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Contents

C. F. Bell's Annotations of Beckford Biographies

MIKE FRASER

Charles Francis 'Charlie' Bell (1871–1966), was first Keeper of Fine Art at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, a post he held between 1909 and 1931. His father, Robert Courtenay Bell (1816–1896) was a banker, his mother Clara née Poynter (1834–1927) was known for her definitive translations of Ibsen and Balzac. His brother, Edward Hamilton Bell (1857–1929) emigrated to the US to curate the John G. Johnson Collection as Assistant Director at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.[1] The wider Poynter family included such luminaries as his uncle Sir Edward Poynter, President of the Royal Academy and Director of the National Gallery from 1894 to 1904, and his grandfather the noted architect Ambrose Poynter (1796–1886), pupil of Nash and founding member of the RIBA. Through his uncle's marriage to Agnes Macdonald he was related to Burne-Jones, Kipling and Baldwin.[2]

Bell was a well-connected figure in early to mid-twentieth century art history, with a wide knowledge and a strong, even aggressive, temperament with regard to standards of scholarship. His character could be politely described as 'idiosyncratic', and one distinguished scholar suggested he was "*a fierce and acerbic art historian of great breadth of learning who set himself and others standards of perfection which few could achieve, let alone maintain*."[3]

Despite his prominent professional position, Bell published relatively little in his long career with some implication that in the public realm he preferred that "*others could take the blame*".[4] To

exert influence and scholarship, Bell took seriously the nurturing and mentoring of emerging talent, and his protégés were among the most senior art historians in twentieth-century Britain. Sir Kenneth Clark (1903–1983) was introduced to Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) by Bell, and Clark's early work on the Gothic Revival was encouraged by Bell and partly based on his notes.[4] Clark wrote of Bell, "*he had an entrée into every great collection and intellectually distinguished milieu in England and Italy. But he had no wish to shine in the great world, only to excel in certain narrow and precise branches of art history*".[5]

Another of Bell's apprentices was Sir Francis Watson (1907-1992) who went on to become curator and then director of the Wallace Collection, a lifelong friend and eventually executor of Bell's estate.[6] In 2014, material from Watson's estate was sold through several London and provincial auction houses, including items from Bell's personal collection held within Watson's own reference library. In one volume, a set of Toynbee's Letters of Horace Walpole,[7] Watson writes on the endpaper "… *in 1964 I was acting as executor to the still-living C. F. Bell at the time when his house at No. 8 Vicarage Gardens was closed down (as he was moving into a nursing home) … When, therefore, these books with the rest of CFB's library were sold at Sotheby's on 15th March 1965 I purchased them.*" The auctions of Watson's collection included items by and about William Beckford which were extensively annotated in Bell's hand.

Drawing on some of these volumes, this article presents a small selection of Bell's annotations, focusing on his perspectives on the politics surrounding Beckfordian scholarship in this period through his copies of Melville,[8] Oliver,[9] and Chapman.[10] While these perspectives are unique to Bell, they contribute further context to Beckford's biographers within the setting of the biographies' production, and give a sense of the art historical context in which they were working, as well as revealing the early stages of a broader movement that underpinned Beckford's increasing place in art historical circles in the early to mid-twentieth century.

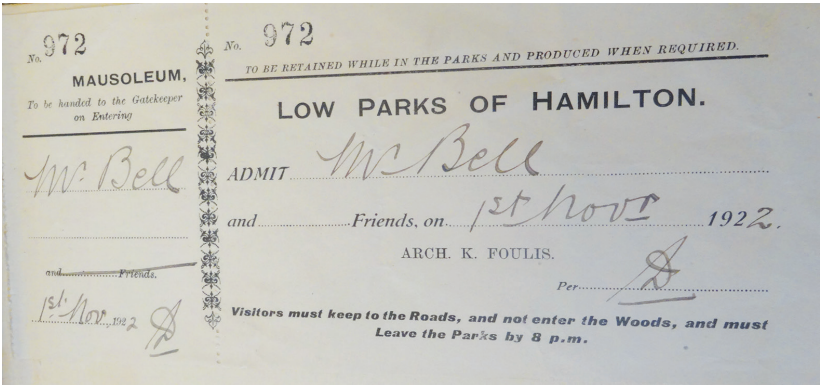

Fig. 1. C. F. Bell's ticket of entry to Hamilton Parks and Mausoleum.

Bell's handwritten notes on the endpapers of his copy of Chapman's biography suggest that he had been strongly interested in Beckford since at least 1922, when he was asked by the Burlington Fine Art Club to compile a catalogue for their exhibition on the art of J. R. Cozens.[11] He was determined to inspect the Beckford papers, still at Hamilton Palace while it was enduring demolition, to verify Melville's statements and look for any other Cozens material that may have been missed. The resulting story, transcribed in Appendix 1 of this article, is revealing on several points regarding the condition of the Beckford papers and the establishment's relative views of the quality of work by Melville, Oliver and Chapman. Bell's copy of Melville has, pasted on the front endpaper his ticket of entry to the Hamilton Parks and Mausoleum, dated 1st November 1922, Figure 1. Indeed, Bell's Beckfordian collection is littered with neat pencil marginalia, and grangerised with photographic plates of related portraits, newspaper cuttings from the Times Literary Supplement, letters from correspondents and original pictures.

A couple of notable examples will help to convey the character of these books. In his copy of Melville, Bell has pasted an original drawing of Fonthill Abbey and attributes it to his Grandfather Ambrose Poynter, Figure 2. The caption reads in full: "*Sketched*

Fig. 2. Ambrose Poynter, pencil image of Fonthill Abbey 'sketched from nature'.

from nature by Ambrose Poynter, architect (b 1796 d 1836) in the summer of 1823 when the abbey was first opened to the public, 1824 or 1825 – the tower fell down finally in December of that year". Comparison of the drawing with other work by Poynter strongly suggests that the attribution is correct. A superficial study of the image suggests that it is conceivable that Poynter was copying Rutter's South West view of the Abbey or Higham's engraving of it. However, on more detailed inspection there are significant differences in both the perspective and the emphasis of architectural points of interest in which Poynter was notoriously accurate, and the presence of unique landscaping details also reinforce Bell's story of this sketch of Fonthill being taken from life.

Further exploration of Poynter's work reveals that the RIBA Library contains significant material by Poynter which was donated to the RIBA by Bell, demonstrating that Bell did hold an archive

of his grandfather's work. These materials include correspondence from Poynter to A. C. Pugin (1762–1832),[12] and a 91-page typescript "Note-and-sketch book" by Poynter on Gothic ecclesiastical and domestic buildings in England, with index. This latter item is undated but with watermark 1831 and inscribed on the fly-leaf by his son Sir Edward Poynter, "*These drawings and memoranda were made by my father Ambrose Poynter, apparently with a view to a treatise on English gothic architecture*'."[13] These materials suggest this trajectory of interest in the gothic can trace a direct line of influence from Beckford, through Poynter and Pugin, via Bell, to Francis Watson and Kenneth Clarke. Bell thus forms a lynchpin in the trajectory of developing scholarship in the gothic revival between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This example perhaps conveys some of the rich underpinning value of the annotations in these volumes, with individual items suggesting numerous directions for further research.

A second example shows how Bell was situating Beckfordian perspectives within the twentieth century critical milieu. Also pasted into Bell's copy of Melville are cuttings of a number of images of American architectural designs for skyscrapers, including the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning, Figure 3. Charles Z. Klauder (1872–1938) produced this Collegiate Gothic design which remains the second tallest gothic-styled building in the world, after New York's Woolworth Building. Bell has inscribed below these images the phrase "What Beckford would have liked to have built".

Beyond such one-off items of interest, the bulk of Bell's marginalia discuss specific mistakes in the text or general related information of interest. He has also inserted photographic plates of related pictures into his copy of Melville, and has corrected many of Melville's attributions of pictures and their sitters. He has inserted detailed corrections of Melville's transcriptions of letters, presumably taken from the originals on his visit to Hamilton Palace.

Bell's written preface in his copy of Chapman's biography

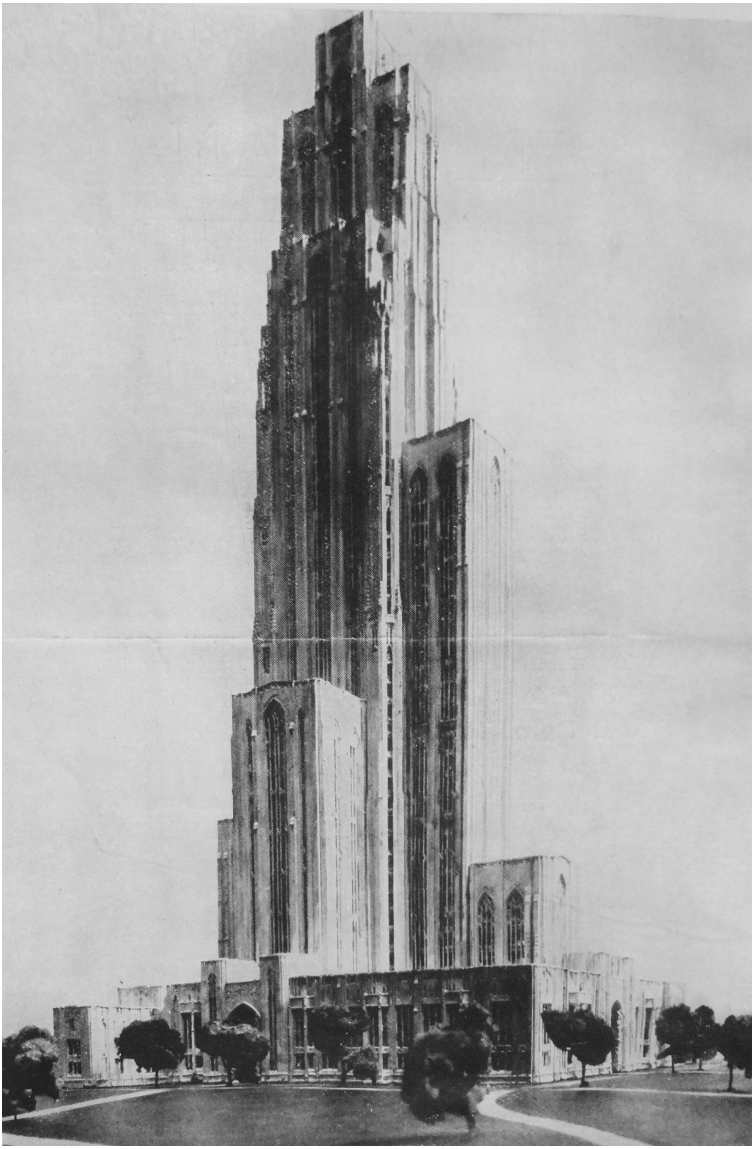

Fig. 3. Charles Z. Klauder's design for the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning (1936). "What Beckford would have liked to have built" according to Bell.

provides a full account of his developing interest in Beckford's biographers following work on the catalogue for the 1922 Cozens exhibition. Several features of this account deserve comment, as they collectively demonstrate the contemporary perspectives of Beckfordian scholarship in the art historical establishment of that period, and especially at the time that biographers were establishing and contesting patterns of narrative around Beckford's life and work which would strongly shape later works. A clear picture emerges that as commercial writers Melville and Chapman are considered, in different ways, 'outsiders' of the academic sphere whereas Oliver is established as the 'insider's' choice of biographer. These insiders seem to include a network of academics and art historians who hold Bell's confidence. Sir Herbert John Clifford Grierson (1866–1960) was the Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University to whom Oliver's biography is dedicated. Sir Robert Rait (1874–1936), was Historiographer Royal and Principal of the University of Glasgow. Bell's circle also included Michael Sadleir (1888–1957), British novelist and book collector, and the other members of the Committee established for the Cozens exhibition, Thomas Girtin (1874–1961) descendent of his namesake, Harold Clifford Smith (1876–1960), Keeper at the V&A in 1935, and Adolph Oppé (1878–1957), renowned collector of drawings and subsequently author of the definitive *Alexander and John Robert Cozens.*[14]

A 1924 letter from Grierson, transcribed in full in Appendix 2, sets the scene. Grierson, in agreement with Bell on the quality of Melville's work, suggests that his 'pupil' (Oliver) is working on 'a short biography' and has permission from the Trustees of Hamilton Palace. He also mentions that cataloguing of the Beckford papers is in hand and that the catalogue may be published too. Oliver himself regarded Bell of some importance to his biography, demonstrated by his deferential letter to Bell which is pasted into Bell's copy, transcribed in full as Appendix 3. In it, Oliver gives thanks in ways which suggest that the extent of Bell's involvement in the production of Oliver's biography was significant: "*I hope the book "will do". You*

took a great deal of trouble over it and I hope it will prove to have been worth it. In any case, I need not say how grateful I am to you for all your help."

His annotations give a strong indication that Bell, Grierson and colleagues were heavily involved in encouraging and supporting Oliver's work, and that this biography stemmed in part from their concerns about the legitimacy, accuracy, and quality of scholarship of the work carried out by Melville, and later by Chapman. Suggestions advocated by Bell include minimising the sensationalist aspects of Beckford's scandalous affairs, and prioritising narratives of Beckford as romantic hoarder and collector rather than calculating editor and reviser of his own *nachlass.* These positions have their basis laid out in Bell's introductory notes to the 1922 Cozens exhibition. While many individual mistakes by Melville or Chapman can be identified in the context of later Beckfordian scholarship and biography, and indeed many are highlighted in Bell's marginalia, it is difficult to know the extent to which these criticisms of Melville and Chapman are aligned only with their level of scholarship, and which may be influenced by other prejudicial factors. Contested aspects could include the effect of art historical cliques and their ability to exert control over scholarly work or primary research sources; the distaste for commercial work and its need to sensationalise; and even anti-Semitism, certainly visible in the opening of Bell's comment in his Chapman preface, "*Mr Lewis Melville né Benjamin, who with the persistence of his race has nosed his way into several family muniment-rooms*". It is made clear that Oliver has been tasked with the writing of his biography at the request of Grierson, Rait and Bell, yet subsequent Beckfordian scholarship by Boyd Alexander and others demonstrates that Oliver did not achieve all that might have been possible, even with the benefit of full access to the Beckford Papers and the support of Bell and others.

While Melville's work had passed by mostly unscathed on publication and was only criticised in retrospect, Chapman

was publishing and operating within the sphere of influence of these scholars, and seems to have faced significant opposition in consequence. Chapman wrote an article about Beckford in the *Times Literary Supplement* on May 6 1944, which drew heavily on his biography. Bell responded in a letter published in the *TLS* two weeks later repeating many of his criticisms of Chapman from Appendix 1, and concluding "*As an old-fashioned researcher into what used to be deemed historical details I naturally feel much hesitation – trepidation even – when introducing my testimony before a tribunal that deems a pamphlet containing several major errors of fact as none the less informed by the spirit of the truth – a spirit, it is to be feared, like others distilled in war-time, many degrees remote from proof. But as The Times Literary Supplement will certainly come to be used as a primary source of authentic information, it is surely desirable that any mistakes that creep into it should be corrected*."

A personal letter from Douglas Cooper (1911–1984), art historian and cubist collector, to Bell, pasted into his copy of Chapman's biography, responds to Bell's *TLS* letter and provides further contemporary context, transcribed here as Appendix 4. Cooper writes in support of Bell's views: "*it is getting increasingly difficult to find any editor who will allow one to challenge in his columns the spate of confident mis-statements which defigure almost every thing written by a certain little group*". While we can only guess at the group being alluded to, there is certainly evidence that efforts to marginalise Chapman's work were not isolated with Bell. This context of Chapman's contemporaries sheds new light on Geoffrey Blum's article which describes in detail Chapman's developing work towards his *Beckford* biography, his emphasis on documents and facts, and his challenges in circumventing Grierson's preferential treatment of Oliver with respect to accessing the papers.[15] Bell's materials suggest a counterpoint to these assessments, instead painting Chapman's narrative of Beckford as a dishonest figure obsessed by crafting his place within history as in fact constituted through Chapman's own outsider status, characterised by distance

from the art historical establishment and representing his inability to develop a narrative independent of Melville due to lack of primary source material until late in the development of his book. These views shake the very foundations of the idea of Beckford as deceitful obsessive, shaping the character of his own celebrity through editing and revision, an idea which has most recently been expressed in Mowl's ironic phrase 'Composing for Mozart'.[16] For Beckfordian scholars, there is a certain attraction in Bell's counter-view that Beckford was rather, at the core, simply a compulsive and romantic hoarder.

Bell's collection of Beckford biographies provides individually fascinating items, but is also collectively revealing. It shines a light on the context of literary cultures in which early-twentieth century Beckford biographies were produced, interpreted and critiqued. Most importantly, it illustrates the genealogical influence that Beckford's work continued to exert on subsequent generations of scholarship through a period which has often been treated as a hiatus in Beckfordian research.

Appendix 1 – Transcription of Bell's handwritten preface in Guy Chapman's *Beckford* (1937)

'The history of this book is rather curious. In 1910, Mr Lewis Melville né Benjamin, who with the persistence of his race has nosed his way into several family muniment-rooms, and published unscholarly versions of their contents, somehow discovered that Beckford's papers were in the charter-room of Hamilton Palace, and obtained leave to make a book out of a selection from them. The result was his "Life of William Beckford". In this, besides the edition's habitually inaccurate and illiterate methods of transcription, there can be detected an apparently deliberate but imperfectly successful scheme of sophisticating documents by altering names and the sexes of pronouns. The object of this seems to have been to retain an aroma of romance while avoiding allusions to Beckford's connection with the Honble. William Courtenay, scandal of that nature not being in those days considered mentionable in public. The book seems to have fallen flat. It was not until ten years later that I came upon it, and from reading it guessed rather than learnt, that Beckford had been on intimate terms, both as a friend and patron, with Alexander and John Robert Cozens, and that they had even, apparently, had some connexion with his tempestuous love-affairs.

In the autumn of 1922 the Burlington Fine Arts Club decided to hold an exhibition of works of J. R. Cozens, and I was asked to serve on a sub-committee to carry out this plan. The compiling of the catalogue fell to me. I felt that it would be desirable to examine the Beckford papers in order to check Mr Melville's statements and see if there was any other material relating to the Cozens' that he had overlooked. By the kindness of Sir Herbert, then Professor Grierson, I obtained introductions and spent a week of long days at Hamilton working at the contents of two or three large chests. As the Palace itself was then being pulled-down, and the contents of the charter-room were in some temporary storage place, the boxes were brought to the estate-offices. I noticed that they were very damp. The bulk

of the papers seemed to be in the same order as when they had been packed by Susan, Duchess of Hamilton, Beckford's daughter, in the period between his death in 1844 and her own in 1859. If Mr Melville had examined them all more minutely than his book might lead one to suspect, he had replaced them with great care. I found the now well-known seven sketchbooks of Cozens, and letters which confirmed the ideas about the relations between him and his father and Beckford suggested by Mr Melville's account of them. I hinted at the situation as guardedly as I could in the introductory essay to the catalogue of the exhibition.

The result of its publication was most astonishing. I began to receive letters from people entirely unknown to me asking questions about the papers, the possibility of acquiring them &c, &c. Professor Grierson, by some round-about way, through the Commissioner of the Hamilton Trustees, who was mentioned in the catalogue, received, I understand, similar letters. I cannot remember whether Mr Guy Chapman was one of those whose interest was excited at this time, but T. J. Wise was.* I had mentioned to Professor Grierson that the state of the papers showed that the temporary charter-room could not be weather-proof. He spoke to Sir Robert Rait, and representations were made to the Duchess of Hamilton and the Trustees, which resulted in the decision to transfer the whole of these archives on permanent loan to the National Scottish Register House at Edinburgh.

The point then arose as to how to protect the Beckford papers, henceforth accessible to the public, from the sort of use which Professor Grierson and I strongly deprecated, and which was quite evidently aimed at by the enquirers already mentioned. First of all it was announced that the papers had to be sorted and arranged. This

*Thomas James Wise (1859–1937) assembled the Ashley Library which is now part of the British Library collection. In addition to his many published bibliographies of poets and dramatists, he was notorious for a 1934 scandal suggesting he resold and mis-authenticated many literary forgeries and stolen documents.

task was confided to a pupil of Sir Robert Rait's. Then Professor Grierson hit upon the excellent idea of getting some judicially-minded scholar to anticipate a muck-raking biography by producing a quasi-official book out of the more valuable materials. He pitched upon Dr Oliver, and that gentleman's excellent and, it was hoped, final biography of Beckford was the outcome. Meanwhile, the indefatigable Mr Guy Chapman, foiled in his efforts to get at the central heap, proceeded to compile and publish sundry volumes, making use of such straw &c, as he could scrape off the surrounding soil. In these he was so astute as to insinuate that the grapes were really sour, in other words that the letters and so forth were of little value, because they had been tampered with by Beckford himself; where second thoughts, later and disingenuous infacionesti? preserved and adulterated with the idea that they would ultimately be used as the foundations for an eulogistic or at least not a defamatory biography. So deeply has Mr Chapman steeped himself in the habit of this sort of insinuation, that in the present book he seems uncertain himself, and leaves the reader doubtful whether <u>any</u> of Beckford's correspondence and diaries can be trusted as contemporary evidence.

This is not the impression that a careful study of the original documents, in something like their original arrangement or disorder, made upon me. It is certainly astounding that many of the letters, even more incriminating than Mr Chapman allows them to appear, should have been allowed to survive at all, although expurgated by numerous blottings and erasures. The letter-books containing copies are also a strange feature of the collection, but the copies do not seem to have been Bowdlerized to the extent or in the manner that might have been expected. My own conclusion was that the whole mass had been kept, without any very definite view about future use, by a man who was by nature a collector and hoarder, lazy about looking through accumulations and destroying rubbish, and a double-dyed sentimentalist (the letters of Louisa Beckford and Pacchierotti are tied up with pink ribbons!). Perhaps even more

remarkable than Beckford's neglect to destroy, is the fact that the Duchess of Hamilton seems to have looked through the papers and decided to leave them to tell their own tale, for the notes she made prove that she held her father in the highest affection and respect.

Mr Michael Sadleir told me in March 1946 that he had been of terms of close acquaintanceship with Mr Chapman when this book was being written, and had read it in various stages of its progress. He assured me that is was quite finished in its first shape long before the author had succeeded in obtaining access to the Beckford papers – I think he said before the appearance of Dr Oliver's "Life". It seems to have been the case, therefore, as I have suggested in the preceding account, that he was one of those who had wanted, but was baffled in their attempt to get at the papers. In point of fact, this book was in the first instance a remodelled version of Mr Lewis Melville's materials, the untrustworthy character of which became evident to a certain extent to Mr Chapman after reading Dr Oliver's work and studying the papers themselves, after they became available. No doubt the patched effort, occasional inconsistency and disproportion between different sections of the narrative, are due to the great difficulty of expanding and correcting something already completed in another form.'

Appendix 2 – Transcription of Letter from H. J. C. Grierson to C. F. Bell, 1924

'Sep 30 1924
Dear Mr Bell,
I think it must be to you I am indebted for the beautiful book of Inigo Jones' designs which I have just got from the Press. It is a great treat both for myself and my daughter who is a student of art. I should have written you last winter. I agree with all you said as to Melville's 'Beckford' and you have no idea how inaccurate his transcripts of the letters are. A pupil of mine is now at work on a short biography which Chapman Press are to consider. They are going on with their edition and have got permission from the Trust. The cataloguing of the papers is coming to an end. It is being very well done and the Historical MSS. Commission will probably print it. It seems likely that the papers of historical interest will be presented to the Latin and kept at the Register House. This is the right thing and we shall owe it greatly to your suggestion.

Thanking you again for your very generous gift,
I am sincerely yours, H. J. C. Grierson.'

Appendix 3 – Transcription of Letter from J. W. Oliver to C. F. Bell, 1932

'4th October, 1932
Dear Mr. Bell,
As you perhaps know, my *Beckford* will, at last, be published on the 13th of this month. I should like to have the pleasure of sending you a copy, but am a little uncertain about where to send it and it has also occurred to me as a possibility that you may possibly have a copy sent you from the Press and may not want to be bothered with two copies. I shall be very glad to hear what your own wishes are. For myself, I shall count it a very real pleasure to send you the final result of my efforts. I feel very guilty of not having acknowledged your letter in answer to my query about the Reynolds portrait of Robertson's. I know at the time, however, that your address was rather uncertain and did not reply immediately, with the usual result, that I did not reply at all. I hope the book "will do". You took a great deal of trouble over it and I hope it will prove to have been worth it. In any case, I need not say how grateful I am to you for all your help. I hope you are well,

I am, yours sincerely,
John W. Oliver'

Appendix 4 – Transcription of Letter from Douglas Cooper to C. F. Bell, 1944

'May 16th 1944
Dear Mr. Bell,
I feel I must write and tell you how much I have appreciated the last paragraph of your letter in the Times Literary Supplement this week. It is not often that its reviewers lay themselves open with so much naivety to the charge of wanton disregard for honesty. And it is getting increasingly difficult to find any editor who will allow one to challenge in his columns the spate of confident mis-statements which defigure almost every thing written by a certain little group.

Yours sincerely
Douglas Cooper'

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Bob Gemmett

In conversation with STEPHEN CLARKE

Robert J. (Bob) Gemmett is the leading and the most prolific Beckford scholar in the United States. He obtained his PhD. from Syracuse University with a dissertation on Beckford's Fonthill, and from 1965 taught at the State University of New York, Brockport, N.Y. where he was for many years Professor of English.

He is the author of *William Beckford*, a study of Beckford's literary works, which appeared in 1977 as a volume in the Twayne English Authors Series and has edited numerous Beckford texts, including *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*; *The Episodes of Vathek*; *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*; *Azemia*; and *Modern Novel Writing*, as well as editing Beckford's correspondence with his bookseller George Clarke and an anthology of writings on Beckford's Fonthill Abbey. His most recent book is a new work on Fonthill, *William Beckford's Fonthill: Architecture, Landscape, and the Arts*.

We asked him to tell *The Beckford Journal* about his involvement with Beckford.

How and when did you first become interested in Beckford?

My interest in Beckford began in 1964 when I was trying to decide upon a dissertation topic for my Ph.D. I had decided tentatively on the poet John Keats, but when I mentioned this to Professor William Fleming, the art historian at Syracuse University and author of *Arts and Ideas*, his reaction was that a great deal had already been done

Fig. 1. Robert J. (Bob) Gemmett.

on Keats and that William Beckford might be an absorbing subject for consideration and offer some untrodden ground for investigation. He recommended that I read Boyd Alexander's *England Wealthiest Son* and *Life at Fonthill*, which I did, and concluded there was much about Beckford's life and works that would be intriguing subjects of research.

As it turned out, what my work on Beckford gave me over the years was the pleasure of finding something new that was not previously known about his life and works. The possibility of making a discovery was always a powerful stimulus to my research and kept me returning to the writing pad.

The first Beckford text that you edited is 'Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters'*: how did that come about?*

When I was conducting research for my dissertation, I noticed that there was some confusion among Beckford scholars about the composition date of this satire. I then published an article about it later in the *Philological Quarterly* (January 1968) setting forth my own views. Since this was Beckford's first published work and no edition had appeared since 1834, I decided to suggest a new edition to Thomas Yoseloff of Associated University Presses, and he agreed to publish it in 1969. I also believed that it was an unusual book in that Beckford reflected some of his own emerging thoughts about art historiography, the dominance of Italian art upon the artists of his own day, and the rise of Dutch and Flemish painting.

You have been pre-eminent in providing us with edited and annotated texts of Beckford's writings – 'Extraordinary Painters', 'Vathek and The Episodes', 'Azemia', 'Modern Novel Writing'*, and the letters to his bookseller George Clarke. Can you say something about the process of editing Beckford: are there particular issues or problems in editing him, and how have your attitudes to the task of editing Beckford changed over the years?*

Although this may seem a bit odd to say, I have always enjoyed providing annotations to Beckford's works because by doing so I increased my own understanding of the text I was editing. Ideally, it should have the same impact on the reader. Very often the research required to supply the note led me to discover something new about Beckford himself, about the source he was using, or the role it played in the text. I also used notes to place interesting material that did not fit well into my own commentary but that could be pursued at another time by me or someone else.

Beckford is also a challenge to an editor since he read so extensively and widely that it becomes very time consuming to track

down all of his references. To complicate matters, he had a habit of jotting down his own comments on the flyleaves of the books he read which are often worth exploring. Then there is the matter of his handwriting. Beckford always prided himself on having microscopic vision; unfortunately this led sometimes to microscopic handwriting which can be very difficult to decipher at times, bogging the editor down.

Who do you see as the audience for Beckford?

I would say mainly students of the Neo-classical and Romantic movements, literary historians, art collectors and dealers, rare book collectors, architectural historians, major museums and art galleries throughout the world. The name 'Beckford' will bring light to any curator's eye these days.

He has never been part of the canon of English literature, and the most that students are likely to come up against is 'Vathek'*, presented to them as something exotic and exceptional. Do you see that changing?*

This is a subject I explored in the final chapter of my Twayne book on Beckford (1977) called 'The Haunting Image'. Looking back, I don't feel that much has changed since then. *Vathek* will continue to be of interest as a break-through literary work, a *tour de force* of imagination that transcended the remaining restraints of the Augustan age and helped to prepare the way for a democratization of literature which celebrated personal disclosure, sensory effects and emotional impact. I also believe that some of his works should receive more attention and have been neglected in the academy. For example, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* is a great example of a literary work that co-mingles Neo-classical and Romantic elements, displaying a figure who occupies a place between two worlds, bearing the burden of classical restraint but

straining towards a literary expression of deeply felt emotions and self-revelation. Beckford's travel writings were distinctive at the time and understandably very well received in England and America. His travel books display very nicely the sensibility of the later eighteenth century.

Tell me about that extraordinary pair of 'Azemia' *and* 'Modern Novel Writing'*, which you have helped to show as being a patchwork of passages from contemporary novels, put together and just gently tweaked to push them over the edge into absurdity. How important do you think they are in Beckford's writings?*

I think they are very important in what they bring to an understanding of Beckford as a satirical writer, which I believe was his natural bent and then cultivated by the cross-currents of his own personal life, particularly his social ostracism, isolation and sense of personal aggrievement. The problem is that these two novels are totally neglected works among his writings. They are not read even by Beckford devotees and when they are looked at they are not easily comprehended, as Cyrus Redding observed in his biography in 1859. The dominant thrust of *Modern Novel Writing* was to burlesque the sentimental and sensational literature of the 1780s and 1790s, but to appreciate this effort one has to be familiar with a whole set of novels and poetry that remain obscure. How many people read Charlotte Smith or Anna Seward today or are familiar with the Della Cruscan school of poets? It was for this reason that I decided to undertake new editions of these two satires to try to demonstrate what he intended to do when he wrote them.

What is more fascinating about both novels is the way Beckford moves beyond literary satire to address some political and social issues of the day, particularly involving political intolerance, the war with France, treatment of the poor and a whole list of public issues that needed to be redressed in his mind. *Azemia* continues the attacks on political oppression of the British government and by

focusing on the appalling state of the economy at the time. When Arthur Young suggested that the way to address the crisis of the scarcity of bread in England was that the poor should eat less bread, he provided instant fodder for the satirist.

I also want to mention that it is not well known that Beckford was serious enough about the devastation of the persistent war between France and England that he personally took it upon himself in 1797 to broker a peace treaty between these two countries while operating completely outside the normal channels of the two governments. It failed due to William Pitt's disinterest, but *Modern Novel Writing* and *Azemia* remain as records of Beckford's more republican views on social and political issues of this period of time. Hopefully, the availability of new editions of these novels will promote a more serious assessment of their content than they have received in the past.

What do they tell us about his reading, and how closely do they tie in to his habit of annotating his books by copying out passages or sentiments that he seems to have thought ridiculous?

As is well known, Beckford was an omnivorous reader. His habit was to copy passages in the flyleaves of the book he was reading that were of interest to him either as foolish statements or as impressive observations. He could then return to the book and have his own index to passages he found significant. I am sure he did that with the sentimental literature that became the targets of his satire. But there was something else he did that is of interest. In some of the notes, he recorded his own significant comments, usually caustic in nature, followed at the end by his initials 'W.B'. Why did he do this? Normally, a person writes notes in a book for a private purpose, but I think he may have intended these passages to see the light of day. In other words, it became a method for calling attention to the passages he wanted a transcriber to copy. We know that his librarian Macquin did transcriptions from 1815 to 1820 and was then followed

by George Beltz. The result was the seven folio volumes under the working title of *Fruits of Conceit and Flowers of Nonsense*, now considered lost.

You will have read Peter Sabor's Beckford lecture of 2010 in the 'Beckford Annual Lectures 2017–2010' collection*, where he builds on your work on these two books in relation to contemporary prose, showing an even denser set of borrowings – and although it's not yet published, Tom Keymer's 2015 Lecture did just the same for Beckford's play with contemporary verse. Is there anything you would like to say on that?*

Yes I am familiar with Sabor's published lecture. Reading it, I felt; it was just the kind of extended analysis of Beckford's use of canonical and modern novels as satiric targets that I had hoped my editions would foster. I suspect that in the future more examples of Beckford's satiric treatment of the various forms of the eighteenth-century novel will be brought to light. I also look forward to reading Keymer's examination of Beckford's burlesques of contemporary poetry and the rising vogue of sensibility Beckford sought to mock.

His correspondence with his bookseller George Clarke paints a very vivid picture of his activities as a book collector. What do you think that tells us about him? He paid his bills, but he was clearly extraordinarily demanding.

The correspondence tells us that he was a fastidious collector, always looking for the best copy he could find, tastefully bound, and with the finest engravings, preferably in a proof state. If the book had a distinguished provenance, all the better. As he said, 'nothing second-rate enters here'. He was, as evident from the letters, extraordinarily demanding and Clarke would sometimes experience the brunt of his wrath when things did not go the

way Beckford wanted. You can see the relationship with Clarke was deteriorating badly in the final year of the letters. Clarke was becoming increasingly dilatory, which exasperated Beckford no end. He even threatened to move to someone else to serve his book needs. At the same time, I would say that he wanted Clarke to stay with him, temper tantrums notwithstanding. It is also significant that Clarke was selected to serve as his agent in 1835 for the negotiations with Richard Bentley regarding the publication of *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha* and when Beckford learned that Clarke had been arrested for debt in March of the same year, he stood by him indicating that he was willing to wait until Clarke could give him attendance again. Beckford was a taskmaster, but he was also loyal.

What about Beckford and slavery, the money from which paid for Fonthill and all the collecting, and about which you wrote in 'History Today' (October 2011). *Many people feel uncomfortable that money spent on buying and creating exquisite works of art was underneath it all funded by the product of slave labour on plantations that he never troubled to visit, and that does rather qualify the sentiments he repeatedly expressed on liberty and sympathy for the underdog. What is your view?*

Beckford held some fairly liberal views for his time but not when it came to the institution of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The fact is that he experienced a great deal of anxiety about the possibility that this source of income from the Jamaica estates would radically diminish or even disappear. That's why he refused to support the Abolition Act of 1807 and opposed increases in sugar duties. He was stung by the openly critical article in the *Sunday Times* in 1822 dealing with the relationship between Fonthill Abbey as a monument to excess and the inherited wealth that derived from slavery.

I believe that Beckford was well aware of the dark aspects of his

inherited wealth but he repressed them and then tried to deflect the ethical aspects of the situation by emphasizing how he used his wealth to employ hundreds of people in the construction of Fonthill Abbey and to attend consistently to the needs of the people struggling to survive in Hindon and other towns nearby. It was a feat of 'intellectual laundering', as Professor Simon Gikandi described it, an effort to convert an inherent evil into a public good. As I said in the article, Beckford suppressed the connection between the source of his money and slave labour. But in the end, as an intellectually aware person, there had to be times when he confronted the conflict this created within himself. He could not help but feel at times that he was trapped by his own wealth.

Your anthology on Fonthill, 'Beckford's Fonthill: the Rise of a Romantic Icon' *(2003) is the essential source on the Abbey and anything and everything that's been written about it – and now we have* 'William Beckford's Fonthill: Architecture, Landscape and the Arts'*, that was published by Fonthill Media in March 2016. Is the new book a second edition of the first, or a new study: how does it differ from or build on the first book, and what made you return to the Abbey?*

While I use material from the first book, I felt there were too many substantial changes to call it a second edition. First of all, the anthology is gone. In its place, there are two new Appendices: The first consists of a list of prominent visitors to the Abbey estate in 1823 culled from newspapers and journals that would list them at the end of their respective reports; the second is a collection of *Morning Chronicle* articles on the Abbey by J. Sidney Taylor in 1823 which I identified for the first time. As for the body of the book, I added a considerable amount of new material based on more extensive research I conducted since 2003. This concerns the architectural history of the early Fonthill mansions, the contents of Fonthill Splendens, new information about the four on-site sales at

Splendens in 1801 and 1807, and the demolition of the old mansion – all helping to complete the story of two of the greatest estates in England. I also expand my description of the interior of the Abbey to include additional rooms and their interior décor, not mentioned in the first book, along with identification of prominent paintings and other objects of art and their locations throughout the Abbey. Even in the transferred material, I offer details not hitherto known or published before. In the end I would call the two Fonthill books companion volumes.

You taught for many years as a Professor of English at the State University of New York College at Brockport, but have now retired to New Hampshire. Given that Beckford isn't a staple of the University curriculum, did you find when you were teaching that your research on Beckford tied in with or complemented your work in the classroom, or was it totally separate?

My research on Beckford was an education in itself. To write about his life and works required familiarity with the social, political, and artistic trends of his time. He was a multi-faceted personality with eclectic interests in the fine arts, the decorative arts, literature, landscaping and architecture. Since I have always considered myself a primary researcher, I basically immersed myself in these areas of interest. This involvement naturally would come into play in the classroom in my courses on the rise of the British novel, the literature and background of the Neo-classical age and the Romantic movement. As for Beckford himself, I would refer to *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey as examples of new trends in Romanticism but did not study them directly with my students. It was the preparation involved in being able to write about him that complemented my work in the classroom.

How do you think Beckford's status has changed in the period of over 45 years you have been working on him?

Vathek continues to be studied and is beginning to surface increasingly in university textbooks on the Romantic period. But I think Beckford is receiving even more attention now as one of the great collectors of the nineteenth century, who amassed an extraordinary collection of rare books, prints, paintings and the decorative arts. *An Eye for the Magnificent* catalogue for the exhibitions at the Bard Centre and the Dulwich Picture Gallery certainly helped to record his formidable achievements in this area.

Is there one missing item from Beckford's library or collections that you would particularly want to be re-discovered?

Yes, I would like *Fruits of Conceit and Flowers of Nonsense* to surface. I have tried in the past to locate these seven volumes of Beckford's commentaries but to no avail. I even contacted Quaritich's (the original purchaser at the Hamilton Palace sale) to see if their records showed where they went after the sale, but they no longer have these early records. These volumes would certainly provide a treasure-trove of Beckfordiana and cause a great stir in the book world were they ever to come to light. I nurture this persistent vision that someday someone will contact me to say that he or she has a set of folio volumes with the same title in their library. They are a bit dusty with the bindings dried out but would I be interested in seeing them?

What direction do you think Beckford studies should take? Or, put another way, what book on Beckford would you most like to see published?

An edition of his letters and correspondence needs to be done. My edition of the Beckford-Clarke letters marks the beginning. If the

rest of his letters could be transcribed and edited, it would provide the basis for writing about his life and works in a more definitive way than has been done in the past. Based on my own experience, I would say that this will be a formidable task, very time consuming to be done well, and probably involve more than one person.

I also feel that a new primary bibliography concentrating specifically on editions of Beckford's works that were published in his lifetime is in order. Chapman's bibliography in 1930 was an important contribution to Beckford studies, but it needs to be updated.

Are you still working on Beckford? Is there anything to which we should in due course look forward to?

I believe the manuscript of a dramatic version of *Vathek* that I purchased at Sotheby's years ago is by Caroline Norton and have set forth my reasons for believing this is the case in a forthcoming article in *Notes and Queries*. As Norton was the granddaughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, this is a significant discovery. I am also working on a new edition of *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*.

After all, I have to keep up my reputation as 'indefatigable'.

Adam Clarke's Visit to Fonthill, 1806

PETER FORSAITH

In contrast to William Beckford, Adam Clarke was the son of an impoverished village schoolmaster in the north of Ireland, yet in his later years, Clarke managed to enjoy a comfortable standard of living. His parents disagreed on which year he was born – whether it was 1760 or 1763. He died of cholera in his home, Haydon Hall, Pinner, Middlesex, in 1832. Largely self-educated, he was a polymath, knowing some fifteen languages, especially near- and middle-Eastern, and wrote a number of literary works (Figure 1). In 1808 he was appointed by a Royal Commission as editor of a new edition of Rymer's *Fœdera*.[1] He also enjoyed 'contacts with bishops, universities, prominent laymen, and, through his friendship with the duke of Sussex, with the royal family itself.'[2]

It was in his late teens that he had a spiritual epiphany. After crossing to England in 1782, the leading Methodist clergyman John Wesley appointed him one of his travelling preachers: he became the most prominent Wesleyan Methodist of his time, thrice President of its annual Conference. Yet he was not afraid to sail close to heterodoxy, most notable in disagreeing with the 'eternal Sonship' of Christ. In his extensive *Commentary on the Whole of Scripture* his philological expertise led him to translate the creature which tempted Eve as an ape or orang-utan, rather than a serpent.[3] He befriended two Bhuddist monks, stating that 'these men cannot be treated as common heathens; they are both Philosophers – men of profound erudition in their way.'[4]

In 1806 he first served as President of the Wesleyan Conference,

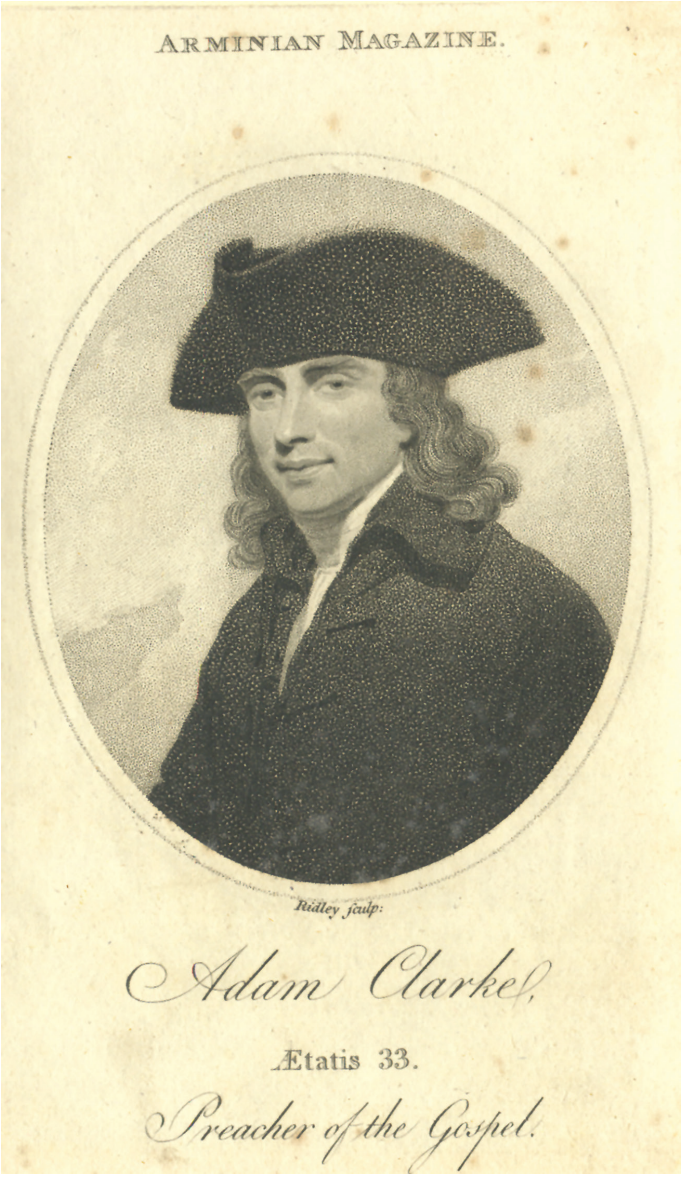

Fig. 1. Adam Clarke, engraved J. Ridley. Frontispiece, *The Arminian Magazine*, 1796.

although most of his publications, and honours, were ahead of him. That summer he spent a week in Wiltshire visiting several great houses as well as Stonehenge and Salisbury, which he related in a series of letters to his son. At a time when Beckford had already started to dispose of some of the contents of Fonthill Splendens, he wrote to his son Joseph:

August 28, 1806

… This is a beautiful mansion, and I think more delightfully situated than any we have yet visited:[5] all the circumjacent hills and dales are skirted with woods, and before the house is spread a large and beautiful lake, covered with wild and tame fowl in abundance. Of the house itself I shall say but little: it did not please *me*: it is true I never saw any place so elegant by many degrees: gold, silver, ivory, corals, agates, porphyry; the finest marble, cedar, ebony, &c., met the eye every where: invention had been tortured to find out places, and sufficiently varied forms to permit wealth, elegance, and luxury to pour out and arrange their vast profusion of what might be termed superb, gay, garish, and gaudy. In ancient times it would have been considered rather as the temple of *Plutus*, or of *voluptuousness*, than the residence of any human being. A vast number of the utensils were not only of silver in the finest forms, but also of massive gold: dishes, spoons, and very large candlesticks were of this last-mentioned metal: even the very *backs* and *seats* of the chairs were all gilt over; and the beds, and bed-room furniture, superb and costly beyond all you can imagine. We were shewn some cabinets, which cost only for the making £1500, and others £1700. The pictures were many, and were very fine; some of them by the first masters in *Italy*, *Holland* and *France*. We were shewn the picture of a little laughing boy, about fifteen by twelve inches, which cost £2000; and two landscapes, I think by *Claude Loraine*, which cost seven thousand guineas.[6] Though the general merit of the paintings must be allowed, yet the workmanship, and costliness of their frames, in many cases, destroyed the effect, and exceeded the worth of what they enclosed.[7]

Clarke was not travelling alone. With him was his wife, Mary, her sister Anne and husband Joseph Butterworth, and the Clarkes' young daughter, also Mary. Butterworth (1770–1826) was one of the most prominent lay Wesleyans of his generation.[8] A successful London law bookseller and publisher, he was one of the first Methodist MPs – the movement had not then split completely from the established church, so Butterworth was eligible for public office.[9] And, like his brother-in-law, he had wider interests and vision than the narrowly religious.

But most intriguing, perhaps, is the fact that a party of prominent Wesleyan Methodists, including its serving President, visited Fonthill at all. Clarke and Butterworth could hardly not have known of Beckford's scandalous reputation. However wide their tastes, they were not devoid of evangelical moral scruples. Yet there is no reference to this, nor, it seems, any reaction to their visit from wider Methodist circles. If Beckford was as socially isolated as sometimes claimed, this account suggests that visits from suitable persons – to 'Splendens' at least – happened as with any great house.

For other visits they had written ahead to secure an invitation: whether Beckford issued an invitation personally is an interesting point. The Abbey, incomplete though it was, would have been a greater attraction: were they only allowed to see the mansion? Clarke did not mention any attempt to see the Abbey. Around that same time Samuel Rogers had visited and admired the Abbey, and Sir Richard Hoare too, although Beckford had met with abject hostility from other Wiltshire gentry.[10]

After Fonthill the party visited Stourton which 'met our every wish, and gratified our most extensive desires …'[11] Yet despite his obvious preference for Sir Richard Hoare's house 'which is elegant without any thing gaudy', and its 'intelligent, and worthy proprietor', there seems yet a grudging admiration for Beckford's collection. 'The paintings are not so numerous as in *Fonthill* house, nor are they yet so fine …'[12]

The day before visiting Fonthill, the Clarkes and Butterworths

visited Wilton House, which was undergoing alterations, also by Wyatt. 'Except in a few rooms where there are many and elegant paintings, all things were in sixes and sevens.' Clarke noted 'a vast profusion of ancient busts … had I not been so hurried, I should have had very high treat with these ancient school-fellows of mine,' suggesting a level of classical education which his known schooling belies.[13]

Joseph Clarke wrote of his father's inexhaustible hunger for knowledge: 'no situation and no company was entirely destitute of something which could improve or instruct.'[14] So, like John Wesley, Adam Clarke enjoyed visiting great houses, but unlike him, was not piously dismissive of what he saw.[15] He was genuinely and positively interested in every aspect. From scattered evidence in his memoirs he knew and appreciated pictures. A decade previously, visiting Warwick Castle, he was particularly struck by a portrait by Rubens: 'such a speaking canvas I never before beheld. The [housekeeper] perceived my reverie; from which I soon found she argued well of my taste and knowledge.'[16]

What Clarke saw that August day, just 200 years ago, was on the cusp of dissolution. Within months many of the contents had been moved to the Abbey, and the house itself would be dismantled.[17] So Clarke's description, limited as it is, offers some account of the Alderman's mansion in its final days. Moreover it is from a somewhat unlikely source.

1 A collection of state papers from the Norman Conquest to the reign of George III

2 Ian Sellers, 'Clarke, Adam (1762–1832)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/view/article/5483, accessed 16 March 2016]

3 Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments: the text carefully printed from the most correct copies of the Authorized translation, including the marginal readings and parallel texts, with a commentary and critical notes, designed as a help to a better understanding of the sacred writings*, 8 vols., London: Butterworth, 1817–35

4 Elizabeth Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, London: Routledge, 2009, 34

5 He had visited Wilton House and Wardour Castle on the previous day

6 The two Claudes were *The Landing of Aeneas* and *The Sacrifice of Apollo*, bought by Beckford in 1800 for £6825 (7,000gns had been asked for them) and sold in 1808 for 10,000gns (Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, London: Faber, 1979, 256-7, 283-40). Now at Anglesey Abbey, Cambs

7 J. B. B. Clarke (ed.), *An Account of the Infancy, Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke, L.L.D., F.A.S.*, 3 vols.; London: T. S. Clarke, 1833, vol ii, 138

8 Leslie Howsam, 'Butterworth, Joseph (1770–1826)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/view/article/4233, accessed 7 Aug 2016]

9 Adam Clarke was confirmed by the Bishop of Bristol in 1783, Clarke, op.cit., vol. i, 168-9

10 Fothergill, op. cit., 269-70, 282-3

11 i.e. Stourhead

12 Fothergill, op. cit., 139

13 Ibid., 32-3

14 Ibid, vol iii, 470

15 W. Reginald Ward, Richard P. Heitzenrater (eds.), 'Introduction' in *The Works of John Wesley*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, vol 18 (Journals & Diaries I), 62

16 Clarke, op. cit., vol ii, 28. Whether Clarke had any artworks himself is not known. His grandson, who shared many of his religious and liberal values, was the coastal scenes painter James Clarke Hook (1819–1907). Joseph Butterworth seems to have collected pictures which passed down the family until 1873

17 Robert J. Gemmett, 'The 'Fonthill Spendens' Demolition Sale of 1807', *The Beckford Journal*, vol. 17 (2011), 10-20

A glimpse into some hidden aspects of the Beckford collection at Brodick Castle

BET McLEOD

Work on the fire suppression system at Brodick Castle, National Trust for Scotland, has necessitated the closure of the Castle throughout 2017. This, together with cuts to local authority funding that has affected visits to Châtelherault, the Hamilton Mausoleum and Town House Library, all in Hamilton, has unfortunately put paid to plans for the Society's visit to Scotland in 2017.

It is possible, however, to view, albeit at one step removed, some of the more rarely-seen aspects of the Beckford treasures that await members of the Society on another occasion. Below is a selection of hitherto unpublished images of well-known Beckford objects at Brodick Castle, as well as a newly-discovered Beckford piece.

Having had the remarkable opportunity to photograph the Beckford items at Brodick Castle in the winter of 2014 and acknowledging herewith the kindness of the NTS staff on site, I decided it would be an interesting exercise to assemble a number of items into three 'Brodick Objects of Vertu'. All six items shown in 'Brodick Objects of Vertu No. 1', FIGURE 1, had previously been depicted in the Willes Maddox original three paintings, but not altogether. This homage to the Beckford collection is also in recognition of Susan Beckford's decision to keep these objects, and to the Dukes of Hamiltons thereafter and their descendants that chose not to sell them.

Fig. 1. Brodick ‘Objects of Vertu No. 1’.

Fig. 2. Brodick ‘Objects of Vertu No. 2’.

Fig. 3. The hidden armorials on the stand of the agate bowl.

Fig. 4. Brodick 'Objects of Vertu No. 3'.

As is well known, Beckford was a passionate and discerning collector of hardstones, and his own pieces were mounted with a degree of originality and flair that to this day still astonishes. The second image shows two of the most remarkable pieces of mounted agate, which have been well published and illustrated over the decades, Figure 2. Although the Hamilton cinquefoil is visible around the base of the stand to the agate bowl, there are further armorials within the bowl of the stand: although there are references to these in the majority of catalogues, there is no other published image known to this author of this detail, which can be seen here, Figure 3. The mottos are of Beckford, and of Hamilton, differenced by Beckford by the addition of the Latimer cross. Beckford used these two crests together from c. 1809 onwards, once negotiations had begun for the marriage of his daughter Susan Euphemia to the Marquis of Douglas. In common with many of the armorials on Beckford items, their discreet placement could only have been seen by the privileged few who were allowed by the owner to examine these closely, either by dismantling the object, or by turning it upside down. No doubt the withholding or granting of this privilege would have afforded Beckford much glee and satisfaction. Figure 4 depicts another 'Brodick Object of Vertu', while Figure 5 shows the underneath of one of the stands of the scent flask, where the Latimer cross and Hamilton cinquefoil are engraved on each alternate foot.

Again placed on the underneath of an item, in this case the plates and saucers of the Worcester 'armorial' tea service, are the motto and crest as seen earlier, Figures 6, 7. It is particularly rewarding to see these in full enamelled colour, as most of the known Beckford armorials on extant pieces are in monochrome gilt or engraved. Heavily decorated on the surface with Beckford and Hamilton motifs in two different patterns, the underneath of each pattern bears further and very deliberate statements of lineage. Alderman Beckford had a Chinese armorial set, very much in keeping with the fashion of the mid eighteenth century, but this

Fig. 5. The hidden armorials on the stand of the scent flasks.

Fig. 6. The armorials on the underneath of the plate and saucer of one design.

Fig. 7. The armorials on the underneath of the plate and saucer of the other design.

trend had become superseded by the preference for English-made armorial services which had come into their own c. 1770s onwards. This Worcester set would appear to be Beckford's very original and provocative riposte to the more usual commissioning of an armorial service.

The last item under review, a steel and gilt casket, FIGURE 8, has not previously been identified as Beckford's, nor is it likely to have been frequently opened, as the presence of the bill of sale was a surprise to many. This item does not bear any armorials, but has been selected for the 'hidden' identification within. The bill of sale reads:

Fig. 8. The coffer and the bill of sale found inside.

'London 4 Juin 1816
Received of G. Franchi Esq. the sum of fifty pounds for a little coffer
Steel & gold
£50 [signed] A. Delahantay'

Alexis Delahante (1767–1837), through marriage and family ties, was very closely connected with the Paris art market, and achieved great success and wealth in London as an art dealer and entrepreneur.

Gregorio Franchi acted as an agent over a number of years for Beckford, but it is not altogether clear whether this casket was purchased to Beckford's order, or on speculation, or was acquired by Franchi for himself, and later given to Beckford, circumstances unknown. In any event, it remained by descent in the Hamilton family, and is now at Brodick Castle, which holds the largest collection of Beckford works of art.

Laurent Châtel, *William Beckford the elusive Orientalist*

Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment, 2016:11, pp.248

A Review by MALCOLM JACK

The appearance of a new and extensive work on William Beckford is the cause of celebration for the Society. In this study, appropriately produced in a dark blue cover with French folds, Laurent Châtel explores the theme of Beckford's Orientalist leanings, whether as author, collector or simply dreamer.

Châtel eschews the traditional, biographical approach of most works which attempt to cover Beckford's life and writings. Rather he postulates boldly that Beckford, for all the ambiguity of his life and works, was a committed Orientalist who had a deep interest in, and a wide knowledge of, Eastern culture. The starting point for his passion (for that is the tone that emerges from these pages) is well known to readers of this *Journal* – namely the edition of Antoine Galland's *The Thousand and One Nights* which was in the Alderman's library in Fonthill Splendens. Previous biographers have told us how teenage Beckford devoured it and went onto write many short stories, like *The Long Story*, in the style of Arabic tales as a result of reading Galland.

Châtel's backing for asserting that Beckford was *par excellence*, an Orientalist, goes much deeper than that, although he acknowledges the debt to Galland. In particular, as he has already indicated in previous studies, he draws attention to the influence of the manuscripts of Edward Wortley Montagu which the ever encouraging and seductive Lady Craven made available to Beckford in the 1780s – when he was writing *Vathek* and *The Episodes of Vathek*. In an Appendix of ten dense pages, Châtel lists the Caliph's

Orientalist collection of books, prints and drawings which we are told is a "preliminary" catalogue. As well as a library of exotic literature on every subject of Eastern interest, the list includes details of folios of Chinese drawings (with such varied subjects as silk and cotton manufacture, tea making and of course, porcelain) on the one hand and volumes of Hindu miniatures on the other, to name just two. The gathering together of "mixed" material in this manner is highly illuminating and evidence of Beckford's deep commitment, even obsession with Arabic, Indian and Chinese culture.

A second theme Châtel explores in the book is the mystery of why Beckford, writing in French, was little noticed in France until Mallarmé's famous preface of 1876. This he ascribes to a number of factors – including an almost flamboyant carelessness on the part of Beckford but also to machinations against him by booksellers or others who wanted to damage his reputation. But it may also be considered as Beckford's commitment to the motto that is said to have guided Descartes – namely *vixit bene, bene qui latuit* (he lives well who lives a hidden life). Whatever the reasons for this failure to capture Gallic attention, Châtel claims that had *The Episodes of Vathek* been published in Beckford's lifetime, he would have been recognised as the true heir to the great Galland and displaced Byron as the leading Orientalist in French eyes. Quite a claim!

There are, of course, challenges that can be made to a book which tends to one overriding thesis. Châtel himself admits that there is not much evidence of Oriental taste to be found in Beckford's buildings or gardens. Then there is his deep interest in the rituals of Roman Catholicism, most clearly set out in his Portuguese diaries. Above all there is the thorny matter of *Vathek's* Gothic or neo-Gothic features remarked upon by many previous authors and scholars. Let me not go into these objections here but leave you to peruse the book yourself and come to your own conclusions.

Notes on Contributors

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