sup> Some of his disappointment with Dom Pedro is relieved by visits to the Patriarchal Seminary in the company of Polycarpo António da Silva, a friend of the Marialvas, who was well aware of the direction of Beckford's interests. At the Seminary, Beckford was surrounded by admiring teenage boys who vied with one another to be the most charming in the eyes of the attractive English visitor. One of the seminarians who soon became a favourite and eventually his lifelong companion, was Gregorio Franchi.

By late June the heat in the city was becoming unbearable – Beckford decided to move to umbrageous Sintra, nestling in the hills outside Lisbon. The village of Sintra, later described by Byron as 'the most beautiful, perhaps in the world'<sup>13</sup> had always captivated poets and writers and it had been the haunt of Portuguese *fidalgos*, including the Marialvas, who had followed the monarch to the pepper pot chimneyed palace in the heart of the old quarter. Sintra's attractions had always been a near perfect balance between woodland and orchard, mountain slopes and ocean mist. With plentiful water and game in the adjacent forests for hunting, it had appealed to the Moorish rulers of the Caliphate and after them the noblemen who emulated the Horatian ideal of the civilised, rustic life in their well-appointed country houses or *quintas* on its slopes.<sup>14</sup>

As luck would have it, a stately mansion, Ramalhão which was situated not far from the Marialva's house in São Pedro de Sintra, was up for rent.<sup>15</sup> The house was built on a site with a long history that stretched back to the late fifteenth century but in its contemporary form, with its characteristic longitudinal dimensions, it dated from the middle of the eighteenth century, about forty years before Beckford's arrival. Some rebuilding, adding a touch of grandeur,



Fig. 1. Palace of Ramalhão, Sintra, c. 1960. © Sintra, Historical Archive, Municipal Archive.

had been done after the damage caused by the 1755 earthquake. The mansion was of considerable proportions and it was set on a raised terrace, visible from the foothills as the traveller approached Sintra, FIGURE 1. Behind it the mountain or *serra* rose in a jagged, majestic peak; in front a vast expanse of country stretched towards the coast. Ramalhão's salons were grand enough for Beckfordian whimsy to operate on its usual scale. Beckford had the main room, lofty and grand, decorated in Oriental style. Quite intentionally, this 'lantern like apartment hung round with curtains of beautiful English chintz and furnished with ample sofas,' soon had the air of the retreat of a grandee at the Moghul court.<sup>16</sup>

Great entertainments were arranged with music provided, at a cost that was later to shock Beckford, by Jerónimo Francisco de Lima, a leading Portuguese composer of the day. When such excitements



Fig. 2. Palace of Setéais, Sintra, mid-nineteenth century. Lithograph by Manuel Luiz, after C. Brelaz. © Sintra, Historical Archive, Municipal Archive.

were not taking place, the ancient Abbade, would waddle over from the Marialvas' villa for a chat amid the snug drapery of the Aladdin's cave that Beckford had created while the wind whistled about outside. In any case the Marialvas house was conveniently nearby, while just to the other side of the village, the well-heeled Dutch Consul, Daniel Gildemeester, was building the palace of Setéais, FIGURE 2.

Gildemeester himself comes over as an affable and mature *bon vivant* whilst his wife, Mrs Gildemeester was one of those lively, older women whose company Beckford always enjoyed. Guests at Setéais included the great and good, gathered in festive mood. Mrs Gildemeester shared Beckford's mischievous sense of humour and delighted in poking fun at less lively mortals, in this case the drabber, and no doubt less affluent, English residents of Sintra. There is an account of the two conspirators chuckling together in the damp

garden of a Mrs Steets whose hospitality was as dreary as the weather on that particular day. Despite a proclivity to the frivolous, Mrs Gildemeester was a force to be reckoned with and became a staunch supporter in Beckford's cause of presentation.

Beckford describes a great dinner he attended at Setéais, served with fine Cape wines and a 'dessert frame fifty or sixty feet in length, gleaming with burnished figures and vases of silver flowers of the most exquisite workmanship.'<sup>17</sup> On the way to the Gildemeester's was the Quinta do Religio, the house of Thomas Horne, Beckford's agent with its terrace shaded by an old cork tree which the diarist tells us 'commands the most romantic point of view in Sintra.'<sup>18</sup>

Ramalhão had another important association for Beckford for it was there that he spent time alone with Gregorio Franchi when the young seminarian could escape his duties at the Patriarchate. Franchi, dashing and cultivated, was already an accomplished musician who played Haydn on the piano forte to the delight of his English host. Beckford was enthralled by Franchi's devotion, the kind of emotional experience he had had little of at home in England. But the excitement had its price: when Franchi was not around the lofty rooms of Ramalhão 'wore a silent and deserted appearance.'<sup>19</sup>

When he needed some solitude Beckford rode down off on his own into the surrounding countryside. He effuses about the effect of light on the scenery, the exotic plants along the way, the ocean swelling off the cliffs at the place where Camões said the land ends and the sea begins. Sometimes there is a high Romantic and Gothic tone in his account as for example when he visits Cork Convent, high up in the misty hills, surrounded by rocks and thickets bearing the grim signs of an ascetic way of life.

When the mountains closed in too tightly, there was always vistas to the boundless ocean that could be seen on the promontories and cliff tops, craggy and pyramid like in what seems to the visitor a theatrical perspective.<sup>20</sup> Among the coves and boulders below he expects to alight upon the ancient sea nymphs of Greek and Roman legend.

In the valley of Colares, he delighted in following a variety of

shady paths which led to copses and orchards, surrounded by green meadows, well-watered by mountain streams. Beckford rhapsodised about the cool, flowing waters, overhung by cork trees and lemon, just as Southey was to do when he stayed in his uncle's lonely cottage in the same hills. The Arcadian scenery of Sintra brought back memories of Savoy and Switzerland, though the blossoming orange and the aloe add an exotic touch not to be found in those more northern climes. It also reminded him of his travels in Italy and of one of his favourite artists, Poussin.

However much he may be pandering to the fashionable cult of nature in the published work, there can be no doubt from the private diary that he was besotted with the bucolic charms around him. One day the party make a visit to the Convent of Mafra, **FIGURE 3**, where he says: 'After coasting the wall of the great garden, we turned suddenly the corner, and discovered one of the vast fronts of the convent, appearing like a street of palaces.'<sup>21</sup> Criticising some of the features of the main façade, including the pagoda-like towers of the Convent, Beckford was nevertheless much taken by the church interior.

The first coup d'oeil of the church is very imposing. The high altar, adorned with two majestic columns of variegated marble, each, a single block, about thirty feet in height, immediately fixes the eye. Trevisani has painted the altar piece in a masterly manner.<sup>22</sup>

Beckford's summer in Sintra and its surrounds was undoubtedly one of the happiest periods of his life. Despite the failure to get presented at court, there is every indication that like Southey and Byron after him, Beckford was enchanted by Sintra. Although Ramalhão was not a perfect house – on his first inspection Beckford had noticed its lack of chimneys, which portended badly for windy, autumn days – it was set in beautiful countryside and there was a familial and social community around him so that he was never bored. The summer he spent there inspired him to return to Sintra seven years later after his visits to Madrid and then in Paris during the beginning of the revolutionary years.



Fig. 3. Palacaio Nacional de Mafra. © The Author.

In fact during the first year of Beckford's second visit to Portugal in November 1793 he stayed again near Belem for the first year and made his celebrated visit to the monasteries. As on his previous visit, Beckford arrived in Lisbon with a large retinue of servants, mimicking the habits of the Portuguese *fidalgo* families with whom he mingled and once again assumed his pious church-going manner and his worship of Saint Anthony, the Patron Saint of Lisbon. While there was a certain degree of humbug in his posturing, his persistent cult of St Anthony seems to have been genuine and led later to his

honouring the saint by placing his statue in the Oratory at Fonthill Abbey.

The diary that he kept on this second visit focused almost entirely on his journey to the great monasteries north of Lisbon. It was later to be published as his most effervescent and picturesque work, the *Recollections of An Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha*. From the outset of the book he was determined to create a mysterious and fanciful atmosphere, telling his reader with an assumed air of casualness:

The Prince Regent of Portugal, for reasons with which I was never entirely acquainted, took it into his royal head, one fair morning, to desire that I would pay a visit to the monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha and to name my intimate and particular friends, the Grand Prior of Aviz and the Prior of St Vincent's, as my conductors and companions.<sup>23</sup>

His reference to the Prince Regent was, of course, intended to impress his readers with the importance of his social status in Portugal. In fact it was only a year later that he was presented to the Prince Regent, this time by-passing the convention of being introduced by the envoy, much to Walpole's fury. The Prince Regent's involvement in suggesting the excursion is therefore a typically Beckfordian embroidery.

The large party for the excursion to the monasteries set off on the 3rd June 1794 from Beckford's house watched by a gaping crowd. Beckford writes of a caravan that would not have cut a despicable figure on the route to Mecca or Mesched-Ali.<sup>24</sup> This jaunty tone is kept up throughout the book which Brian Fothergill suggests represents 'the last really carefree moment in a life that was growing increasingly cynical and embittered.'<sup>25</sup> From Lisbon the party made its way northwards towards Tojal where, at the monastery, Beckford was delighted to find a garden designed in Chinese style by one of the monks who had visited China. From his conversation with the monk he learns that the Emperor of China's winter garden was maintained



Fig. 4. Monastery of Alcobaça. © The Author.

by warm blasts of air throughout the winter by specially constructed furnaces. While this story of grandeur fascinated Beckford, it was too much for the Grand Prior who suggested that a mass should be held for the Emperor's conversion to Christianity. At the next stop on the journey, at the mansion of the Duke of Lafões, the Queen's uncle, Beckford again describes wandering in the gardens and pondering on the peaceful state of Portugal amid the turmoil in other parts of Europe.

On the fifth day of the excursion, the travellers at last reach Alcobaça, FIGURE 4, passing through the well-cultivated lands surrounding the monastery. Beckford's first impression on Alcobaça is graphic.

The first sight of this regal monastery is very imposing; and the picturesque, well-wooded and well-watered village, out of the quiet bosom of which it appears to rise, relieves the mind from a sense of oppression the huge domineering bulk of the conventual buildings inspire.<sup>26</sup>

The reception for the party was also regal. The Abbot, in his costume of High Almoner of Portugal, advanced to give them a cordial welcome; later a grand banquet was held in the capacious dining rooms of the monastery which Beckford wryly describes as the ‘most distinguished temple of gluttony in all Europe.’<sup>27</sup> In the short interval between arriving and the summons to dinner, Beckford rushed to the chapel to inspect the marble tomb of King Pedro I and Donna Iñez, his Spanish lover whose death at the hands of the courtiers had made her a legendary figure. The elaborate tomb, FIGURE 5, with its rich fretwork, reminded him of the Gothic splendour of the Beauchamp monument at Warwick. His appreciation of the finer details of the tomb was interrupted by a summons to dinner in the vast banqueting hall.

Beckford found Alcobaça somewhat heavy in style and gloomy. The damp, stained atmosphere of the Norman cloisters and the grim, ill-sculptured effigies of the Kings of Portugal did nothing to dispel his first impression; the sybaritic atmosphere and lack of scholarly and antiquarian interest on the part of the Abbot and the attendant monks added to his negative feeling. His mood only changed when he left the courtyards of the main building and entered a tree-lined avenue to hear the sad melody of a Brazilian *modinha* or folk song being sung by one Donna Francisca, a former member of the Lisbon social set who had abandoned her fast city life for a calm existence given over to religious contemplation.

It was during his stay at Alcobaça that Beckford first visited Batalha, crossing the famous plain of Aljubarrota where, in 1385, the Portuguese under the banner of King João I of the house of Avis, aided by English archers, defeated the Castilian forces and thereby secured the independence of Portugal from its neighbouring Spanish



Fig. 5. Monastery of Alcobaça, Chapel, Tomb of Pedro I. © The Author.

kingdoms. From the first Beckford loved Batalha, enthusing on its pure Gothic style and revelling in the royal chapel where King João I and his wife, Philippa of Lancaster were interred, surrounded by their distinguished family of princes. On the day after this all too brief visit in the company of the Alcobaça clerics, Beckford rode across

the plain alone to revisit Batalha. On the way his thoughts became gloomy; examining his own character he recognised a self-destructive streak which prevented him from taking up the opportunities that residence in Portugal would offer him. His dark mood was dispelled as he approached the monastery and its bells pealed out in welcome. A simple meal, in contrast to the excesses which had been laid on at Alcobaça, served by the charming novices, ‘Egyptian looking boys in white tunics’<sup>28</sup> who flocked around him, dispelled his tangled thoughts. On this occasion he also had a chance to enjoy the finery of Baltalha’s gothic at his own pace, much taken by details of the arches and the fan-vaulting of the ceilings. His only complaint was with the Founder’s chapel where the incongruous jumble of Corinthian and Doric pillars displeased him and he takes a swipe at James Murphy, the architect who had visited the monastery and praised the chapel and whom he dismisses as ‘that dull draftsman.’<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless out of respect for the more simple and serious monks of Batalha to whom he felt drawn, the English visitor keeps his opinion to himself.

Less than a year after the great jaunt to the monasteries, Beckford had moved back to his beloved Sintra, this time into the house of Gerard de Visme, a highly successful member of the English factory, at Monserrate down the road from the Gildemeester’s at Seteais. Like Ramalhão, Monserrate had a long history; a chapel had been built in honour of our Lady of Monserrate in 1540 by one Gaspar Preto.<sup>30</sup> By the early eighteenth century a *quinta* or country house had been built by the family of Mello e Castro and they sold the house to Gerard de Visme from whom Beckford rented it. De Visme then undertook considerable alterations. From contemporary eighteenth-century engravings we can see that his house at Monserrate was designed in a mock-Gothic style, the long front façade interrupted by a central tower and two end turrets embellished with angular, tapering windows and the whole edifice capped by pointed roofs. Its castellated front made it an attractive country retreat for De Visme but according to Cyrus Redding, Beckford described it as ‘barbarous Gothic’<sup>31</sup> nor was he amused at Byron’s mocking description of it later in *Childe Harold*.

Here didst thou dwell, here schemes of pleasure plan,  
Beneath yon mountains ever beauteous brow,  
But now it is a thing unblest by Man,  
Thy fairy dwelling is as lone as thou!  
Here giant weeds a passage scarce allow  
To halls deserted, portals gaping wide;  
Fresh lessons to the thinking bosom how  
Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied  
Swept into wrecks anon by Time's ungentle tide.<sup>32</sup>

The most evocative description of the house in its last period before the construction of the existing Moghul-style building of the Cooks was given some years later, in 1821, by Marianne Baille, an English pilgrim to Sintra. Although by then the house was in a ruinous state, she describes it as an English villa with elegant apartments, one in the classical style with fine mirrors and precious, crystal-encased doors. There was a spacious central room which opened out onto a lawn where rare shrubs and flower beds reflected the interior design. In another room with a rotund copula one could practice echoes, something that would certainly have appealed to Beckford.<sup>33</sup>

The setting of Monserrate is idyllic. Sunk somewhat in a lush valley, the house itself had been built on a mound. Beyond it towered the craggy heights of the Sintra hills, capped by the ancient Moorish castle. All around the rolling vales offer panoramas. In this setting Beckford conducted his experiments in landscape gardening, trying to integrate a total picture of a natural setting that was improved but not overwhelmed by human cultivation. Vistas were opened up by clearing thickets and brambles so that trees could extend their branches unrestricted. Straight lines and the formality of Continental gardens were avoided; the rolling hills and dips were used to emphasize the shape of trees; cultivated areas were left to merge into wilder ones. Here and there Gothic ornaments – in the form of a ruined chapel or a cromlech were placed at strategic spots in the grounds; a picturesque waterfall was made a feature of the garden. Monserrate was the ideal location to try out the ideas developed by William Kent

and Charles Hamilton; a ruined wall with a distant view of the house which itself could be seen from the terrace of the house was one of the effects at creating a Claudian landscape.

Beckford seems to have retained the lease on Monserrate until 1808 but he returned there only once more in 1798 after the death of his mother, the Begum and stayed there for nine months. Although he had been in correspondence with the Marialvas – he in French, the Marquis in Portuguese – there is no direct record in the form of a diary or other writings of this last sojourn in Portugal. We must assume that he resumed his social life with the Sintra set and continued with his work on the gardens.

Beckford's last visit to Portugal was overshadowed by the growing turmoil that was spreading across Continental Europe. Napoleon's armies invaded the Peninsula; under General Junot they marched toward Lisbon, destroying whatever was in their path and causing panic in the capital. In 1807, escorted by ships of the Royal Navy, the Prince Regent and a considerable number of courtiers set sail for Brasil, carrying with them large amounts of currency and treasure. Junot declared the end of the Bragança dynasty and himself as Protector of Portugal. There was much rampaging and looting by the occupying French forces. When Junot's grip on Portugal was finally shaken by British intervention, his army was allowed to withdraw from the country with all its booty. The terms of the Convention under which this was agreed was signed at Sintra and outraged a vocal section of the British public which included Wordsworth and of course, Beckford.

Preoccupied though Beckford had now become with the building of the Abbey, he keeps up with Portuguese affairs through contact with several ambassadors including the Marquis of Funchal. Funchal was a liberal and an Anglophile who had the difficult task of reassuring the British Government of the steadfastness of its old ally. It was through Funchal that Beckford learnt of the departure of the Prince Regent and Beckford congratulates him on the Prince's safe escape and greets him as the representative of the important country of Brazil.

Later Beckford was befriended by the Duke of Palmela, Funchal's successor as ambassador. The Duke, Pedro de Sousa Holstein, was one of the most distinguished of Portuguese diplomats, representing his country at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. He comes across in Beckford's correspondence as a likeable, rather eccentric character, refusing to be sent to diplomatic posts unless they suited his tastes and arriving for *soirées* in the middle of the night.

While Beckford's diary entries lament the political events unfolding in Portugal, they also contain nostalgic references to what increasingly came to be seen by him as a golden summer of lost youth. This very Portuguese sentiment of *saudades* was particularly strong when he had contact with Portuguese visitors like the diplomat Bezerra de Seixas who came to visit him in July, 1810. Walking about Fonthill on a fine summer's day with his Portuguese visitor, the 'air gilded by the rays of the sun, the most brilliant effects of chiaroscuro' he remarks in a letter to Franchi on the 'picturesque mists' which might make one think one was breathing in the 'scent of Cintra and Colares' and which make 'poor Bezerra weep and fills him with the tenderest *saudades*...' <sup>34</sup>

Beckford himself is full of that sentiment and writes to Franchi two years later:

*Memories of Portugal will always be the memories nearest to my heart.* <sup>35</sup>

1 M. de Bombelles, *Journal d'un Ambassadeur de France au Portugal 1786-1788*, ed. R. Kahn, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979, 117 [Author's translation]

2 Rose Macaulay, *They Went to Portugal*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1946, 110

3 *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain*, ed. Boyd Alexander. London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1954, 52

4 *Journal*, 1954, 153

5 *Ibid.*, 37

6 For a full account of various aspects of the earthquake, see *The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 Representations and Reactions*, ed. T.E.D. Braun & J.B. Radner, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005

7 See J. Murphy's comments on the nobility's finances and estate management, *Travels in Portugal*, London, 1795, 197

- 8 On Beckford's various 'Portuguese' works, see Malcolm Jack, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo*, New York: AMS Press, 1996, 78-99
- 9 *Journal*, 1954, 110
- 10 *Ibid.*, 63
- 11 *Ibid.*, 41
- 12 *Ibid.*, 115
- 13 Lord Byron *Selected Letters and Journals*, ed. P. Gunn, London: Penguin, 1984, 45
- 14 For a history of Sintra, including its foreign visitors and residents, see Malcolm Jack, *Sintra: A Glorious Eden*, Manchester: Carcanet, 2002
- 15 For the definitive history of the house, see F. Costa, *Beckford em Sintra no Verão de 1787*, Sintra: Câmara Municipal, 1982
- 16 *Journal*, 1954, 165
- 17 *Ibid.*, 145
- 18 *Ibid.*, 142
- 19 *Ibid.*, 204
- 20 *Ibid.*, 122
- 21 *Ibid.*, 86-7
- 22 *Ibid.*, 88
- 23 William Beckford, *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha*, ed. Boyd Alexander, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1972, 1-2
- 24 *Ibid.*,
- 25 B. Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, London: Faber, 1979, 232
- 26 *Recollections*, 1972, 35
- 27 *Ibid.*, 37
- 28 *Ibid.*, 133
- 29 *Ibid.*, 136
- 30 For the definitive history of the house see F. Costa, *História da Quinta e Palácio de Monserrate*, Sintra: Camara Municipal, 1985
- 31 C. Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill*, 2 vols., London, 1859, 1:270
- 32 Lord Byron, *Poetical Works*, Oxford: OUP, 1979, 74
- 33 Costa, *Monserrate*, 1985, 28
- 34 *Life at Fonthill, With Interludes in Paris and London*, ed. Boyd Alexander, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957, 91
- 35 *Ibid.*, 125

## *Founding or finding the Beckford Society* *Some Reminiscences of a Vice-President*

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GERLOF JANZEN

Our wonderful Secretary Sidney Blackmore keeps telling me that without me the Beckford Society would not have appeared on the surface of the earth. As this illusion obviously stems from his great and loyal friendship, and as, because of that very same friendship, I do not wish to rob him of it – I have, with some hesitation, consented to write a few personal words which have some bearing on that remarkable happening, the founding, now twenty years ago, of a society, an illustrious company of learned women and men, that study the literary works and other caprices of that most versatile of *richards* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, William Beckford.

The origins of my passion for William Beckford seemed forever to be shrouded in mists, ‘till I remembered that my first real interest in him was kindled whilst glancing at Brian Fothergill’s great biography of Sir William Hamilton. This occurred in the mid-seventies, approaching the town of Hassocks, where I was to descend from the train with my old friend Pat Jolly, an historian to whom I owe a great deal of literary and historic friendships – and such wonderfully personal ones – and for whose spectacular house in Ditchling we were heading. Pat had finished reading Fothergill’s book on the train, and handed it to me just before we arrived at Hassocks railway station. Whilst leafing through it, I stumbled on William Beckford’s name, which seemed to ring a bell – be it not a very loud one. Asking Pat about him, on the platform at Hassocks, he said something like ‘Oh, Beckford, naughty old queen, that’, and consequently my interest was raised.



Fig.1. Gerlof Janzen standing beside Beckford's tomb, 21 May 1993.

Back in Holland I immediately turned to our English library, and found of course that there was much more to find out about Beckford, whom actually I must have read about before the Hassocks incident, as it was in a copy of *Vathek*, that Byron had written his famous lines beginning 'Remember thee, remember thee', addressed to that notorious *femme fatale*, Lady Caroline Lamb. My connection with Byron and the other two great English Romantics, Keats and Shelley, had by then been of much longer standing. As a student I had been a founding member of the Nederlands Byron Genootschap – later to become a branch of the International Byron Society – which actually celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. The only reason for my not then becoming the chairman of that literary society was that, at the very moment the founding meeting took place, I, being a trainee doctor, had to operate on a patient with an acute appendicitis and consequently could not attend the gathering of some ten Dutch

Byronians. I was severely punished for my absence by being made Secretary – and that kept me busy for many years. We had our Annual Lectures in Amsterdam, at the magnificent premises of the British Council in one of the most delightful canal houses on the Keizersgracht, and there were flourishing local reading circles in three other cities in the Netherlands, where kind old ladies opened their houses to welcome Byron and his readers, and to present their home-baked cookies, and excellent wines when the reading was over.

Years passed by, and apart from the many interesting Byron meetings we had, I privately deepened my knowledge about Beckford and bought many editions of his works. In the early nineties I translated Beckford's two Travel Diaries, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* and his *Portuguese Diaries* into Dutch, translations which, to my great surprise, were even published, thus adding at least six people interested in his works in the Netherlands. I gave some lectures on Beckford, two for the Dutch Byron Society, and one for a literary institution which was amazingly called the Bathtub. Unfortunately the Bathtub gave the wrong date for my lecture on their posters, so the only ones to attend were the organizers, and the caretaker and the cleaning lady of the premises – who simply loved it.

And then, during one of our many spring-visits to the West Country, my partner Ronald de Leeuw and I decided to visit Bath, and Beckford's Tower. It must have been a wonderful day, as we can just see on the photograph that was taken on that very day. My diary tells me it was Friday 21st May 1993. I very well recall we had to ring a bell at the impressive neo-Greek building. The door was opened by a lady whose charms were fitted to more elegant times than ours. She was sweet, most knowledgeable, and most helpful, showed us everything we wanted to see, and left us to drift on our own through the tower when that was what we wanted. This was, of course, Philippa Bishop, with whom we had made the appointment to visit the tower. Moreover, she gave us a copy of the guidebook to the tower by Jon Millington, and we talked about that great man of letters and country-houses, James Lees-Milne, whose charming

book on Beckford had long graced our shelves, soon to be joined by the impressive row of his own Diaries. By the time we had finished our visit to Beckford's and Goodridge's creation, we had become imbued with even more Beckfordian fire than before. Seeing and feeling how well and lovingly everything was organized at the Tower, we were convinced that Beckfordians long before us had joined forces and created something of a club or a society of friends – and we expressed our wish to become members of the Beckford Society. 'Oh, my dear young man,' cried the sweet lady, 'there is not such a thing as a Beckford Society. Mind you, we would love to have one, and we have so many wonderful people involved with Beckford, that it should have been here a long time ago – but we don't know how to go about it.' She then told us about the Beckford Tower Trust, about Jon Millington and his indefatigable work on Beckford, about Sidney Blackmore – and too little about herself.

'Well, I don't think it should be all that difficult to have a Beckford Society', I answered with the typical lack of modesty of the younger Dutchman, 'it took us exactly one afternoon to establish the Dutch Byron Society', and as you seem to have a great many Beckfordians available here, you will have your Society in the nick of time. 'Well, really,' said the kind lady Philippa. 'Could we ask you to come over one day, and see what can be done?'

Eighteen months later I found myself again in Bath having been invited by Michael Briggs, Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust to partake in a meeting to explore 'the possibility of setting up a Beckford Society'. Over lunch the Beckfordians quizzed me and debated what goals such a society should have. James Lees-Milne protested that there were too many literary societies. He had even been asked to be president of the Lowry Society. But despite these protests he would eventually become our first President.

I was more than lucky because James consented to show me around in his Beckfordian abode, the magic house with Beckford's Library, at Lansdown Crescent. Philippa would take me there on a particular day, at a particular time. We were there. But no one answered the bell, and

Philippa, in a flutter, suggested that we waited a little as, she was sure, he would eventually turn up. After about half an hour, spent chatting together in the glorious sunshine and enjoying the beauty of the crescent, a small car appeared, driving at a low pace. It parked almost in front of us. 'That is him,' Philippa whispered. Nothing happened. After some minutes, an elegantly clad arm was stuck out, through the now opened door of the car, and what seemed to be a precious Kang H'si blue-and-white bowl was placed on the pavement. The same elegant arm returned after a while, pouring water from a plastic bottle into the bowl, to appear, for a third time, putting a small dog near it, which immediately lapped up the water. For a fourth time the elegant arm appeared, to take the costly bowl back inside. Only then did the maestro extricate himself from the little vehicle, proving himself very much surprised to see us waiting at the curb. 'How wonderful of you to be here, what a coincidence.' 'Well, it's not only a coincidence,' Philippa delicately put in, with a little sigh, 'we had something of an appointment.' 'Oh, really, how amazing, how wonderful,' answered James, with old-worldly elegance, 'do come in by all means.' And he took us with him into Aladin's Cave.

When I next came to Bath, on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1996, for the first Annual General Meeting of the Beckford Society, all the good work had been done: by Philippa and her creative husband Michael Bishop, by Sidney Blackmore, always supported by David Wiltshire, by Jon Millington and his wife Pat, and by Malcolm Jack, who was to be our first Chairman. And I do hope to make it clear that, as far as my own part in these happenings was concerned, it certainly was not so much *founding* the Beckford Society as *finding* it. It had materialized, almost as miraculously as, nearly two-hundred years earlier, Fonthill Abbey had done. The Caliph of Fonthill's own hand must have been active.

This is all twenty years ago now, and we are very lucky that all the protagonists are still here with us today, with the one sad exception of course of James Lees-Milne. The Beckford Society thrives, more than ever, due to the indefatigable exertions of our Secretary Sidney

Blackmore, our first Chairman and now President Sir Malcolm Jack, and of Jane Wainwright, Stephen Clarke, Mike Fraser, Amy Frost, Bet McLeod and my fellow Vice-President Philip Hewat-Jaboor. Not to mention the editorial work over many years of Jon Millington and the first Treasurer, Philippa Bishop. And of course through that most remarkable character who, as a young man, once filled his coach with jasmine blossoms and continues to fill our hearts with admiration, inspiration, love and sometimes even with a little irony – William Beckford.

John Martin Robinson, *James Wyatt*  
(1746–1813) *Architect to George III*

Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 370

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A Review by STEPHEN CLARKE

Beckfordians looking for the first time at John Martin Robinson's sumptuous study of James Wyatt might see Wyatt's Royal Academy watercolour of Fonthill Abbey on the back of the dust jacket, and Charles Wild's watercolour of the Abbey with its soaring, unrealised spire immediately after the Contents page, and conclude that Beckford's Abbey would play a prominent part in this study of Wyatt's achievement. The fact that it does not is no criticism at all of the book, but simply a reflection that the Abbey was one commission in a long and extraordinarily prolific career, in the course of which Wyatt received over fifty commissions a year. In that one statistic, of course, lies the seeds of Beckford's frustration, and of Wyatt's undoing.

Wyatt was born in 1746 into an industrious Midlands family – his father was a builder turned architect – and two themes that emerge from that background are his innovative attitude to new processes and materials (mostly far more effective than the compo-cement used at Fonthill), and his extensive cooperation with his family, from his brother acting as builder in his first London project, to his employing his son Matthew as painter and cousin Edward as carver and gilder at Windsor Castle at the end of his career; nepotism did not trouble him. He was taken up by Richard Bagot (whose identity Robinson has established), secretary to the Earl of Northampton, the Ambassador Extraordinary to Venice, at the age of 16. At Venice he became part of the circle of Consul Smith, the banker and connoisseur whose collection was to be bought by George III, and met Richard

Dalton, the King's librarian. He also studied under the painter Antonio Visentini, as well as taking music lessons. In 1764 he travelled to Rome, spending four years there, and meeting Piranesi.

We know frustratingly little about Wyatt's studies in Italy, but clearly quite apart from his technical skills he also perfected that ease of manner and geniality for which he was well known – social skills that were to serve him well in his dealings with his aristocratic and royal patrons, and which he was to rely on increasingly where in the latter part of his life his clients became increasingly incensed with his delays. What is extraordinary, however, is how Wyatt burst fully armed onto the London architectural scene when in January 1772 the Pantheon in Oxford Street opened its doors. How that plum commission fell to him is still not fully established, though Robinson has helpful suggestions. But as he recounts, its opening party was attended by 1,700 people, including all the foreign ambassadors, the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor, eight dukes and the cream of the nobility. The building was a sensation and Wyatt was made.

The career that followed can only be described as glittering. When Wyatt was offered the possibility of working for Catherine the Great, the Dukes of Devonshire, Northumberland, and Richmond all paid him £50 a year for two decades in return for his resisting her approaches; Chiswick House, Sion, and Goodwood all benefited as a result. Wyatt seized the country house practice of the Adam brothers, and promptly established himself as “the first in his line.” Robinson is particularly good in bringing out just how crisp and accomplished were the early country houses, such as Heaton Hall and Heveningham, how convenient and compact were the plans, and how original were the designs for metalware and for furniture, with some of the designs loosely thought of as Hepplewhite being Wyatt's own. He had an extensive Irish practice, though he only visited Ireland once, relying on executant architects to realise his designs. The chaste and stately designs for the mausoleums at Cobham and Brocklesby, both late 1780s, are singled out for especial praise, as is the Radcliffe Observatory at Oxford, which Robinson describes as “one of the

supreme architectural monuments of the English Enlightenment, combining advanced ideas and superbly made scientific equipment with innovative Neoclassical architecture.” Wyatt in fact dominated Oxford commissions for thirty years.

It was at Oxford that Wyatt undertook some of his first exercises in Gothic. After the Neoclassicism of the Radcliffe Observatory and the Venetian Palladianism of Oriel College Library, there were Gothicised halls at New College, Merton, Magdalen, and Balliol, and Gothicised chapels at New College and Magdalen. By the 1790s nearly all his Oxford work was Gothic, and Wyatt even consulted with Horace Walpole, that oracle of Gothic taste, over the restoration of the damaged reredos in the chapel of New College.

Robinson recounts the claim of Wyatt’s pupil William Porden (who was to go on to design the Gothic extravaganza of Eaton Hall for the Earl Grosvenor, a building as spectacular in its way as Fonthill), that it was he who first opened Wyatt’s eyes to the beauties of Gothic, while Porden was in 1777 drawing and measuring in York Minster. Wyatt’s eyes also seem to have been opened by James Murphy’s drawings and plans of Batalha, Murphy’s expedition to Portugal having been paid for by one of Wyatt’s Irish clients, William Burton Conyngham of Slane, where Wyatt may have seen Conyngham’s own drawings of the building. Wyatt’s first Gothic building in a mature style was Lee Priory in Kent, praised by Walpole as ‘a child of Strawberry prettier than the parent’ – indeed, he told the owner, Thomas Barrett, that Strawberry Hill was ‘but a sketch by beginners, [Lee] is finished by a great master.’ This did not mean it was stylistically consistent or correct in any antiquarian sense (only some of the rooms were Gothic); as Robinson explains, Wyatt’s did not strive after stylistic homogeneity in Gothic any more than he did in Classical. The details could be convincing, and certainly his work on the English Cathedrals had taught him much; but his modern or mixed Gothic combined convincing details of mixed dates, creating grand and scenographic effects – none more so, of course, than at Fonthill itself.

Wyatt the Destroyer, as he became known for his intrusive Cathedral restorations, is given a detailed and not wholly unsympathetic hearing by Robinson. It was Wyatt's misfortune that his commissions to repair and improve some of the greatest of the country's Gothic monuments coincided with a movement in antiquarian circles to preserve and protect them – hopelessly conflicted aspirations. The architectural polemicist John Carter led the charge, and there was a cause célèbre in 1797 when Wyatt was initially blackballed from membership of the Society of Antiquaries. At Salisbury Wyatt had the detached bell tower removed and monuments moved, while at Durham the exquisite Norman Galilee chapel escaped by the skin of its dentilled teeth. Yet at Hereford his clerestory remains, as does the surprisingly convincing ribbed stucco vault of the father and son team Bernato and Francis Bernasconi, who worked extensively for Wyatt. But as Robinson concludes, Wyatt's other Gothic work, secular and castellated is sensational, though virtually all of it, from Windsor and Kew to Wilton and Belvoir, from Fonthill to Cassiobury and Ashridge, was undertaken on huge budgets; and none of it was more spectacular than Fonthill.

One of the elements of the Fonthill story that Robinson brings out is the way in which Beckford's impossible and ever-changing visions of the building were not actually in conflict with Wyatt's genius for the combination of separate but telling details, and for grand scenic effects. He also provides a revealing quotation from the scholarly classical architect C. R. Cockerell, who visited in 1825, before the tower collapsed, and reported that the Abbey was not the monstrous caprice he had expected, and that 'The system of the plan seems to me judicious, as you arrive by the vestibule at once into the centre, which is the means of communication to and from the various apartments of the House'; it was rare indeed for the adjective "judicious" to be employed in any description of the Abbey.

Robinson further reminds us just how different were the two men, summarising Wyatt as 'stolid, affable, easy going and addicted to women.' But while it was Wyatt alone who could realise Beckford's

dramatic visions, Beckford's influence on Wyatt was profound; it was Beckford who introduced Wyatt to Francophile taste, who showed him what could be achieved by the use of drapery and upholstery, of rich curtains of scarlet and purple, of ebony and buhl and hardstones and other exotic materials. This had a profound effect on the heavier Regency style that Wyatt introduced at Frogmore and at Dodington, buildings that were to be influential in their turn in the evolution of Regency taste.

Beckford of course voiced his frustration at the increasingly unreliable Wyatt more forcefully than perhaps any others of the ever-lengthening train of Wyatt's resentful clients, calling him Bagasse, or 'whorehopper,' as in this example quoted by Robinson from October 1811:

Where infamous Beast, where are you? What putrid inn, what stinking tavern or pox-ridden brothel hides your hoary and gluttonous limbs... One can't trust the infamous Bagasse in the slightest thing. Every day brings fresh proof of his negligent apathy.

Similar complaints from Lord Pembroke (of Wilton, where Wyatt did at least achieve some very impressive work) and William Windham (of Felbrigg, where he failed to do anything) are less striking only because they are expressed in language less picaresque.

Towards the end of Wyatt's life, honours crowded in on him; Surveyor General and head of the Office of Works, the favoured architect of George III (who considered him "the first architect in the kingdom"), and for a year President of the Royal Academy. But nonetheless his career began to unravel, and he was only saved disgrace by his untimely death. He was a poor businessman, and despite 5% commission on all his many projects, he was seriously in debt at his death, and his widow was faced with penury. The *éclat* of Royal patronage, congenial as it may have been, was also a major distraction. The house and office at Foley Place, Westminster, had to be sold and the country house at Hanworth disposed of. The investigation on his calamitous management of the Office of Works would have resulted in his dismissal, and he had already been sacked from

the Office of Woods, from Wilton, from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and from Soho House Birmingham. He had always worked extraordinarily hard, losing himself in individual favoured projects at the expense of the rest of his practice, but increasingly drink and the distractions of the flesh took their toll. And yet... even at the end of his life, the one thing that remains unchanged is the quality of his invention. Look at Ashridge, created for the Earl of Bridgewater (or Bilgewater, according to Beckford), whose staircase hall provides one of the finest evocations of the lost drama of Fonthill, and whose chapel is a wonderful and convincing display of Collegiate Gothic; look at the majestic neo-Roman of Dodington, or the civic grandeur of Liverpool Town Hall. Robinson has no difficulty in convincing us that these are exceptional achievements at the end of an exceptional career.

We benefit from the fact that this book is the product of decades of thought and research; Robinson's early study *The Wyatts: An Architectural Dynasty* was published as long ago as 1979. It provides us with by far the best and most comprehensive account of an extraordinarily talented and original architect, and it does so in the handsome and copiously illustrated format that we have come to expect from Yale University Press – the book is designed by the accomplished Sally Salveson. There is an incomplete reference at the head of page 231, and some of the page references to Boyd Alexander's *Life at Fonthill* are astray, but these are merely the minutiae that reviewers cite to show they have read the book. They do not begin to rank in the assessment of a fine achievement; a traditional but convincing and entertaining account of a great architect, infinitely accomplished in both classical and Gothic styles, moving from the perfect and polished harmonies of the 1770s to the drama and virtuosity and exercises in sublimity of the 1790s and beyond. Wyatt has been well served by this book.

‘I found an invitation from Mr. B.  
to visit the Abbey’  
*Richard Cosway’s portrait miniature of  
an Unknown Man dated 1793*

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STEPHEN LLOYD

The appearance of the writer, traveller and aesthete William Beckford is known to posterity through a small group of oil portraits of him in his early adulthood and middle-age, painted by three leading English contemporary artists: by George Romney, in 1781-2 as an arrogant, epicene young man about to embark on his Grand Tour, FIGURE 1; by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1782 as an expressive and sensitive youth with wind-swept hair, FIGURE 2; and by John Hoppner in c.1800 as a tense, melancholy and introspective bibliophile, FIGURE 3.<sup>1</sup> There is also a group of other portraits that are less helpful in decoding the distinctive features of the connoisseur, patron and collector, since they were made either in childhood, by Andrea Casali, c.1766, on his deathbed by Willes Maddox, 1844, as printed profiles by Piat-Joseph Sauvage, 1801 and by John Doyle, 1842, or as a caricature after William Behnes, 1807.<sup>2</sup> The most eloquent modern literary pen portrait describing Beckford’s appearance was made by James Lees-Milne in his short biography, which remains the best introduction to the man and his achievements, and which is worth quoting in full:

What was William Beckford like at the age of twenty? Undoubtedly he was an attractive young man. He was on the small side, slender, well proportioned we are told, which is not however borne out by his portrait by Romney the following year. There the hips, unusually

broad, like a woman's, give him a slightly epicene appearance. But whether Romney's figure was a likeness we cannot be sure. His face in youth was certainly handsome, though the nose was rather long. The expression was mischievous when not downright arrogant. His sneer could be daunting. The eyes were small, steel grey, of wonderful acuteness. He had a rapid enunciation and when angry the voice rose to a high scream. He had an affected manner, especially when singing. The wit George Selwyn remarked that his singing voice was like a eunuch's, whether natural or feigned he could not tell. His conversation was brilliant, but he could become boring in the pursuit of a well won subject. He was given to mimicry. He had a habit when silent or concentrating of putting a freckled hand over his mouth. The best portrait of him was probably Hoppner's, taken in middle age. The head is still very handsome and the expression highly intelligent, melancholy and reserved. With the approach of old age Beckford's face became beaky, the nose sharp, chin pointed and, as he lost his teeth, the lips drawn in.<sup>3</sup>

While Beckford's three portraits in oils by Romney, Reynolds and Hoppner show the sitter in variety of poses and attitudes, they are essentially public performances. Hitherto, what has been lacking in our understanding of Beckford's appearance has been a revealing intimate portrait, such as a miniature, but no such small scale depiction is recorded in Beckford's archival remains or early biographical memoirs. Yet if Beckford was to have been portrayed in miniature, the most likely artist he would have sat to would have been the most fashionable contemporary miniaturist. This would have been Richard Cosway (1742-1821), elected a Royal Academician in 1771, and who first painted the Prince of Wales, later the Prince Regent and George IV in 1780, becoming his *Primarius Pictor* or Principal Painter in 1785.<sup>4</sup> Beckford had a number of points of contact and sympathy with Cosway, not least that the artist was flamboyant and eccentric, extremely well-connected socially, an outstanding collector and connoisseur, a romantic antiquarian, and a self-proclaimed magician and syncretic mystic with an extensive and eclectic library devoted to the occult sciences.



Fig. 1. George Romney, *William Beckford*, 1781-2, oil on canvas.  
© Bearsted Collection, Upton House, The National Trust.

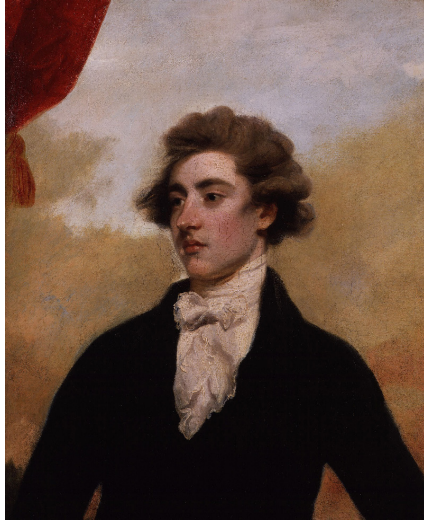


Fig. 2. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *William Beckford*, 1782, oil on canvas.  
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

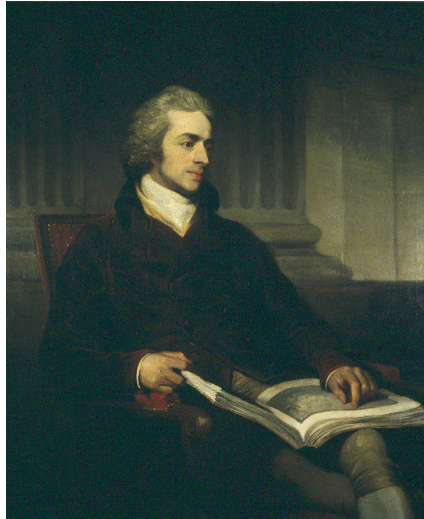


Fig. 3. John Hoppner, *William Beckford*, c.1800, oil on canvas.  
© Salford Museum and Art Gallery.

Apart from the Prince of Wales, one of Cosway's three most significant aristocratic patrons was Beckford's young paramour 'Kitty', namely William, 3rd Viscount Courtenay, later Earl of Devon (1768-1835). From 1790 and 1812 Courtenay actively commissioned from Cosway portraits of himself in both miniatures and oils, running up a bill of £1,602.81, which was finally settled in 1820.<sup>5</sup> Among the many miniatures painted by Cosway of Lord Courtenay, the finest is probably that showing him in 'Vandyke' fancy dress and armour, which was purchased 2010 by the Royal Albert Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter, and which can probably be dated to 1793.<sup>6</sup> Courtenay also sat in 1790-91 to Cosway for a full-length portrait in oils, for which the artist charged £136.10s in 1791. This ambitious coming-of-age portrait, where Courtenay is shown wearing his splendid 'Vandyke' costume in black, trimmed with gold braid, still hangs in pride of place over the fireplace in the Music Room at Powderham Castle, which had recently been commissioned by Courtenay from the architect James Wyatt.<sup>7</sup> Cosway went on to paint two triple full-length portraits in oils of Courtenay's six sisters, including *The Hons. Sophia, Louisa and Mathilda Courtenay* shown in 1805 seated in a landscape, for which the artist charged Courtenay £265.10s.8d; both paintings are still displayed in the ancestral home of the Courtenay family at Powderham.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the mutual connection with William Courtenay, another notable point of convergence between Beckford and Cosway was their mutual admiration within an elite artistic and aesthetic milieu. In 1807 Cosway planned to travel down from London with two of James Wyatt's sons to view the auction of the contents at Fonthill Splendens, and also to see the picture gallery of outstanding Old Master paintings at Longford Castle, the country house of Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, 2nd Earl of Radnor, another of the artist's most important patrons between 1781 and 1812. Cosway portrayed Lord Radnor and members of his family in miniatures and drawings but mostly in a series of oil paintings.

As Cosway revealed in an undated letter to Lord Radnor, but

which is clearly from 1807, he was diverted from a visit to Longford Castle by an exceptionally rare invitation to stay at Fonthill Abbey as the personal guest of William Beckford and to view the collection with the owner, a visit that was to last ten days. In a footnote it also contains reference to the imminent sale by Beckford of the two famous Altieri Claudes, now in the Fairhaven Collection, Anglesey Abbey, The National Trust, that were masterpieces by the French seventeenth-century landscapist and the disposal of which Cosway thought might be interest to Lord Radnor for his already very fine picture collection. The letter is worth quoting in fuller detail as it relays something of the artist's excitement in receiving the invitation and for its description of the contents:

My Lord,

I cannot but deeply regret my disappointment in being depriv'd the pleasure I had propos'd to myself in paying my respects to y' Lordship – seeing the Gallery at Longford Castle; but as I could not leave Town till the Day before the Pictures and other works of Art were to be sold at Fonthill, and having two of Mr Wyatts Sons with me who were under the necessity of joining their Father there on that Day – I flatter'd myself I shou'd have it in my Power to visit Longford Castle on my return, which I conceiv'd wou'd have taken place in three Days, but on my arrival at Tisbury where Mr. Wyatt had provided Apartments for me, I found an invitation from Mr. B to visit the Abbey, This opportunity (which I apprehended perhaps might never happen again under such advantageous circumstances) I cou'd not resist, and such a Wonderful accumulation of Treasures of every possible description in Books, Manuscripts, Prints, Books of Prints, Gems, Cameos, Carvings in Ivory, Ebony, the most rare Japan, China, &c, &c, &c, &c, &c, of the highest Class and in the purest state of preservation, I believe clearly does not exist in Europe, & which can never be seen but by Mr. B. himself so that instead of three days to which time I had limited my stay from London, I was employ'd Ten Whole Days in examining what I believe to be a fiftieth part of the contents of the Abbey and I really think shou'd have remain'd there to this Hour, had I not been summon'd

thence by Express from Town on very urgent Business, - thus was I depriv'd the very great gratification I had propos'd to myself in visiting Longford in my return as I was oblig'd to be in Town at a given time which I with difficulty accomplish'd. But I trust I shall soon be more fortunate -

[...]

N.B. I have some reason to believe Mr. B. will perhaps be induc'd to part with His Claud[es], as he has no Place where he can possibly hang them to advantage in the Abbey according to the Costum observed throughout the Building - and it wou'd be cruel to deprive the Public the gratification of seeing them in London, he is charm'd with yr. Lordship's [pair of paintings by Claude] as all who have ever seen them & know anything must be, but Alas they also, are fourscore Miles from the Capitol.<sup>9</sup>

Cosway's personal invitation from Beckford to stay at Fonthill Abbey was clearly a highly unusual event, as only a very select group of sympathetic and imaginative artists were permitted entry, together with a few celebrities such as Lord Nelson and Emma Hamilton. Beckford clearly admired Cosway both as an artist and as a connoisseur and collector. During his visit to Fonthill Abbey, Cosway also made a pen and ink drawing of the western façade and tower of the Abbey, which is now at Fondazione Cosway in Lodi. Despite it only being a sketch, its importance to Cosway was signified by his mounting it on card and setting it with a gold-leaf border, which he only did for his most finished and precious subject drawings.<sup>10</sup>

Fifteen years later, in 1822, a year after Cosway's death, the critic and essayist William Hazlitt went to Fonthill Abbey to view the famous sale of the contents. His contrasting consideration of Cosway and Beckford, was full of praise for the romantic and imaginative antiquarianism of the artist in comparison with, as Hazlitt saw it, the soulless array of polished trophy-art accumulated by the millionaire. This study in contrasts, with its devastating critique of Beckford as a collector, was first published in his essay on 'Fonthill Abbey' in *The London Magazine*, and four years later in a modified form, praising



Fig. 4. Richard Cosway, *An Unknown Man*, here identified by the author as William Beckford, 1793, watercolour on ivory.  
© Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Cosway, in his essay ‘On the Old Age of Artists’, for the collection of writings, *The Plain Speaker*. Hazlitt lamented Fonthill as ‘a desert of magnificence’, ‘a cathedral turned into a toy-shop’, where there was not ‘one lofty relic of sentiment or imagination’. On the other hand Cosway’s collections at 20 Stratford Place off Oxford Street in London were described as ‘in the richest disorder, dusty, shadowy, obscure with much left to the imagination (how different from the finical, polished, petty, perfect, modernized air of Fonthill!)’.<sup>11</sup>

Cosway was prolific as a fashionable miniaturist for over half a century from 1760 until around 1810, when he mainly ceased the production of portrait miniatures in favour of drawings. One of his

greatest masterpieces in this art form in which he excelled is the portrait of an unknown man in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, FIGURE 4.<sup>12</sup> It was bequeathed to the museum in 1910 by the omnivorous collector George Salting; prior to that it had owned by Edward Joseph and illustrated in his privately printed catalogue of 1883 of portrait miniatures by Richard Cosway.<sup>13</sup> In this miniature, which is signed and dated, the artist sets the sitter against a cloudy sky background with flashes of blue sky and grey clouds. The man, who looks to be in his early thirties and wears his hair fashionably powdered, looks to his left in a three-quarter profile. He is shown wearing a brown coat, white neckerchief and blue undervest. The left hand side of his face is slightly shadowed. The sitter has grey eyes and a long pronounced nose. He appears to be sensitive, intelligent, haughty and melancholy. While no written evidence has appeared yet in the William Beckford or the Richard Cosway papers to state that the former sat for his portrait to this artist, on purely terms of visual connoisseurship and by comparison with other portraits, both artistic and literary, this portrait has a strong claim to be reidentified as a portrait, and an intimate one at that, of Beckford in his prime, and painted by one of the finest miniaturists of the late Georgian and Regency period.

1 I am grateful to Stephen Clarke for encouraging me to write this article and providing me with a copy of Boyd Alexander's 1967 article on portraits of Beckford; to Sidney Blackmore and Bet McLeod for their assistance with the illustrations to this article; and to Anne Eschappasse for her conversations on Beckford. For the Romney portrait, see *William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, exh. cat., Derek Ostergard (ed.), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, New York and London, 2001-2, 305, cat. no. 8, and *In Trust for the Nation: Paintings from National Trust Houses*, exh. cat., ed. Alastair Laing, National Gallery, London, 1995, 34-5, cat. no. 9. For the Hoppner portrait, see *William Beckford 1760-1844*, exh. cat., 16, fig. 1-1

2 For the full-length childhood portrait by Casali, see *William Beckford 1760-1844*, exh. cat., 298-9, cat. no. 1; fig. 6-2; for the two deathbed portraits in profile by Maddox, see *Ibid.*, 404-5, pp. 150-51; for the severely classicizing head and shoulders engraved in profile by Sauvage, see *Ibid.*, 99; for the lithograph of the full-length equestrian study

in profile by Doyle, see *Ibid.*, 262, fig. 151-1. For Behnes' engraved caricature vignette showing Beckford wearing spectacles with his bookseller, see Boyd Alexander, 'Fonthill and Portraits of William Beckford (1760-1844)', *The Register of the Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas*, III, nos. 8-9, Winter 1967, 7, fig. d. For a fuller list of publications on the portraits of William Beckford, see Jon Millington, *William Beckford: A Bibliography*, Warminster: The Beckford Society, 2008, 55-56

3 James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford*, Tisbury: Compton Russell, 1990, 7-18

4 Stephen Lloyd (ed.), *Richard and Maria Cosway: Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion*, exh. cat., Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh and National Portrait Gallery, London 1995-6; *idem*, *Richard Cosway*, London 2004; *idem*, 'The Cosway Inventory of 1820: listing unpaid commissions on the contents of 20 Stratford Place, Oxford Place, London', *The Walpole Society*, LXVI, 2004, 163-217

5 Lloyd, *The Walpole Society*, *op. cit.*, 72-3, 201

6 The Cosway miniature of Courtenay, a watercolour on ivory, 7.2 cm high, can be seen on the website of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, and that of Philip Mould Ltd, London, the dealers who sold the miniature to Exeter for £24,000. It was acquired with the support of the Art Fund, the MLA / V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of Exeter Museum and Art Gallery

7 *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 96 (col. pl); 122, no. 93

8 *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 126, no. 151

9 Pleydell-Bouverie archive, Wilshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, 1946/4/28/4. I am grateful to Steven Hobbs, archivist at the Wiltshire Archives, for his assistance; partially quoted in *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 77

10 Stephen Lloyd, 'Richard Cosway: *primarius pictor*, virtuoso e collezionista', *Maria e Richard Cosway*, ed. Tino Gippioni, Turin 1998, 45-60, ill. 48

11 William Hazlitt, 'Fonthill Abbey', *The London Magazine*, November 1822; *idem*, 'On the Old Age of Artists', *The Plain Speaker: opinions on books, men and things*, 2 vols, London 1826, I, 207-27

12 *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 124, cat. no. 119, not ill., watercolour on ivory in gold frame, height 8.8 cm, V&A Museum accession no. P46-1910, George Salting Bequest 1910. It is fully signed and dated with Cosway's mature signature, which he used after his appointment as *Primarius Pictor* to the Prince of Wales in 1785. It is written in Latin in pen and ink on a piece of paper, inserted into the back of the miniature: *Rdus. Cosway R.A. Primarius Pictor Serenissimi Walliae Principis Pinxit 1793*. It is known that Beckford returned to England in May 1793 after a long sojourn in Revolutionary Paris, and so could have sat to Cosway later that year. See Anne Eschapasse, 'William Beckford in Paris, 1788-1814: *Le Faste Solitaire*', *William Beckford 1760-1844*, exh. cat, 99-115

13 *Catalogue of a Collection of Miniatures by Richard Cosway, R.A. and Contemporary Miniaturists. Illustrated by Photographs of the Originals, in the possession of Edward Joseph, Esq. For Private Circulation only*. 1883, cat. no. 3 'Portrait of a Gentleman'. A printed introductory note states on page 1: 'Many of these were exhibited by Mr. Joseph, at the Art Treasures Exhibitions; at Burlington House in 1879; at Ryde, Isle of Wight, in 1881; and at Lewes, Sussex, in 1882.'

## *A Commentary on William Beckford*

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A Transcription by BET MCLEOD

A manuscript letter in the National Library of Scotland provides a little-known commentary on William Beckford.<sup>1</sup> It was written by Viscondessa de Haguahy, from 95 Piccadilly, London, on October 11 1822, to Lady Henrietta Liston, Millburn Tower, near Edinburgh. Lady Liston (1751-1828), a noted botanist, was the wife of Sir Robert Liston (1742-1836), a British diplomat, and had spent many years on the Continent and in the United States, often creating notable gardens in the grounds of the British compounds.

The connection between the Viscondessa and Beckford is as yet unknown, but is likely they had some links through the Portuguese court. Lady Liston, who was a minor heiress born in Antigua, would certainly have known of the name of Beckford, and may possibly have also known of the gardens and grounds at Fonthill.

‘...talking of princely fortunes much are people amazed at Mr. Beckford selling certainly the most beautiful house in England – which served to be a hobby horse that was the amusement of his life – hardly finished when he disposes of it. They say to M. Farquhar for 400.000£ who tho so immensely rich – lives as a miser. What can such a man do with so fine a place, and what an establishment to keep it up. I saw Mr. B just before I went to Richmond and he then only talked of selling a number of costly articles that were more than he wanted superfluities – for a man who never gains to be in distress with an income at times that amounted to 150,000 some years, – tis true that West India property is reduced to less than half, – and I must think that he has had law suits that have been only now cruelly decided against him. Some estates that even his father enjoyed are now proved

to have belonged to others – he is obliged to give them up and what is still worse to refund the money they produced – the whole seems to me a romance, a riddle.

I think he might gain thousands by writing and selling his memoirs – he has matter for fancy to work on – and by no one is he surpassed in genius and talent – . I could moralise on this subject for hours – he is subject for conversation for everyone – but how few know him and can appreciate what art and nature has done for her favourite. Had he done justice to himself he ought to be the shining character of the age – listened to followed and admired – where sweet lady are we to look for happiness when a man so gifted has so sadly frittered it away – . . .

. . . Postscript: They say that more than thirty thousand people have been to gaze at the wonders of Fonthill – and so many more wd have gone but the tickets of admittance was a guinea for 2 people – & a catalogue – ’

<sup>1</sup> Ms 5688, ff. 186-187, transcribed as written

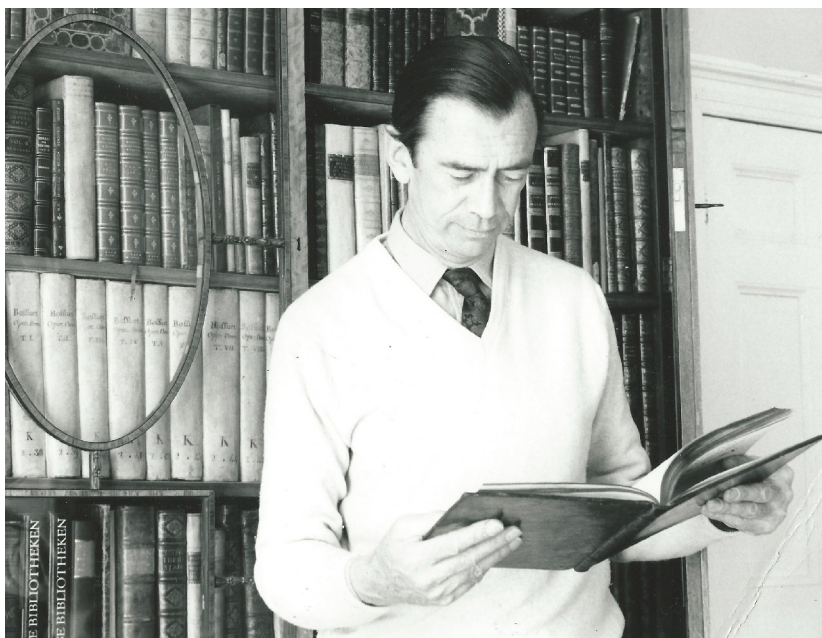
*Anthony Hobson D.Litt., F.B.A.,  
5 September 1921 – 12 July 2014,  
President of the Beckford Society from 1998.  
A Memoir*

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DIANA BERRY

*‘Let it be bound in some choice little scrap of genuine rough grained blue morocco, no gold except in lettering – Voyage d’un Chrétien vers L’Eternité– true and straight – accent over the e correct and accurate – inside, red within a border of blue morocco, said order with blind tooled fillets somewhat antiquated.’*<sup>1</sup> Thus William Beckford instructed his favourite binder, Charles Lewis, ‘The Angel’, in December 1831 for an addition to his library in Bath. But it could equally have been Anthony Hobson from the precise detail of the order, except the morocco would have been deepest black on the spine, the end papers marbled dark green and the bindery Sangorski and Sutcliffe. The Hobsonian binding ‘livery’ was legendary at Sotheby’s.

Anthony Hobson was the second President of the Beckford Society, succeeding James Lees-Milne. Accepting the role from Malcolm Jack in July 1998 with characteristic diffidence he wrote: ‘I am most grateful to the Society for their confidence in me’. In truth, there could not have been a more appropriate appointment. As bibliophile and world authority on bindings, he had written about Beckford’s book collecting as early as 1959,<sup>2</sup> and his binders in 1961.<sup>3</sup> But even more to the point, he was head of Sotheby’s book department, the auctioneers who had handled the great suite of book and manuscript sales from Hamilton Palace in 1882-3 which included Beckford’s library. Through Anthony Hobson’s friendship with the Beckford



Anthony Hobson photographed by his wife, Tayna.

scholar and biographer Boyd Alexander, he was able to work on the Hamilton papers where he discovered the correspondence detailing the fascinating relationship between Beckford and his various booksellers and binders.

Sotheby's, first established in 1744, had built its reputation as auctioneers of books and literary material, whereas the slightly younger Christie's specialised in paintings. When in 1908 the firm of Sotheby's came up for sale, it was bought in part-shares with two others by Geoffrey Hobson, Anthony's father, himself a great scholar of Romanesque bindings. Hobson senior published five books on the subject and pasted photographs and cuttings of every relevant example he found into vast folio albums which his son would later update with newly-discovered examples. These albums are now destined for the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

After Eton and a spell at Oxford curtailed by the war, where he served with distinction in the Italian campaign, Anthony Hobson joined Sotheby's in 1947: not long after became head of the book department, aged only 27. Whereas Geoffrey Hobson, being rather deaf, had not taken sales, Anthony – with tuition from future chairman Charles des Graz – learnt the art of auctioneering most elegantly. When his father died in 1949 his son Anthony inherited a third of the company.

When I joined the firm in 1968 as a very junior member of the furniture department, Anthony's domain was at the back of the warren of eighteenth century houses that made up Sotheby's. The Book Room was thus entered from St George Street, off Hanover Square. At that time, there were two regular book sales a week, usually on a Monday and Tuesday, with the auctioneer's rostrum at the head of a horse shoe table, and an 'understanding' that key members of the book trade sat in the same seat each week. Overhead were the two floors of the book department under the strict leadership of 'ARAH', or the 'Ant' as he was secretly called, where the very highest standards of scholarship and cataloguing were maintained. A number of offices containing the specialists such as John 'Jake' Carter, A.N.L 'Tim' Munby, Andreas Mayor, and Igor Vinogradoff, Anthony's father-in-law, led off a rickety staircase. When I graduated to the Medieval and Renaissance Works of Art department working for Dr J. F. Hayward, his office was also situated off that back staircase of learning. Occasionally wanting a second opinion on, for example, the date of a piece of Saracenic metalwork in relation to Venetian binding decoration, John Hayward sent me upstairs to 'Mr Hobson', definitely one of my more daunting tasks. As Christopher de Hamel noted in his excellent address at Anthony's funeral: 'In the workplace, Anthony Hobson cultivated a certain patrician grandeur. His vast office overlooking St George Street resembled the drawing room of a country house. He regarded Sotheby's as his private fiefdom'. On these occasions, he would pull out volumes from a Georgian bookcase to show me comparative examples, but I knew never to

ask to borrow a book – it went straight back into the shelf with the rows of bound and annotated sale catalogues of libraries he had presided over, such as Dyson Perrins, J. R. Abbey and the never-ending Phillip’s sales. When, in the 1970s Anthony Hobson became disillusioned by the auction house and the commercial route it was taking, his personal reference library was quietly cleared one evening and in 1974 he resigned.

As director, Anthony Hobson maintained the strict ‘library’ rule that no tea or coffee was to be brought into the book department in case of spillage. This also meant, uniquely, that he gave his staff – who, led by his example worked long hours – permission to go out to the café round the corner. By the time of his departure the custom had spread to other departments, with these elongated ‘tea breaks’ even leading to a number of company romances. When management attempted to curtail the practice, the members of the book department alone were able to insist it continue, as it was ‘Mr Hobson’s rule’.

One day, I encountered ‘Mr Hobson’ on the stairs and to my surprise he asked about my mother who had been ill. I was touched that such an eminent, and by reputation aloof, member of the Sotheby’s deity would take such an interest – but at once the ice was broken. Anthony and his wife Tanya were great friends of the writer Anthony Powell and his family, as was I at the time, and thus links outside the hierarchical world of the auction house were established.

Anthony Hobson was, in my view, a great loss to Sotheby’s. He may have been a demanding taskmaster but no one ever matched his level of scholarship and connoisseurship at the same time as commanding a department of multifarious scholars with such brilliance. The chairman Peter Wilson had recognised the need for greater cataloguing scholarship in the decades after the war, bringing in top experts from the museum world such as Philip Pouncey from the British Museum for drawings, Neil Maclaren from the National Gallery for Old Masters, and my own boss John Hayward from the V & A for works of art and metalwork. But these great men did not have Anthony’s combination of academic and commercial skills – he

was also an auctioneer through and through. Only he really knew the detail of saleroom etiquette. I recall an occasion when a dealer was overheard selling on an item he had just bought to another dealer, as he walked between the saleroom and the street. Trading on the premises was strictly forbidden. He was sent to Anthony Hobson for a ticking off and banned from the rooms.

In 1975 I became the organiser of an exhibition about William Beckford that the Southern Arts Association was mounting in the Salisbury Library as part of ‘European Architectural Heritage Year’ in 1976: this exhibition subsequently transferred to South Western Arts in the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath. As I lived within twelve miles of Fonthill and had been brought up with the legend of ‘the Caliph’, the project appealed to me, even though it was somewhat ambitious for its budget. A year’s planning with a powerful committee of Beckford experts such as Jon Millington, Dr Christopher Thacker, the late Clive Wainwright, and Professor John Wilton-Ely, designer Humphrey Stone and chairman Julian Berry, sent me from one end of the country to the other researching loans, the greatest treasure trove being the Beckford *objets d’art* at Brodick Castle, Isle of Arran, at that point not yet published by Malcolm Baker. Everyone was hugely enthusiastic about the exhibition and wonderfully generous with their time and expertise, while James Lees-Milne agreed to write a book for us, his immensely readable *William Beckford*.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it was because the time was right for a reassessment of Beckford or perhaps triggered by didactic exhibitions such as *The Destruction of The Country House* at the V&A,<sup>5</sup> and *Gothick* at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton,<sup>6</sup> the little show took off and indeed was hailed by Sir Roy Strong as the best regional exhibition of that year. Scholars were generous with articles while Bevis Hillier, then editor of *Connoisseur*, offered to dedicate a large part of the April 1976 issue to Beckford in time for the opening. This is where Anthony Hobson’s important article *William Beckford’s Library* appeared,<sup>7</sup> the culmination of years of watching Beckford’s books and manuscripts, dispersed in past great sales, circle round and back through Sotheby’s,

affording him the opportunity of studying at first hand items from the Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Crescent libraries. The article describes Beckford's passionate book collecting, his devouring of volumes, as he did read the books, the numerous auctions of illustrious libraries where he sent agents to bid or on occasion attended himself sometimes in disguise, in particular his buying in pre- and post-Revolutionary Paris; his lively correspondence with his various booksellers and binders; his curiously spiteful acquisition of Edward Gibbon's library; and the establishment of what became known as a 'Fonthill' binding, though interestingly Anthony Hobson did not call it that. The article is most valuable in breaking down Beckford's areas of book collecting and even describes how Beckford liked to display his books, in five libraries at Fonthill Abbey, but also scattered through other rooms such as the Cedar Boudoir. Hidden behind a secret door, the room is described by Rutter as giving 'that feeling of privacy and perfect seclusion to its inhabitant, which is a luxury of the highest order to a true bookworm'. Perhaps this struck a chord.

In 1975, in neat time for the exhibition, a collection of Beckford's books from the library of the 5th Earl of Rosebery at Barnbougle Castle were offered in two sales at Sotheby's,<sup>8</sup> many with 'Fonthill bindings'. These bore the signature Beckford motifs, stamped in compartments on the spine, comprising the *cinquefoil* from the Hamilton arms through his mother, and the Maltese – or Latimer – cross *patté* because Beckford claimed descent from the first Lord Latimer. A good number of the volumes typically contained Beckford's notes and annotations on flyleaves. Anthony Hobson describes Beckford's taste in bindings as 'fastidious but sober' and that 'he demanded first class workmanship and plain designs... rejecting for example, Simier's elaborate bindings for the Duchesse de Berry, (as) 'smooth and goldified articles';<sup>9</sup> Beckford preferred simple red or blue straight-grained morocco with reserved ornament as perfected by his favourite binder, Charles Lewis, 'the true Angel of binding'. We acquired two volumes from the Rosebery sale, one with binding attributed to Staggemeier, the other to 'The Angel', for

inclusion in the exhibition, and listed as Catalogue nos. L7 and L9.

Another aspect of Anthony Hobson was his devotion to Eton and in particular to College Library where as an Oppidan scholar he would have, grudgingly, been allowed access. Most boys passed through Eton without discovering its riches but those who did never forgot it. One of Anthony's many responsibilities was as a Trustee of the College Collections and consultant to College Library. In 1977 he invited me to accompany him to Eton to meet Provost Harold Caccia. After a rather daunting lunch at high table in College Hall where the subject of conversation was Anthony Eden, about whom the Provost was to give a memorial address in Westminster the next day, I found myself appointed works of art consultant to the Collections. Later I was shown the Order of Merit of Provost M.R. James. According to Christopher de Hamel, until his death last year Anthony Hobson was probably the last man alive to have known the famous Provost of the ghost stories.

Now came the years of my visits with my family to Glebe House in Whitsbury, where Anthony and his wife Tanya (née Vinogradoff) lived in an elegant pink brick Queen Anne house nestling in a village below the rolling Hampshire chalk downs. Between Salisbury and Fordingbridge, Whitsbury also contained the William Hill stud and racing stables, the village maintained to perfection with deep verges of mown grass and post and rail fencing, more New England than England. As one made way for strings of horses, white-painted signs directed owners to 'Visiting Mares' which always caused our children amusement. Although not overtly 'horsey' Anthony had certainly been a capable rider in his time, but in latter days it probably just appealed to him to have a few thoroughbreds grazing in his fields around the house, adding to the elegance of the setting. It was onto that stage set in 1959 that he brought his beloved Tanya and his stepson, with three more children to follow.

Tanya Vinogradoff, half-Russian, open, warm and loving, filled the house with friends and family and gently broke down the rigidity of Anthony's urban lifestyle. I see Tanya now, often with head scarf

tightly knotted, tucking back escaping strands of fair hair, racing between vegetable garden and kitchen with baskets of fresh-picked produce, followed by her unruly Jack Russell, Albert, effortlessly delivering huge and delicious meals, often involving eggs and spinach, while guests and children crowded round. It always seemed summertime at Glebe House, cricket on the lawn and swimming in the Roman-style pool and sunning on its grassy banks stared at by two stone sphinxes. Tanya, who adored her garden, had a special way of doing flowers for the house, natural, tumbling, in little lustre jugs in the bedrooms and in a special pair of vases on the drawing room fireplace. When she died, far too young, in 1988, one wondered how Anthony would go on.

But go on he did, and certainly heart-broken, he called upon that extraordinary will of his and threw himself into more work, more writing, lots of travel, often driving himself to the Continent, having friends to stay and taking them to the opera and exhibitions. It would never be the same again for him but lucky were the friends who were invited to join his travels, with his formidable cultural knowledge of so many countries and his perfect command of so many languages. I went with him, for example, to Naples, with some members of the *Bibliophile français*, to Croatia with Mollie and John Julius Norwich, and on a magical visit to St Petersburg with Ian and Deirdre Curteis, where everything had been, in his characteristic manner, carefully researched in advance.

When he became President of the Beckford Society, I joined him on the Society's first visit to Portugal in 1999. Led by Malcolm Jack we retraced Beckford's steps to the abbeys of Alcobaça and Batalha and to the restored gardens at Monserrate, and stayed in cloudy Sintra where the mists swirled around the towers just as they had done for Beckford, reminding him of foggy Wiltshire.

Anthony Hobson had many bibliographical responsibilities as the formal obituaries have shown,<sup>10</sup> but he greatly enjoyed the Beckford Society, particularly making a point of attending the annual lectures and presiding at the dinners after, often, appropriately, held in the

beautiful library of the Travellers Club, the haunt of many of his writer friends. At Glebe House Anthony continued, with a loyal domestic staff to support him, to have family and friends to stay who were magnificently fed by his devoted cook/butler David, with 'Guards' pudding being a special feature. V.S. Naipaul, Henry and Virginia Bath, his sister-in-law Deirdre Connolly and her husband Peter Levi, were regular visitors, as were Wanda and Eric Newby, the latter one of the funniest men I ever met, sharing with Anthony stories of Italy in the war, many woven round Eric's hair-raising escape from the German occupying forces and meeting and falling in love with his Italian teacher, Wanda.<sup>11</sup>

Describing growing up at Glebe House, William Hobson described in his moving funeral address how it was a rare event to cross the threshold of his father's library: 'a sanctum devoted to serious, arcane labours veiled in an aura of the purest concentration'. And yet when they were very young, that was where he read stories to his children, gleefully mimicking different voices while they sat in a high-backed leather chair 'like on the branches of a tree, our legs dangling'.

He was a father of contrasting opposites, and I saw them both on many occasions. On one occasion, my daughter Georgia, who was staying with me at Glebe House, was not considered old enough to come down to dinner although it was her fifteenth birthday, until rescued by Deirdre Levi. And yet nothing was too much trouble to achieve perfection for family and especially children: he once told an incredulous Humphrey Stone how much he loved babies. During the Naples visit, he wanted to buy coral necklaces for his two young granddaughters Nell and Maddy, but rejected the downtown jewellers' shops as too touristy. Instead, a lengthy morning was spent driving miles up the coast, searching for the head-quarters of Neapolitan coral manufacturing, where the grandee Godfather-style chief was brought out of his office to deal personally with this distinguished English signor while the purchase was negotiated of two tiny coral necklaces of palest pink. They had to be perfect.

The suite of posthumous sales of Anthony Hobson's library and

art collections, ably put together by John Byrne, covered a startling number of subjects; Old Master and British Drawings, Victorian and Old Master Paintings, Arts of India, the Exceptional sale which included Lady Desborough's Chippendale bookcase, sculpture in Paris, Gobelin tapestries, Russian works of art, plus two single-owner book sales. The pictures and furniture all had a particular role in contributing to the decorative scheme of both Glebe House and a London flat, things that reflected Tanya's taste as much as Anthony's. Tanya was the granddaughter of the painter Algernon Newton, and a Newton painting of an arcadian scene with a country house was the cover lot of one sale,<sup>12</sup> and she wove her own magic around the taste of her husband. The contents of Glebe House provided a Grand Tour in themselves, ranging through France, Italy, Germany and Austria and stretching from the Mediaeval to the Pre-Raphaelite to Tanya's superb black and white photographs of Russia. And despite the house having Queen Anne origins, the overall effect was Regency, from its classical façade to the light and airy interiors, a clever mix of academic and aesthetic softened by the floral and decorative.

The books were a life's work. Anthony Hobson, like Beckford, had formed a series of different collections within his library; illustrated books of the Italian baroque, English artistic bindings, antiquarian bibliography, Russian literature inspired by Tanya and Igor, and a Ronald Firbank archive which was the subject of his last Roxburghe Club volume.<sup>13</sup> In addition there was his bibliographic reference library that contained many rare catalogues of libraries Beckford bought from,<sup>14</sup> and a collection of twentieth-century English literature including an important Federico Garcia Lorca group and a Nancy Cunard collection. Once or twice these stocks had to be raided, in particular in 1996 to raise some post-Lloyds funds. To quote John Byrne in his introduction to the Modern Literature catalogue,<sup>15</sup> "Oh poor Anthony, poor Anthony, all those empty shelves! . . . But there were no empty shelves. Like the prisoners in *Fidelio* many books came forward out of the darkness of double banking, while other clambered up from the cupboards below." One is reminded of Beckford trying



to fit all his books into Lansdown Crescent grumbling: ‘Some of my finest books are marshalled two rows deep, one behind the other.’<sup>16</sup>

‘The Personal Collection’, Anthony Hobson’s *Modern Literature*, that was sold in June,<sup>17</sup> contained many volumes signed and inscribed by writers who were friends, visitors to Glebe House in its heyday, such as Kingsley Amis, John Betjeman, Dickie Buckle, Cyril Connolly, Arthur Koestler, Philip Larkin, Peter Levi, the Sitwells, Newby and Naipaul. The early Anthony Powell novels in their rare original Misha Black wrappers were keenly fought over, while a set of the twelve volumes that make up *A Dance to the Music of Time* made a record £32,250.

The Beckford quote ‘Nothing second rate enters here’ is perhaps overused but in a way apposite, for that was the overall effect at Glebe House. And for a man with an indoor upbringing of town and library, Anthony Hobson also knew the importance of woods and garden and wilderness, rejoicing in the garden Tanya created as well as relishing in a stretch of woodland up on the hill behind the village where he always had hoped to build a picnic folly. His last outing before his final illness was a lunch party in my garden at Sedgemoor, over a sunny Whitsun Bank Holiday in May 2014. He was a little frail and was brought by his stepson Jonathan Tetley but he was, as always, the life and soul of the party, holding court with friends old and new, including James Stourton, Xa Sturgis and Jonathan Marsden, plus lots of children. When he became ill that famous will of his surfaced: he was determined to finish a review for the TLS of the final catalogue of the Waddesdon Library,<sup>18</sup> the printed books and book bindings by Giles Barber. ‘I promised Jacob Rothschild’. It was published eight days before his death.

There is surely no better epitaph for Anthony Hobson than the classical quotation he himself chose to go on the plinth of a statue on the garden façade of Glebe House. His son William drew our attention to it; from Virgil’s Eclogues, it reads ‘*Fortunatus et ille, deos qui novit agrestis*’ – ‘Happy is the man who has known the gods of the country’. That is where he found greatest happiness, at The Glebe, with Tanya and his children, and his books.

1 Anthony Hobson, ‘William Beckford’s Binders’, *Festschrift Ernst Kyriss*, Stuttgart: 1961, 379. The quotation is taken from Beckford’s writing to Charles ‘The Angel’ Lewis, specifying the binding of John Bunyan’s *Voyage d’un Chrestien vers L’Eternite*, Amsterdam: 1685, which is now in the British Library

2 Anthony Hobson, ‘William Beckford’s Library’, paper read to joint meeting of the Bibliographical Society, the Roxburge Club and the Grolier Club, 20 April 1959, subsequently published in *The Connoisseur*, CLI, no. 770, April 1976, 298-305

3 Hobson, ‘Binders’, op. cit.

4 James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford*, Tisbury: Compton Russell, 1976

5 Roy Strong, Marcus Binney, John Harris (eds), *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1975

- 6 *Gothick*, exh. cat., Brighton: Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums; exh. Brighton, May 6 - Aug. 17, 1975
- 7 Hobson, 'Library', op. cit.
- 8 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books Formerly in the Library of William Beckford*, Sotheby's, London, 27-28 Oct 1975
- 9 Hobson, 'Library', op. cit., 302
- 10 Select obituaries: (a) N. Barker, 'Anthony Hobson, historian, auctioneer and scholar who followed his father as a leading figure in the study of Bookbinding', *The Independent*, 24 July 2014; (b) James Stourton, 'Anthony Hobson, Bibliophile and 'scholar aesthete' who won the admiration of Cyril Connolly', *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 2014
- 11 Eric Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971
- 12 *Glebe House, Mount Pellier and Woodbury House, Three Country House Collections*, sale catalogue, Christie's South Kensington, 17 June 2015, front cover and lot 42
- 13 Anthony Hobson (ed.), *Ronald Firbank, Letters to his mother 1920-24*, Roxburgh Club, 2001
- 14 *Fine Printed Books and Manuscripts including the Anthony Hobson Collection of Bibliography*, sale catalogue, introduction by Felix Oyens, Christie's South Kensington, 9 June 2015, 57
- 15 *Modern Literature: The Personal Collection of Anthony Hobson*, sale catalogue, introduction by John Byrne, Christie's South Kensington, 10 June 2015, 3
- 16 Hobson, 'Library', op. cit., 304
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Anthony Hobson, 'Morocco Bound. Giles Barber: The James A. de Rothschild Bequest, Printed Books and Bookbindings, Rothschild Foundation: 2015', review, *Times Literary Supplement*, July 2014, 24-5

## *Notes on Contributors*

DIANA BERRY, formerly Diana Keith Neal, worked for twenty-five years at Sotheby's, becoming a senior director and Chairman of Sotheby's Institute. She organised the 1976 Beckford Exhibition in Salisbury and Bath, and set up the Museum of Eton Life (opened 1985) while a consultant to Eton College Collections. In the last ten years she has been a professional fundraiser, in particular as director of development and now Trustee of New Schools Network, a charity established to promote the opening of the new free schools. She is also a Livery Court Assistant, and a Trustee of Policy Exchange and of the Attingham Trust for Historic Houses.

STEPHEN CLARKE is a London lawyer and independent scholar. His research interests centre on Horace Walpole and William Beckford. He participated in the exhibition on *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill* at the British Art Centre at Yale and at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2009–2010. His book *The Strawberry Hill Press & Its Printing House* (New Haven: Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, 2011) is distributed by Yale University Press. He has recently published articles in *The Book Collector* on William Beckford's marginalia and in *The Journal of the History of Collections* on some early 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian collectors. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a Trustee of Strawberry Hill and of Dr. Johnson's House, and an Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Liverpool.

MALCOLM JACK served as Chairman of the Beckford Society from its inception in 1995 until 2015 when he was elected President at the Salisbury AGM. He has written extensively on Beckford and edited his works. His book on Beckford's time in Portugal, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo* was published in 1996. He has published a number of books on Portuguese history including a history of Sintra (*Sintra: A Glorious Eden*, 2002). He has also published widely on eighteenth-century subjects and has recently been visiting professor of Enlightenment Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. From 2006 to 2011 he was Clerk of the House of Commons during which time he edited Erskine May's

*Parliamentary Practice*. He was appointed KCB in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2011.

GERLOF JANZEN, now retired as a clinical psychiatrist, has been active as a translator since 1980. He is a founding member of the Dutch Byron Society and the Beckford Society. Among his translations into Dutch are Beckford's Travel Diaries, Keats's Letters, Oscar Wilde's Letters, and many works of other English and American authors and poets such as Shelley, Walter Pater and William Maxwell.

STEPHEN LLOYD is a historian of art, and is Curator of the Derby Collection, Knowsley Hall, Merseyside. He received his doctorate from the University of Oxford on the Regency artists Richard and Maria Cosway who were the subject of an exhibition he curated at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh and the National Portrait Gallery, London in 1995-6. He worked for many years as Senior Curator at the SNPG, where he curated a number of exhibitions, especially on portrait miniatures, but also on the Scottish pastellist Archibald Skirving (1999), Lord Byron (with the NPG, 2002) and with Kim Sloan, *The Intimate Portrait: Drawings, Miniatures and Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence* (with the British Museum, 2008-9). He co-edited with Vicky Coltman, *Henry Raeburn: Context, Reception and Reputation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

BET MCLEOD is an independent decorative art historian and consultant. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, her PhD subject was the ceramics in the collections of the Dukes of Hamilton. She continues to work on Beckford and Hamilton collections, and has published and lectured widely on these, and other topics.

