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*When Beckford came to stay: the emotional,
aesthetic and literary impacts of a weekend
at Powderham*

CHARLIE COURTENAY, EARL OF DEVON

This paper is based on an illustrated lecture given at
The Beckford Society's Twenty-third Annual Lecture,
Delivered on Wednesday 28 November 2018 at the
Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1

Introduction

This is the story of William Courtenay (1768-1835), his friendship with William Beckford, and the ramifications of Beckford's visit to the younger William's family home at Powderham Castle, Devon in October 1784.¹ As William's successor and the current custodian of Powderham, I offer a personal insight into William's life and family, and the impact of Beckford's visit upon them, and upon us. I also propose a fresh view of William Courtenay, who has all too often been dismissed or misunderstood within the study of Beckford.²

A typical description of William Courtenay is found in the footnotes to Boyd Alexander's authoritative Beckford biography. Mr. Alexander describes William thus: "he fled to France to escape arrest as homosexual 1811, died unmarried in Paris in obscurity, instrument of Beckford's ruin 1784." I invite you to think again and to understand what a complex man William was. With recent developments in our understanding and appreciation of William, his life and his sexuality, his story and that of his relationship to Beckford warrant considerable reassessment.

Setting and Protagonists

This painting from 1800 by William Craig, William Courtenay's principal painter in residence (and drawing master to him and his many sisters), shows Powderham during the Regency period. Save for the Wyatt Music Room extension to the right of the building it is Powderham as it looked when Beckford came to stay in 1784, FIGURE 1.

The Castle was built in the late 14th Century, and originally consisted of a massive medieval great hall, with adjoining apartments, flanked by 6 towers. By the time of Craig's painting, the Castle had been renewed, refreshed and added to many times, particularly since it was besieged by Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War in 1645-6. A major campaign of works had been undertaken by William's father and grandfather, the 1st and 2nd Viscounts Courtenay, who had added suites of domestic and hospitality rooms to the north and east of the central axis, and who had rebuilt a number of the original stone towers in crenelated brick. The Castle overlooks the River Exe estuary, dominating access to Exeter's great medieval trading port of Topsham, the source of the Courtenay's medieval wealth and status. By the 1770s, the Castle was surrounded by an estuary-side deer park, and extensive landscaped gardens. The principal access to the Castle was still from the water, and the family were regular and active sailors, enjoying the use of a family yacht – the *Dolphin*.

Courtenay Family of Powderham

A concise family history helps explain Beckford's interest in William and in Powderham. The Beckfords were reputedly keen to associate with families of antiquity and standing, and the Courtenays' aristocratic medieval links made them a valuable connection, particularly as they were distantly related through Beckford's mother.

The leading contemporary history was Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published during the



Fig. 1. William Craig, *Powderham Castle*, 1800. ©Powderham Estate.

1780s.³ In the midst of his detailed account of the Byzantine Empire, Gibbon offers a Digression on the family of Courtenay – heralded as an example of a long-standing pan-European family still flourishing in Europe’s farthest corner linking its ancient, crusading past with the ‘modern day’.

Before the introduction of trade, which scatters riches, and of knowledge, which dispels prejudice, the prerogative of birth is most strongly felt and most humbly acknowledged. In every age, the laws and manners of the Germans have

discriminated the ranks of society; the dukes and counts, who shared the empire of Charlemagne, converted their office to an inheritance; and to his children, each feudal lord bequeathed his honour and his sword. The proudest families are content to lose, in the darkness of the middle ages, the tree of their pedigree, which, however deep and lofty, must ultimately rise from a plebeian root; and their historians must descend ten centuries below the Christian aera, before they can ascertain any lineal succession by the evidence of surnames, of arms, and of authentic records. With the first rays of light, we discern the nobility and opulence of Atho, a French knight; his nobility, in the rank and title of a nameless father; his opulence, in the foundation of the castle of Courtenay in the district of Gatinois, about fifty-six miles to the south of Paris. (Vol.11, 294-295, c.1797)

Gibbon tells the story of how Athon fortified the town of Courtenay circa 1000AD. Soon after, the family adopted its coat of arms, the three red spots, or *torteaux*, on a golden background, to signify three spots of Christ's blood brought back from the First Crusade on a golden salver, which was lodged in Bruges Cathedral by Godfrey de Bouillon, FIGURE 2.

Although originally French, the family moved to England in 1152 when Renaud de Courtenay (Reginald) fell foul of Louis the Fat, King of France, and was banished. He joined the court of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, newly married to King Henry II, from whence he was dispatched to Okehampton and occupied the Norman keep that defended Devon from the west. There the family established itself and married into various noble Norman families, principally the de Brionne and de Redvers families, gaining wealth, land and titles as it did so. Through marriage to the de Redvers family, the Courtenays succeeded to the Earldom of Devon, confirmed as such by Edward III in 1335. Hugh de Courtenay, 2nd Courtenay Earl of Devon was a leading participant in the 100 Years' War, and married

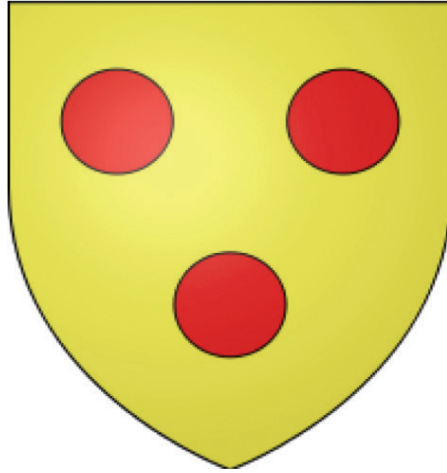


Fig. 2. Courtenay Coat of Arms. ©Powderham Estate.

Margaret de Bohun, granddaughter of Edward I. The manor of Powderham was part of her dowry and has been a Courtenay home ever since – bequeathed by Margaret to her sixth son, the seafaring admiral Sir Philip.

The family flourished in high medieval Devon, and branches occupied various castles including Okehampton, Tiverton, Bickleigh, Boconnoc, Plympton, and Collaton, as well as Powderham and Exeter. They survived the Wars of the Roses, despite numerous attainders and beheadings, but during the Tudor period flew rather too close to the sun. First cousin to Henry VIII was Henry Courtenay, Marquis of Exeter; he was attained and beheaded in 1539. His son Edward was then imprisoned but later was released and recreated Earl of Devon by Queen Mary in 1553. Exiled soon afterwards for an allegedly treasonous dalliance with the young Princess Elizabeth, Edward died childless in Padua in 1556, thus ending the senior English branch and causing the Earldom to fall into abeyance. However, the Powderham cadet branch continued (descendants of Sir Philip, the sixth son of the 2nd Earl). They were royalists during the Civil War (Powderham was besieged in 1645 as a result) but again

survived to play a leading role in the Glorious Revolution, hosting William of Orange's first night on English soil, and re-establishing their regional pre-eminence during the seventeenth century.

William's Family and Childhood

By the 1730s, William's grandfather, also William (1709-1762), was a well-regarded politician, who was rewarded with a Viscounty at the end of his life. He married Lady Frances Finch, with whom he was much enamoured, commissioning many portraits of her and their family by Thomas Hudson – principal painter of the period and a Devonian. Together with Frances, the 1st Viscount took the knocked-about shell of the medieval Powderham, mostly abandoned since the Civil War, and began a multi-generational program of restoration and modernisation.

The 1st and 2nd Viscounts Courtenay and their wives, both 'Lady Frances', inserted fabulous reception rooms, libraries and a remarkable rococo staircase within and around Powderham's medieval core. Stone towers were replaced in brick and accommodation suites were added. They commissioned works from the most fashionable artists and craftsmen of the day – many of whom were Devon born: Thomas Hudson, Joshua Reynolds, John Channon for the furniture, and William Stumbels for the clocks. They also set about 're-wilding' the previously formal landscape, introducing a deer park with a herd of fallow deer, which remain to this day. They engaged enthusiastically with the Exe Estuary and the 2nd Viscount, also William (1742-1788), founded the long-sailing Starcross Yacht Club in 1772.

Gothic Georgian Powderham was home to the young William, and this is the family into which he was born in 1768 – the fifth child, and eldest son. The 2nd Viscount and his family were painted by the Reverend W. Peters in 1780, and exhibited in the Royal Academy that year, **FIGURE 3**. The portrait shows eleven of the 2nd Viscount's thirteen daughters and his one son, William; he is gazing lovingly



Fig. 3. Reverend W. Peters, *The 2nd Viscount Courtenay and his family*, 1780.
©Powderham Estate.

up at his father while surrounded by a ‘harem’ of femininity.

By all accounts, William was a boy of precocious beauty, wit, and talent, FIGURE 4. He enjoyed an idyllic childhood at the newly refurbished and extended Powderham, full of sisters. ‘Kitty’ was his nursery nickname.⁴ His father, the 2nd Viscount, continued the extension and modernisation of Powderham, converting the Old Plantation into a fantastical Georgian Woodland Garden, replete with a grotto and the magnificent Belvedere Tower topping the hill overlooking the Castle. Built in 1775, when William was six years old, the Belvedere would have been the focus of entertainments and hospitality at Powderham during William’s childhood.

Despite happy beginnings, William’s early adolescence turned tragic. In 1782 Frances, William’s almost ever-pregnant mother, died. The youngest of her thirteen daughters, Louisa Augusta, was



Fig. 4. Reverend W. Peters, *William Courtenay as a Boy*, c. 1775
©Powderham Estate.

only one at the time and William was only 13 years old. Shortly thereafter, William also lost Isabella, his third eldest sister, FIGURE 5. This illustration records the traumatic evening in 1783 during which she stood too close to the flames and her skirt caught on fire; she burned to death in front of her brother and the assembled company.⁵

Beckford's First Powderham Visit; *Vathek* and Romney

Beckford first visited Powderham on a teenaged 'grand' tour he undertook in 1779. The trip occurred at the instigation of Beckford's mother Maria (née Hamilton), who organised a tour for her son and his tutor, Reverend John Lettice, to familiarise Beckford with important families, houses and sites of England. The ancient lineage at Powderham would have satisfied his mother's aims; but it could equally have been of interest to Beckford, whose nascent gothic sensibilities, encouraged by Lettice, were likely excited at the prospect of association with Powderham, and its ancient stewards. Beckford's first visit coincided with the explosion of building



Fig. 5. "Lord Courtenay endeavouring to extinguish the flames of his sister's clothes, which had caught by standing too near the fireplace.", 1783.

undertaken by the 2nd Viscount, the crowning glory of which was the Belvedere Tower, FIGURE 6.

Here, in a painting by William Craig circa 1795, the Belvedere crowns the hill above the busy River Exe. Built as a landmark, the tower was designed to impress travellers on the Exe – the busy, bustling port – and inspire Powderham’s visitors. Young, romantic Beckford would have been a perfect audience, and his 1779 visit to Powderham was likely one of his early and influential ‘tower’ experiences. It was here that he would have spent time with the young William Courtenay and his many sisters, either dancing in the first-floor ball room, or enjoying the beautiful view – the *bel vedere* – from the roof.

Beckford wrote his *History of the Caliph Vathek* only a few years later, and it is easy to imagine a young man inspired by the sheer size, scale and view from atop the Powderham Belvedere.⁶ Beckford’s highly regarded Gothic novel of 1783 tells the history of the Caliph Vathek and his desire to explore all sensory pleasures. Written at the height of Beckford’s friendship with William, the tale reflects strongly the impact of William and the landscape of Powderham.



Fig. 6. William Craig, *The Belvedere Tower*, c. 1795. ©Powderham Estate.

At the beginning of the novel, we meet the Caliph who has just completed his own majestic tower – taller and more imposing than any other. Beckford describes it thus:

Vathek's pride arrived at its height when having ascended for the first time the fifteen hundred stairs of his tower he cast his eyes below and beheld men not larger than pismires, mountains than shells, and cities, than bee-hives. The idea of such an elevation inspired of his own grandeur completely bewildered him. He was almost ready to adore himself till lifting his eyes upwards he saw the stars as high above him as they appeared when he stood on the surface of the earth. (*Vathek*, William Beckford Esq. London: Richard Bentley, 8, Newe Burlington Street, (Successor to Henry Colburn): Bell and Bradfute, Edinburgh; Cumming, Dublin; and Galignani, Paris, 1834, p 4)

Later in life, Beckford drew his own illustration of Vathek's tower, FIGURE 7, and, through the architectural achievements at both Fonthill and in Bath, Beckford went on to become a tower builder of unrivalled repute – taking delight and 'pride' at the heights he arrived at thereby.

It may be too much to claim the Belvedere at Powderham as the sole or even a major influence on Beckford's lifetime tower-fetish – other landscape towers were near to his childhood home in Wiltshire, and contemporary 'gothic' literature was replete with romantic accounts of such buildings. However, the Powderham Belvedere and *Vathek* clearly shared aesthetic inspiration, and for one key reason it is clear that Powderham had significant impact upon the genesis of *Vathek*, and themes explored therein. A third of the way through the novel, the reader is introduced to Gulchenrouz, a boy that the Caliph Vathek meets on his adventure who is the only male living within a harem of women. The most beautiful and precocious boy, Gulchenrouz is described as follows:



Fig. 7. William Beckford, *Vathek's Tower*, Drawn aged 83, 1843.
©Collection of Phillip Hewat-Jaboor.

Gulchenrouz could write in various characters with precision and paint upon vellum the most sweet arabesques that fancy could devise; his sweet voice accompanied the lute in the most enchanting manner, and when he sang... tears insensibly overflowed the cheeks of his auditors.

When I first came upon this character, his similarities to the

young William were too obvious to be accidental. A beautiful, talented young boy, with whom Beckford had formed an infatuation, who lived within a house full of women next to one of Georgian England's foremost contemporary gothic towers. The character of *Gulchenrouz* is Beckford's tribute to the young William, inspired by his time at Powderham.

Not satisfied with immortalising their friendship in prose, Beckford also turned to oils to celebrate William. In 1781 he commissioned a grand pair of portraits of the two from London's finest portrait painter, George Romney, FIGURE 8, FIGURE 9. The paintings show Beckford in one, and the young William Courtenay, aged thirteen, in the other. When the two are seen together, as they have not been since the early 1900s,⁷ the similarities are obvious – the clothing, poses and setting all mirror each other. In the William



Fig. 8. George Romney, *William Beckford*, 1781-2. ©The National Trust.



Fig. 9. George Romney, *William Courtenay*, 1781-2.
©The Nemours Foundation.

portrait, all of these elements are raw and unrefined – the stone is in its native form, the clothing is loose fitting, and the pose relaxed; in the Beckford portrait they are the converse – the stone is carved, the clothes more formal and the pose is stiff.

What Beckford, through Romney, may have been seeking to achieve here was a comment upon his passion for the young William. As he writes in contemporaneous letters, he sees William as himself in his innocent days. During these years, Beckford was dealing with the pressures of his own vast inheritance, following the early death of his father, Alderman Beckford, and the pressures of fulfilling the family duties and the political aspirations and obligations that a man of his wealth and status was expected to fulfil. In the young William, who was about the age Beckford was when his own father

died, he sees his own youth, innocence and freedom, and that is what he was trying to capture in commissioning these portraits. Beckford's letters provide a detailed description of William during a sitting at Romney's studio in Cavendish Square:

...his wild, roaming eyes instinct with a brightest fancy and yet softened by tears, his countenance upon one minute appeared lively as light the next a dark shade came over it and those eyes whispered the last instant sparkle with vivacity now glistened with tears... as all the human creatures, male or female, with which I have been acquainted in various countries and at different periods, he is the only one that seems to have been cast in my mould. When I first began to know him the pleasing delusion would often suggest itself of our having been friends in some former existence. You know he was never as happy as when reclined by my side, listening to my wild music or the strange stories which sprang up in my fancy for his amusement. I dote upon his ecstasies at the harpsichord. They are so like my own.

There has been much speculation and discussion about the nature of Beckford's relationship with William – how close was the friendship, how romantic and whether physical or merely emotional romance. We will never know the details, and can merely speculate on how their friendship manifest itself, but what is clear is that, during these few years, the two young men spent a considerable amount of time together and formed a deep and significant affection. William was present at Beckford's infamous coming-of-age celebrations, and would have had a front row seat at the spectacular *Phantasmagoria* of Philip de Louthembourg – extraordinary experiences for one of such a tender age. Those years themselves would have had an important impact on the impressionable young William, but the circumstances in which their friendship ended were far more significant for them both.

Beckford's Second Visit to Powderham; Scandal and Exile

In 1783, following considerable pressure and concern about his dissolute and increasingly eccentric young life, Beckford married Lady Margaret Gordon – and ostensibly he settled down. Now in his mid-twenties, Beckford had political aspirations, and the stabilising influence of Lady Margaret indicated the beckoning of a more conventional life. This connubial bliss was soon to be shattered when, in October 1784, the newly-wed Beckford paid a second visit to Powderham.

The Castle by this time was undoubtedly a more subdued place than would have welcomed Beckford on his first visit in 1779. The loss of Lady Frances in March 1782, and Isabella's death by burning in 1783 had thrown a pall over Powderham. However, life was clearly returning to some semblance of normality, as the Beckfords' visit coincided with a house party. Another guest at Powderham was Alexander Wedderburn, the 1st Baron Loughborough, who had recently married William's aunt, Charlotte.

Unfortunately, whoever was responsible for the guest list either failed to spot an awkward conflict of interest or deliberately sparked the conflagration that followed. Lord Loughborough was an adversary to Lord Thurlow, a Tory grandee and Beckford's principal political champion at this time, who had been seeking to promote Beckford's public aspirations. While the details of what happened will remain forever shrouded in uncertainty and considerable layers of conjecture and 'fake news', scurrilous details of William and Beckford's previously intimate friendship became public knowledge. These details were then promoted causing untold damage to the political careers of both Beckford and, through association, Lord Thurlow.

Certain accounts suggest that a tutor, possibly William's, saw the two men having an argument through a keyhole, accompanied by physical interaction. It has equally been suggested that the two men

were discovered in a sexually compromising position – although given the presence at Powderham of Beckford’s young wife and child, this seems far-fetched. Further theories abound, and indeed recent research suggests that any ‘incident’ may not have occurred at Powderham at all, but may have taken place on a separate visit of William to Fonthill. Another viable explanation is that the two men had a falling out over the handling of their passionate, youthful correspondence – the intimate contents of which would be compromising to them both if ever published. Beckford had a considerable amount to lose should his letters to William ever see the sober light of day, and one might speculate that Beckford wanted the letters destroyed, but William, still only sixteen years old, did not. Indeed, perhaps the handling of their correspondence was the purpose of Beckford’s visit?

What we do know is that what followed was a deluge of conjecture and rumour in newspapers and the public forum that was favourable to Lord Loughborough, who sought nothing more than to destroy Beckford’s political aspirations without care for the collateral implications. There certainly was no care for the impact it would have on Loughborough’s nephew, poor teenage William. Soon afterward, in November 1784, the *Morning Herald* published a news story reporting “a grammatical mistake in regard to the genders” between Beckford and William – the criminal insinuation of which was clear.

Lasting Reverberations

What followed was the complete collapse of Beckford’s public standing, the abandonment of his political aspirations and a long period of absence. Beckford spent the next ten years effectively in exile around Europe, as he toured the continent, acquired art and honed his aesthetic sensibilities, while keeping far away from English society. With Lady Margaret, he had a second daughter in Switzerland in 1786, but his wife tragically died shortly thereafter, leaving Beckford a widower with two young girls. Beckford

enthusiasts will be well aware of the implications of this period on Beckford's personal and aesthetic life. Cast off from England, but still wealthy in the extreme, he developed the most remarkable taste in fine art and interiors, establishing one of England's finest collections that he later housed in his remarkable Gothic masterpiece at Fonthill. The story needs no rehearsing in this publication.

What may be of more interest are the implications for young William Courtenay – still a teenager at Westminster School, with his entire adult life before him. Reading Boyd Alexander, you would expect that his life came to nothing other than ignominy and exile – simply a dissolute gay man, shunned by society, who hid from the limelight due to the shame of his adolescent exposure. We can, however, refute that – William's subsequent life was rich, complex and rewarding.

William's own father died in 1788, only four years later, and so by the age of twenty William had become an orphan, as well as the man of the house – responsible for his many sisters and the large family estates. He came of age in 1789, but delayed his celebrations out of deference to his father's passing. But when they finally came, the celebrations were not those of a shy, retiring young man.

His coming of age party was an extravaganza at Powderham – a three day festival involving hundreds of guests, a masquerade ball, fireworks and festivities in the park, **FIGURE 10**. William's fancy dress theme for the masked ball was Van Dyck and this is the portrait that William had painted of himself in his costume by Richard Cosway, R.A., Regency London's portraitist-du-jour and principal painter to the Prince Regent, **FIGURE 11**. The newspapers were full of accounts of the festivities and there are descriptions both negative and positive. Some commentators jealously noted that certain guests declined to attend, but the local newspaper described it thus:

As the first evening produced an assemblage of characters to incite mirth so the two latter exhibited beauty and elegance to gain admiration there being each night from three hundred to four



Fig. 10. *Coming of Age Invitation*, 1789. ©Powderham Estate.



Fig. 11. Richard Cosway, *Portrait of William in Van Dyck Costume*, 1791.
©Powderham Estate.

hundred persons of the first distinction in this neighbourhood. The great politeness and the variety shown by Lord Courtenay and his family during the whole entertainment were peculiarly admirable enthrusing pleasure and happiness to all his guests. Nor was his lordship's attention confined solely to his own company. It also had an eye towards the amusement of the populace who were assembled in the park and in great numbers, to please whom some prizes were given in Starcross which were exhibited, a bullock was roasted whole and liquor was distributed in abundance thus bringing to view a true specimen of old English hospitality. The whole was conducted with a great deal of regularity and decorum and much to the satisfaction of all ranks of spectators. (Exeter Evening Post, August 4 1790)

It was a remarkable occasion, but one thing that William realised in hosting these festivities is that he did not possess a space sufficiently large to entertain on that scale. So what did he do? He



Fig. 12. James Wyatt's Music Room, 1793. ©Will Pryce.

commissioned one in 1793 – the Music Room at Powderham Castle, FIGURE 12. Notably, it was commissioned from James Wyatt – the most fashionable young architect of the day – who later became principal architect to Beckford, and was responsible for Fonthill Abbey. Although the written record suggests that William and Beckford very much went their separate way after 1784, and some of the most burning invective in Beckford’s correspondence of this time is reserved for his former friend, at the least they continued to share an aesthetic and creative vision during these years.

Far from slinking into shameful solitude, William’s connoisseurship during the 1790s was of the highest calibre and ambition. The carpet for his Music Room came from Thomas Whitty of the Axminster carpet factory; at the time it was made, it was the largest Axminster carpet, until the Prince Regent learned of it and got one



Fig. 13. Richard Cosway, *Three Courtenay Sisters by the Grotto*, c. 1798.
©Powderham Estate.

made an inch bigger for his new Brighton Pavilion.

William commissioned the extraordinary State Bed, in which my father, Hugh the 18th Earl, was born during the Exeter blitz of May 1942. Also, he purchased at auction Callet's magnificent portrait of Louis XVI in 1793 from the French Embassy, because the French obviously had no need of a picture of their recently beheaded king. In outrageous style, he then hung it opposite himself in his own Music Room, offering a brazen 'two fingers' to the republicans in France; a bold move for a young aristocrat of French royal extraction.

William didn't lack in ambition, and he didn't lack in sisters either. Two of the more remarkable Cosway portraits at Powderham are these groups of William's sisters now hanging in the First and Second Libraries, FIGURE 13, FIGURE 14. The portraits celebrate his beloved sisters' engagement to various families of note, including the Somersets and the Honywoods, and perhaps William's greatest achievements were the pre-eminent marriages that he secured for so many of his sisters – although at great cost. William was now the man of the house, and he had a principle obligation to get his sisters well married into established families; he achieved that with bells on. All but three of his sisters married and married well, something that is not achieved by a dissolute homosexual without ambition.

- Hon. Amelia Courtenay d. 18 March 1789
- Hon. Frances Courtenay b. January 1763 = Sir John Honywood, 4th Bt.
- Hon. Charlotte Courtenay b. 14 February 1764 = Thomas Joseph Giffard, 23rd of Chillington
- Hon. Isabella Courtenay b. 20 June 1765, d. 5 March 1783
- Hon. Elizabeth Courtenay b. 2 September 1766, d. 11 September 1815 = General Lord Charles Henry Somerset
- William Courtenay, 9th Earl of Devon b. 30 July 1768, d. 26 May 1835
- Hon. Lucy Courtenay b. 13 June 1770, d. 27 June 1822 = John Vaughan, 3rd Earl of Lisburne
- Hon. Harriet Courtenay b. 7 September 1771, d. 13 April 1836 =



Fig. 14. Richard Cosway, *Three Courtenay Sisters*, 1805. ©Powderham Estate.

George Thynne, 2nd Baron Carteret of Hawnes

- Hon. Eleanor Courtenay b. 23 November 1772, d. February 1789
- Hon. Anne Courtenay b. 2 July 1774, d. 6 January 1835 = George Annesley, 2nd Earl of Mountnorris
- Hon. Caroline Eustatia Courtenay b. 26 March 1775, d. 6 March 1851 = Lt. Col. Charles Morland
- Hon. Matilda Jane Courtenay b. 6 July 1778, d. 1848 = John Locke
- Hon. Sophia Courtenay b. 25 January 1780 = Col. Nathaniel Foy
- Hon. Louisa Augusta Courtenay b. 23 December 1781, d. 9 February 1823 = General Lord Robert Edward Henry Somerset

William was also a renowned botanist, and a collector of rare and imported plants. He created a remarkable American garden that nestles within the woodland garden at Powderham below the Belvedere tower built by his father. Although its genesis is unrecorded, this is understood to be similar to the American garden Beckford later developed at Fonthill. The American Garden remains, and can be enjoyed at Powderham to this day – it is delightful in spring.

William's later life was not, however, a bed of roses. In his 40s he remained a bachelor with increasingly scurrilous rumours surrounding him and his behaviour. Unlike Beckford, William never married, and he never sought to conform – arguably living an openly dissolute life, that led to him being increasingly shunned by the genteel society of Devon. In or around 1811, gross indecency charges were filed against him, and he fled, at very short notice, on a ship to New York, where he lived for some years in relative comfort at a house called Claremont upon the Hudson River. He was noted to be in attendance at the first sailing of Robert Fulton's steamship, and is recorded in the Register of Aliens during the Anglo-American war of 1812-15. By 1815 he had returned to Europe, notably seen in Ghent the week before Waterloo, before settling in and around Paris after the fall of Napoleon. He died in exile in 1835.

Towards the end of his life an unexpected elevation occurred –

he was affirmed as Earl of Devon. In 1831 he petitioned the House of Lords, encouraged by his cousin the (later) 10th Earl, who was the clerk to the House of Lords and an ambitious and intelligent barrister, as well as William's successor. The petition was filed because Mary Tudor's 1553 letters patent created an earldom that would pass to 'all heirs male', rather than the more common 'heirs male of the blood.' This was either a drafting error, or a deliberate attempt to create a virtually inextinguishable title. You may recall that Edward Courtenay, the recipient, was later exiled for his dalliance with Elizabeth and died in Padua in 1556 without issue – the title fell into abeyance. It was not claimed by the family for nearly 300 years until it was revived in 1831. It is the title that I now hold.

Despite his elevation up the peerage, William never came home until his coffin was brought back to Powderham Church in 1835 and he was buried in the family crypt. The accounts of the funeral recorded great sadness and considerable grief at his death – hardly the 'obscurity' posited by Boyd Alexander.

What happened afterwards was possibly equally distressing. The 10th Earl was no fan of his cousin; as a respectable Victorian gentleman, his morals would not permit him to celebrate his predecessor's unconventional life. He set about destroying the records pertaining to William, and thereafter the family adopted an unspoken sense of shame around the 'flamboyant 3rd Viscount.' Indeed, visitors to Powderham during the last century would note an odd narrative gap between 1770 and 1820 in the family story – despite the distinct interiors and paintings from that era. My own father, Hugh, had quite public difficulty with homosexuality, and barred same sex couples from marrying at Powderham, which resulted in him losing his wedding licence. You might note the irony that my father was born in William's wonderful red State Bed.

Postscripts:

This rather fabulous photograph from the 1920s shows the young William rather wistfully staring at Beckford's two daughters from his marriage to Lady Margaret – all painted by Romney, FIGURE 15. The image comes from the Hamilton sale of 1919 and is a neat juxtaposition of William and the two girls born to Beckford during the time of their great friendship. One can only imagine the thoughts that might run through the young William's head, as he converses with his friend's children over a 130 years after the events we have been considering.

The other magical discovery made recently is a book of letters known as the Wilkinson papers. Discovered when a family was clearing out their coal chute in Hampton Wick in South London, they were found under a pile of rubble. They are the letters written by William's agent, John Wilkinson of Lincoln's Inn, London,



Fig. 15. Christie's Saleroom, Hamilton Palace Sale, 1919, showing the Romney portrait of William beside the Romney portrait of Beckford's two daughters.

during the 1820s. They are addressed to William in Paris and to his agents in Ireland and in Devon, effectively managing Powderham. They reveal the most remarkable depth of interest and depth of knowledge and show that, far from being the dissolute, carefree wastrel that history has painted, William was the most conscientious manager of Powderham, wanting to know everything that was going on: ensuring that everybody got their annuities; that Starcross got its church (for which he donated land); that flood defences were maintained: and that the squirrels didn't destroy the New Plantation – much the same work as we undertake at Powderham today. The letters, APPENDIX, provide the most remarkable insight into Powderham and into the obvious distress of this man who was passionate about his home at Powderham, passionate about the land, passionate about the building that he and his father, and his grandfather had curated, from which he was cut adrift from 1810 until his death in 1835.

While we do not wish to be unduly competitive, so much of William's legacy remains – a considerable amount of it is still at Powderham and much it is yet to be studied. In comparison to Beckford, whose Fonthill is no longer, Powderham retains many of William's most treasured works and his legacy. We look forward to hosting welcoming Beckford society members in 2020 and beyond.

Appendix

Letter No. 28, Tuesday May 4th, The Viscount Courtenay

Part 1

My Lord

I fear you will think it long before you hear from me, but I did not in fact return from Devonshire sufficiently early to write by the packet of last week.

I feel the greatest pleasure at being enabled to inform your Lordship that I found everything (with some trifling exceptions

which I shall notice by and by) in the most perfect order. The external appearance of the Castle and the grounds around it was such as to leave no room for improvement and far exceeded my utmost expectation. On entering the interior, one cannot but be instantly struck with the alteration occasioned by the sale of the furniture – but even this is far less striking than might have been expected and the admirable state in which all the apartments are kept by Mrs Bush lends greatly to compensate for the loss of furniture. Although Mrs Bush may be said to be doing no more than her duty and that the impulse of self interest must naturally operate as an incentive to exertion – still I do not feel that I should be doing this woman justice were I on this occasion to withhold expressing the gratification I derived from observing the result of her superintendence and management.

Part 2

The noble range of new plantation at Melons (Mellands) must be pronounced by everyone who sees it and remembers the ground before it was planted (which I do not) as a most striking improvement and addition to the grounds – with the exception of the upper part of the plantation which partly from the exposed situation and thin soil and partly from the depredations of our old friends the rabbits is not in so thriving a state as I could have wished to have seen it the whole is growing luxuriantly and in some places begins to be greatly in want of thinning. I was much grieved however to remark the very serious injury done to the Scotch firs by another description of marauders than the rabbits viz the squirrels. There are scores and I may also say hundreds of those firs completely destroyed by these animals which I saw running about it every direction. I did not hesitate to giving the strictest injunctions I could to Wilcox and his brother gamekeeper to destroy them or at least to diminish their numbers which they have assured me they would do – I also followed up the directions which had been previously given to them through Mr Pidsley respecting the rabbits (of which there seems to

be a very large colony) and to reduce their numbers also at a proper season. They promised strongly to do so but I thought of your Lordships anecdote of the Duchess of Kingston.

Part 3

I found one of the windows of the Belvidere in so bad state of repair that I ordered it to be sent to Exeter – the workmen at Starcross not being considered equal to the task. The seawall appears to have been well and effectively repaired and I trust will stand for a long time without requiring anything considerable to be done to it.

The Courtenay Arms at Starcross is undergoing a thorough cleaning as to painting and papering. The painting had begun[...] I was there – as I had directed in consequence of previous communications from Mr Pidsley – and when I saw he rooms I ventured to ordering the papering which in some places was getting into very bad condition and would have looked extremely shabby after the new painting.

The project for building a Chapel at Starcross is still warmly entertained and from the contributes the active promoters of it had obtained from the Government Committee and some charitable institutions there seems little doubt but that the measure will be proceeded with and carried into execution. Your Lordship had I understand been appraised of the business and had given your sanction for the appropriation of a piece of land for the site and for the small endowment which is necessary – we looked at a small field on the right hand side of the present road leading out of Starcross towards Dawlish which is considered and indeed appears to be a very eligible situation – It will be on the left and front or nearby so on one side the proposed variation of the road out of Starcross towards Dawlish which will give it a remarkably good entrance and access.

Lord Rolle I fear is attempting to encroach on your Lordships rights in the River Exe by claiming the soil or exclusive right of Ballastage from two sand banks called the Shelley and Bull Hill

situate in the middle of the river. I shall immediately investigate and ascertain the precise nature as far as I can of your Lordships title and rights.

1 There is a multitude of Williams in this story, so in order to distinguish them I will refer to them in various terms. William, 3rd Viscount Courtenay is our lead protagonist, who I will refer to throughout as “William.”

As for other Williams: there is William’s grandfather, who I shall call the 1st Viscount; there is William’s father, the 2nd Viscount; and there is William’s second cousin, and successor, the 10th Earl of Devon. We also have the well-known Alderman Beckford and Beckford himself.

2 This is offered not as an academic study, but as the work of a passionate enthusiast for the life and times of William 3rd Viscount Courtenay, the 9th Earl of Devon. I owe thanks to many whose legitimately academic research has provided material and insight into a fascinating story, including Dorothy Presswell, Amy Frost, Sidney Blackmore, Felicity Harper, Col. Cedric Delforce, Dr. Alan Butler, David Whitfield, and Sarah Moore.

3 Gibbon was known to the protagonists of our story, or at least to their fathers, and it has been suggested that Beckford purchased much of Gibbon’s library after the historian’s death out of spite in an effort to control Gibbon’s legacy, after Gibbon had taken exception to the way in which Beckford treated young William.

4 William is often referred to by historians and modern commentators as ‘Kitty Courtenay’. While this is a helpful distinction in a family full of Williams, it does serve to infantilise him and I have chosen to avoid the name when describing William as an adult. A heterosexual man of substance would likely not be infantilised in this way, so William should not, just because of his sexuality.

5 The illustration is from one of the social magazines, titled: “Lord Courtenay endeavouring to extinguish the flames of his sister’s clothes which had caught by standing too near the fireplace.” Rather typical of the magazines of the day (and today), the hats of the ladies who were at the social engagements of the week array around the picture advertising the fashion while providing the news of this tragic story.

6 The Belvedere Tower has just been restored. Shortly before his death in 2015, my father obtained a grant from Natural England to put a roof back on and windows back in – to make the building watertight. It had a chequered life since William’s time, becoming a Victorian keeper’s cottage replete with kennels, before falling to ruin. In 1948 it was burned out entirely leaving an empty shell, overgrown with ivy and trees. Over recent years, the family have slowly returned it to its former glory.

7 The two have not hung together for over 200 years and they now hang either sides of the Atlantic, with Beckford in the National Trust property at Upton House, Warwickshire, and William in the collection of Alfred I. Dupont, at the Nemours Foundation in Wilmington, Delaware.

*William Beckford, Vathek and
the Episodes of Vathek*

(Edited and translated from the original French by Kenneth
Graham, Edward Everett Root Publishers, Brighton, 2019.)

A Review by MALCOLM JACK

The history of the text of *Vathek* is a veritable minefield, only to be entered into by the most intrepid scholar; Kenneth Graham is certainly well-qualified to do so. In the case of *Vathek* itself, the first translation into English was made in 1786 by Beckford's collaborator, the Reverend Samuel Henley, much to the dissatisfaction of its author who was on the Continent at the time. To counteract that edition, Beckford rushed out a further French version which was published in Lausanne the following year (1787) and then in Paris. A subsequent French edition appeared in 1815. Meanwhile there were a series of English editions – in 1809, 1816 (the so-called third edition), in 1823, 1832 and 1834. While Beckford made alterations to Henley's English translation, he did not substantially change it.

Kenneth Graham's first work on *Vathek* was in 1971, when he established a text, based on the 1816 edition, as part of his doctoral thesis. In preparing it, he took into account all other English editions and where there was any ambiguity in the wording, he consulted French editions.¹ Henley's voluminous notes were included in Graham's thesis. Subsequently, in 2001, he produced a new edition (Broadview Literary Texts) in which Henley's notes were omitted and replaced with up-to-date notes of his own.² He also combined *Vathek* with the *Episodes*, on the basis that this

had always been Beckford's intention. The most remarkable thing about the Broadview edition was his inclusion of a new version of the first of the *Episodes*, known as "The History of Prince Alasi and Princess Firouzkah." Graham used a hitherto undiscovered text in the Bodleian Library where the overtly homosexual theme of the tale is clear, unlike its appearance in other versions, posthumously published, where Firouz' gender is changed to that of a female.³

In the present, new edition Graham has returned to the French texts of both works and translated them afresh into English. In respect of *Vathek* he has used the Lausanne edition; while for the *Episodes* he has once again incorporated his find of the unadulterated first story (Alasi and Firouz) while using Sir Frank Marzials' translations of the other stories.⁴ Once again Henley's notes have been excluded.

While there are obviously similarities in this new version to the Broadview edition, there is a change of tone and indeed a freshness which comes about from the direct translation of the French. The tone is lighter, more modern and idiomatic. For example a phrase such as "he experienced no abatement in the love of his people" is replaced by the simpler "he was not liked by his people"; the fathers vying to claim that their sons were handsomest almost come to blows rather than being "withholden" from them. Here and there facts are re-instated: the Caliph's tower regains eleven thousand stairs rather than the fifteen hundred it was reduced to by Beckford subsequent to his first description of them.

The enterprise of translating the original French does bring us nearer to Beckford's free-flowing style. Nevertheless two editorial decisions continue to trouble this reviewer.⁵ The first is in actually suggesting that *Vathek* and the *Episodes* can be read as one work. *Vathek*, whilst dabbling in horror and grotesquery, is in essence the high-spirited romp of a young writer in the full flush of his power. It is highly amusing, ironic and full of camp and exaggerated posturing. The *Episodes*, by contrast, are dark tales of alienation. While we still find occasional whimsical flourishes here

and there, the stories are grim and deeply disturbing. Tomfoolery and histrionic effects are put aside by a writer who has tasted the bitterness of life. Beckford's earlier authorial intention (for them to be produced together) was overtaken by the course of the events of his turbulent, private life.

Secondly the removal of Henley's copious footnotes on the grounds that they are dated and to an extent, inaccurate in a certain way disturbs the original text. Roger Lonsdale makes the point in the introduction to his edition that Beckford himself considered this erudite apparatus as an integral part of the book.⁶ Although modern footnotes are more accurate, Henley's originals tell us what was known about the customs and behaviour of the Orient at the time which colour both his and Beckford's perception of that exotic world.

Despite these reservations, Graham's new edition is highly recommended. It puts before the reader a closer, more personal feeling to Beckford's work which, after all, he chose to write in French in the first place. Coming from a life-long student of the Caliph, it is a major contribution to Beckford scholarship.

1 *William Beckford's Vathek, A Critical Edition*, K. W. Graham, 2 Vols, PhD Thesis, London, 1971. Kenneth Graham gave me permission to use this text for my anthology, *Vathek and Other Stories*, London: Pickering & Chatto 1993; Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1995

2 Kenneth W. Graham (ed.) *Vathek with the Episodes of Vathek*, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2001

3 See Sir Frank Marzials (trans.), Lewis Melville (ed.) *The Episodes of Vathek* London: Stephen Swift, 1912

4 Ibid.

5 See Malcolm Jack, "William Beckford, *Vathek* with The Episodes of *Vathek*", ed. Kenneth G. Graham; and Sophia Lee, "The Recess; or a Tale of Other Time", ed. April Alliston," *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, Vol. 15, No. 1, October 2002

6 R. Lonsdale, (ed.) *Vathek*, Oxford: Oxford Classics, 1983. A new edition of Lonsdale's edition has been published by Oxford Classics, 2013, edited by Tom Keymer, which I reviewed in *The Beckford Journal*, Vol. 19, 2013

John Stuttard, The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury

Hobnob Press, for the Shaftesbury Historical Society, 2018, pp.
xii, 232. ISBN 978-1-906978-63-1 (hbk); 978-1-906978-64-8 (pbk)

A Review by PETER FORSAITH

Writing an historical biography calls for particular skills: to be thoroughly conversant with your subject – to get inside his or her skin, as it were – but also to be objective, to think and write at a remove. Further, it requires a thorough grasp of the historical areas on which it touches – getting inside the skin of an environment whose structure and values are, to a greater or lesser degree, alien – and creating a productive dialogue for specialist or general readers.

The ‘Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury’ was John Rutter (1796-1851): the law firm which he founded in the town still exists, although his main business was as a printer and publisher: he produced *Delineations of Fonthill & its Abbey* (1822) which will make this biography of interest to Beckfordians. Born in Bristol, his formative years were uncertain times shaped by the Napoleonic wars and political agitation, while the decrease in slave trading was a factor in the decline of Bristol from being the country’s second city (and also, parenthetically, of Beckford’s fortune). At a personal level his father died when he was four and his mother when he was ten, following which he was brought up by his elder sisters and sent to a local school run by a Quaker.

The Rutter family had been Quakers for a century and a half, although his mother was linked to the Bristol Methodists. It was

through Quaker networks that, aged 15, John was apprenticed to a Shaftesbury linen draper, so moved to the town where he would spend the rest of his life. He may not have completed his apprenticeship: in 1817 he opened a printer's and stationer's shop in the High Street. In the early decades of the nineteenth century the growing 'industrial revolution' was changing the face of society, economically, socially, politically and culturally. It was a time of commercial uncertainty but also opportunity: an ambitious small tradesman could do well, and Rutter was such an individual. Two of his early business projects were the guides to Fonthill Abbey (1822) and also to Wardour Castle (1823).

To the Fonthill *Delineations* we shall return. Rutter was evidently a businessman with sound commercial acumen but also a flair for publicity; he was the first person to ride through Shaftesbury on a 'hobby-horse' (an early type of bicycle), which he offered for sale, though probably as an agent, not tying up capital in stock. He was also, as a Quaker, involved in challenging political and social injustice, and used his printing presses for leaflets and petitions. At local level Shaftesbury was a pocket borough, under the increasingly tight control of Earl Grosvenor. Rutter was one of those who opposed him: he was making a powerful enemy.

During the 1826 election, Rutter's press printed a letter which, inadvertently or otherwise, omitted to give the (legally required) printer's name. As a result, Rutter was prosecuted and fined £5, but from there matters escalated. Further legal action ensued, through a rising national tide of agitation for reform, subsequent elections, the 1830 'Swing riots' until by the mid-1830s, Shaftesbury had a reformist M.P., due in no small part to Rutter's efforts. But on the way, this generally moderate man had acquired his soubriquet of being a 'turbulent Quaker'.

He had also acquired some understanding of the law, learning from experience how it favoured the establishment but discriminated against the less well-placed. He decided to study to become a lawyer. The 1828 repeal of the 'Test and Corporation Acts' opened the way

for Quakers to enter such professions and in 1832 he was articled to a Shaftesbury solicitor. With the coming of a wider franchise and reformist legislation in the 1830s, there was scope for someone of Rutter's views to represent the still underprivileged classes.

Lawyers were not permitted to carry on other business, so Rutter had to ensure his printing and publishing operations (and a chemist's shop he had acquired and was running profitably) were secured elsewhere in his family, mainly with his wife. He had married Anne Clarence, also a Quaker, of London, in 1818: of their children, four survived to adulthood. They were a compatible, loving and mutually supportive couple, and Anne was evidently not only a good manager of the home but also of the business. They moved from Shaftesbury to a cottage outside the town in 1822, eventually settling in a property of the Marquess of Westminster (son of Earl Grosvenor), the local magnate whose representatives he had opposed so resolutely, and who once told him his agents had spent £2000 trying to ruin him.

Rutter died in 1851, a successful businessman whose years of struggle both for commercial success and political justice were behind him. By then his business was mostly in the hands of his sons, while he was actively involved in championing new causes such as public gas lighting and railways. In 1850 his health deteriorated: one wonders if the struggles of the past had taken their toll.

This, then, was the man who in 1822 obtained an introduction to meet Beckford, who invited him to make descriptions of exterior, interior and contents of Fonthill, prior to its sale. Rutter had to move fast but the result, as we know, is an appreciative and expressive visual and verbal record of the Abbey – although not always uncritical. While he eulogised over the magnificence of the building and admired the remarkable estate (Rutter, like Beckford, loved the country) perhaps most notably he deplored the inadequacy of the bedrooms which rendered it virtually uninhabitable for all practical purposes.

To this Studdard devotes eighteen pages (pp. 65-83) outlining

not only Rutter's publications but also the rival publication by John Britton (was Beckford deliberately setting the two against each other?) and Rutter's sales campaign to ensure the success of his book, so vital in the early years of his career. It was successful in many ways giving us now, as it does, the most articulate expression of Beckford's remarkable building.

However interesting and useful a publication for Beckfordians, how is this assessed as an historical biography? The early history of Methodism, John Rutter's mother's background (her father was John Wesley's Bristol printer), comes within my own specialism, and here I find myself uneasy. While not central to the main narrative, the generality and detail of this account relies almost totally on just two sources. Wider reading could have resulted in a more nuanced, balanced and contextualised approach. Much work has been done, for instance, on the place of women in early Methodism – highly germane to Jane Rutter.

This unease plays out into concerns about the reliability of the rest of the book. How much weight has been put on solid sources and how much on those less dependable? To what extent does the writing move from narrative to synthesis as, at times, events and quotes tumble together in quick succession with little interpretation? Another signal is giving current values against amounts of money – usually better avoided. Clearly the author is captivated by his subject, but has he perhaps become a little too close to be entirely objective?

The acid test of any serious book must be the referencing and bibliography. While generally these seem accurate and adequate (although n.18, for instance, needs full details), an uninterrupted sequence of 634 references makes it difficult for the scholar to navigate, although maybe of less concern to a more general reader. Coming to the Beckford section, the first [n. 234] is simply '*Life at Fonthill*, p. 295'; it took me quite a time to trawl back and locate the prior, full reference. Notes by chapter at least would be preferable.

In summary, this is a biography of someone not untypical of

his generation, one of the ‘middling sorts’ who took entrepreneurial advantage of the times in which he lived, with the particular opportunities which those offered as the ‘industrial revolution’ progressed. But, further, his non-conforming beliefs fuelled a public life of peaceful radicalism; again, a characteristic of that period of growing religious liberty. Despite its academic shortcomings it is an interesting contribution to local and wider histories and Rutter’s ‘*Delineations*’ of Fonthill make this book of special interest to Beckfordians. The question I am left with though, is – how on earth did Beckford rub along with this ‘turbulent Quaker’?

The Unavoidable Absence: Fonthill Abbey and the Gothic Revival

ERIC RATCLIFF

‘... today it is difficult to believe that it ever existed.’
Terence Davis, 1974¹

Introduction

No discussion of the Gothic Revival can avoid mention of William Beckford and James Wyatt’s *Fonthill Abbey*, but in published writings the building has generally remained a prodigy. There has been scant critical commentary on the place of the building in the development of the array of related styles that emerged within the ensuing century.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the significance attributed to the Abbey in an accessible range of books on the Gothic Revival, from one that crystallised the subject when it was at its height in England to those that have questioned it or expanded its boundaries into other countries and other fields of study. It is necessary to be careful not to write of the Revival as a *movement*, for it was the expression of many motivations, some trivial, like fashion, boredom with a long Classical hegemony, or a wish to assert ancient lineage, some as momentous as artistic or structural integrity, religious revival, liturgical reform and resurgent nationalism.

The idea of ‘revival’ in architecture is ingrained in popular and academic discourse; in the case of the Gothic, the appropri-

ateness of this has always been questioned with the use of terms like ‘survival’ or persistence, which are not quite the same thing.² The geographical translation of revived style to North America and other former European colonies has also been recorded in terms of ‘arrival’, such is the attraction of assonance. The word *revival* appears to have entered the realm of the creative arts through the theatre: according to the *OED* its use to denote the bringing of an older work back to the stage dates from 1664 and it is still current.³

The nineteenth century has been viewed as an age of revivals, architectural and religious, and the word has since been applied with scant justification to a number of stylistic fashions. James Stevens Curl, in his Oxford *Dictionary of Architecture*, defined a revival as the ‘resuscitation of any previous style, properly founded on archaeological studies and scholarship’.⁴ The statement preceding the comma is unexceptionable, but the word ‘properly’ in the rider introduces immediate problems. Many of the features of Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill were explicitly derived from medieval models, but we might question whether even one of the most archaeologically-correct items in the house, the ‘chimney-piece, designed by Mr. Bentley, [...] chiefly taken from the tomb of archbishop Warham at Canterbury’ would qualify for Professor Curl’s definition.⁵ The appearance of direct imitation of older features, as in early phases of the transformation of Strawberry Hill, was to some extent a hangover of a long tradition of seeking models in the Classical Antique, but before Walpole’s project was finished, the focus had moved to innovation around medieval features. Compare the ‘Warham’ chimney-piece in the Holbein Chamber with the invention of similar purpose ‘taken from the tomb of Edward the Confessor, improved by Mr. Adam’ less than ten years later.⁶ The antiquarian vied with the mannerist from the very beginning. Does a replica or a copy, evidences of association or aesthetic admiration, qualify as a revival, or should that term be reserved for developments of a style, signs that it is truly alive? Is a revival retrospective or prospective?

‘... that strange ambitious building [...]so important a feature of the Gothic Revival.’⁷

‘... unequalled in importance by any which preceded it.’⁸

Charles L. Eastlake, 1872

When he published his *History of the Gothic Revival*, the term had already been current for over twenty years, and there was little need to explain it further in the title, although he did so at some length. Charles Locke Eastlake (1836-1906) studied architecture at the Royal Academy School but became best known for his writings, particularly on furniture styles, although in the United States, his name is indelibly attached to the Eastlake Style, often described as a ‘muscular’ derivative of Gothic. In 1872 he published both in London and New York a book with a title that is almost an abstract. Eastlake was writing from the thick of the movement, and much of the book is about his English contemporaries. He was strongly aware of such literary influences as Walpole and Sir Walter Scott, of antiquaries and theorists like Britton, Ruskin, and Viollet-le-Duc, and many other critics and polemicists less well-known today. His canon of works, architects and influences, although Anglo-centric, has never been supplanted; in more recent writing it has been supplemented by the recognition of Continental roots and American developments.

Both the title and the first two chapters of the book recognise that Gothic never really disappeared from the English repertoire, so the subject was truly a ‘Revival’. Chapter III is about Horace Walpole and Batty Langley. Beckford, Wyatt and Fonthill Abbey make their appearance in Chapter IV, sandwiched between the eighteenth-century gothicisation of country seats and a review of the antiquarian writings of the time. Eastlake accords 4 out of his 372 pages to Beckford and the Abbey, and others to Wyatt’s Gothic in general: ‘The history of this strange place presents so many features for consideration, and is so inseparably connected with that of its still more extraordinary owner, that they form together a subject which calls for special comment.’⁹

Regrettably, that special comment is chiefly confined to an account of Beckford's eccentricities and the tale of the house. Most of Eastlake's successors have done much the same. The chapter on the eighteenth century, in which Beckford and Fonthill are embedded, appears as an interlude before two chapters on the restorers, the persistence of Gothic at Oxford, the influence of the Waverley Novels and the taxonomy of Rickman, before starting on the 'serious' phase of the Gothic Revival. Eastlake asserts the Abbey to be of the highest importance in the history of the Gothic Revival, but does not say why: his account of the Abbey and its owner is essentially light relief.

In the half-century after his chronicle of the Revival, the styles that came from it spread around the world and then faded into *fin-de-siècle* eclecticism like the smile of a Cheshire cat, leaving its last monuments still under construction in three continents. It was time to look again at a curious phenomenon so alien to the emerging spirit of the age.

*'Fonthill itself must have been the most exciting building of its time... the imaginative power displayed in Fonthill is a puzzle.'*⁷¹⁰

Kenneth Clark, 1928

The Gothic Revival by Kenneth Clark (1903-1983) is a young man's book that has proved remarkably durable, particularly since its re-issue (I hesitate to write revival) in 1963. It traces the phenomenon in England from alleged origins in the mid-eighteenth century to the dichotomy that emerged between the medievalising of A. W. N. Pugin and the 'Ecclesiologists', who adhered largely to insular forms of Gothic, and the more innovative disciples of Ruskin who sought to develop the style with added doses of Italian polychromy and French and Venetian Gothic. The focus is on 'taste' and therefore on literary connexions, and the book is quite evidently a gloss on Eastlake, up to about the middle of the senior work.

Beckford, Wyatt and Fonthill appear in Chapter IV, headed

‘Romanticism and Archaeology’, about literary enthusiasm for the medieval, about the picturesque and the sublime; ‘...the taste for Gothic seems an insignificant example of a movement essentially literary...’¹¹ It would seem that the evanescence of Fonthill Abbey qualifies it as a work of the imagination, like *The Castle of Otranto*, *Vathek* or the *Waverley* Novels: ‘Fonthill can hardly be considered as more than stage scenery’ although: ‘As scenery it is superb’.¹² Unlike Strawberry Hill, the Abbey was not there to speak, and mislead, for itself.

Clark’s book, with about half the chronological span of Eastlake’s, occupies 224 pages of which about five and a half are devoted to Beckford and Fonthill, but of his ration of fifteen plates, two are devoted to reproductions from Rutter’s *Delineations*. After all, ‘That wonderful building concentrated in itself all the Romanticism of the 1790’s, and was the epitome of eighteenth-century Gothic.’¹³ Clark’s conclusion is brisk, for he has other themes to attend to: ‘If Beckford is to have a place in the Gothic Revival it is as the patron of Wyatt. [...] ... by involving Fonthill in mystery, he made it a brilliant advertisement for the Gothic style.’¹⁴

In 1949 a more mature Kenneth Clark permitted himself a *pentimento* in ‘A letter to Michael Sadleir’ that serves as a foreword (after two prefaces and before an introduction) to the second edition. The younger Clark was writing about taste as much as architecture, and confessed that ‘At first it was the false Gothic of Fonthill and the Houses of Parliament which seemed bearable’ before professing an enthusiasm for the later heavyweights.¹⁵ It would seem that in his twenties, Clark thought he was writing about taste; in his forties he realised he had been writing about architecture, and had begun a process of critical appraisal in place of antiquarian description and historical chronicling, retrospectively acknowledging ‘Mr. Goodhart-Rendel, the father of us all.’¹⁶ ‘At Beckford’s Fonthill, certainly, romance had got the upper hand.’¹⁷

As the title of his book, *English Architecture Since the Regency* implies, the ‘Georgian Epilogue’ discussed in the first chapter is

only a preamble to H. S. Goodhart-Rendel's account of the nineteenth century, the Edwardian era and the coming of modernism. The book was published in 1953, but was based on lectures given in 1932, so the judgments therein might help to fill the gap between the youthful Kenneth Clark and the age of rejection and demolition that preceded a revival of enthusiasm in the 'generation influenced by the poetical insight of Mr. Betjeman'.¹⁸

Beckford and Fonthill appear on the first page, and lead immediately to Rutter's wry apologia for the discomforts and inconveniences of the Abbey as a house: 'we are bound to consider the present conveniences of the Abbey well adapted to the particular establishment for which they were provided.'¹⁹ As an architect, Goodhart-Rendel (1887-1959) was a mitigated modernist, but the Abbey was no *machine à habiter*, and if its form followed its function, that function was to evoke astonishment. Thereafter, the Abbey disappears from sight until mentioned in connection with James Wyatt, who 'only lived to see two years of the Regency, but his influence upon younger men was so powerful that something must be said',²⁰ notably that 'his use of Gothic forms although avowedly eclectic and arbitrary was based upon a knowledge of detail that for his time appears astonishing'. Perhaps, but that knowledge had been purchased at the cost of cathedral renovations that earned him the title of 'Wyatt the Destroyer'.²¹ Goodhart-Rendel noted that:

Wyatt's Gothic houses [...] had never relapsed into the prose of the manor-house, but had followed Strawberry Hill in its romantic combination of details largely ecclesiastical. Priors they would be called, or abbeys; not manors or granges.²²

Wyatt's Classical architecture seems to excite general admiration; it appears to have become customary to praise his Gothic work with faint damns; he understood medieval detail, but not Gothic structure. If you seek his monument, do not look for it at Fonthill.

*'The Gothic detail was authentic and lavish...'*²³

Doreen Yarwood, 1963

The indefatigable Doreen Yarwood, surveying *The Architecture of England* for her *magnum opus*, notices the Abbey at some length in her paragraphs on Wyatt, and devotes Plate XLVI from her small allocation of sixty to an engraving from Rutter's *Delineations*, sharing the honour of inclusion with extant buildings only with Roger Pratt's lost Coleshill House, Nash's Regent Street and St Michael's, Coventry in its original state.²⁴ Like these, and a few other famous absentees such as the successive Gothic iterations of Eaton Hall, Adam's Adelphi, the Euston 'Arch' and the London Coal Exchange, Fonthill Abbey is a missing note in the canon of English architecture that must be sung as if it is still there, but curiously, Strawberry Hill is unmentioned.

*'... a consummate exercise in grand scenic effect ...'; '... fits uncomfortably into the pictorial ideal, failing [...] to merge into the landscape and its interior paying more homage to the Sublime than to the Picturesque.'*²⁵

Terence Davis, 1974

In his thoughtful book, *The Gothick Taste*, Terence Davis limits his study to 'that particular fanciful evocation of the Middle Ages' and 'considers examples of the two main expressions of the Gothick-manifestation; its use as a form of decoration in its Rococo phase and its use to evoke a mood in its associational phase.'²⁶ Strawberry Hill belongs to the former, Fonthill Abbey to the latter.

Davis's text is descriptive but not analytic about the interior of the Abbey, except for the comment that by this time Wyatt's 'increased knowledge of medieval structure' [...] 'was beginning to banish the delights of spontaneity'. He has put his finger on where Fonthill Abbey may sit in the tortuous and tangled path from Strawberry Hill to Truro Cathedral.

The Abbey is covered in four and a half pages of text and five pages of illustrations: the view from the north-west and the octagon interior from Rutter, a ground plan, and a double-page spread of

William Westall's lithograph of the building after the final fall of the tower.²⁷ Davis considered the place of the Abbey and its meticulously planned grounds in the history of landscape as more important than its interior. His conclusion is that as a landscape feature the building was too large for any park, and as a house it was too awe-inspiring to be at all convenient. Contemporary images of the Abbey in its setting show the enclosing forest established by Beckford in early stages of its growth. Had the building lasted, it would probably not appear so out of scale today, FIGURE 1.

The world turns; the arch-Neo-Brutalists, Peter and Allison Smithson joined Mr. Betjeman, soon to be Sir John, in the fight to save that apotheosis of the Doric Revival, the propylaea at Euston Station, and lost, but nobody in a position to influence the decision ever seriously advocated the demolition of the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras. The Gothic Revival has become visible to the readers of *House and Garden*; the important art publishers commission works on the Gothic Revival from acknowledged experts.

*'... the most romantic of Gothic houses for the most romantic patron of the Gothic Revival.'*²⁸

Meghan Aldrich, 1994

Megan Aldrich's *Gothic Revival*, the title unadorned with the definite article, and the content therefore free to roam, is one of a series of lavishly-illustrated books in large format. It traces the subject from the eighteenth century to the most recent re-revivals, and from England to the United States and elsewhere. The author's formation is North American and she is particularly fitted to deal with the transatlantic manifestations of the Revival in buildings and treatises. Her treatment is more thematic than chronological as befits the tangled skein of the subject.

As in most accounts of the Gothic Revival, the examination of the trunk is more robust than that of the branches. Antiquarian interest in the medieval leads to Strawberry Hill, Walpole leads to



Fig. 1. Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire. View from the South. Aquatint published in Robert Havell, *A Series of Picturesque Views of Noblemen's and Gentlemen's Seats*, London: R. Havell & Son 1823. The view shows Bitham Lake in the foreground, Hinkley Hill the right skyline. Reay Tannahill, in *Regency England: The Great Age of the Colour Print*, London: The Folio Society, 1964: 'One of the most dramatically effective of all views of Beckford's much-illustrated folly'.

Wyatt's commission for Lee Priory, and that prefigures Fonthill Abbey. Under the influence of Beckford, Wyatt reaches for sublime heights, and then subsides to the relative horizontality of Ashridge. The branches then rapidly proliferate until detained by a dense growth of mistletoe surrounding Pugin before proceeding to the outer foliage. Beckford and Fonthill are given six and a half pages of text and five illustrations, St Michael's Gallery and the Great West Hall interiors from Britton's *Illustrations*, the Hall from the other direction and ceiling details from Rutter's *Delineations*, and a full page reproduction of Charles Wild's 1799 watercolour rendering of the house with the intended tower and spire.

Fonthill Abbey is famous for being famous; no account of the

early Gothic Revival is complete without it, yet its innovations were not particularly influential. It expanded a fashion that it did not set, but it did not determine the direction of what followed, unless Lee Priory is seen to be more Gothick than Gothic, and the Abbey a further step towards the latter.

The most incredible country house of its time, Fonthill seemed to spark the imagination of all England.²⁹ Like their British equivalent, Thames & Hudson, Harry N. Abrams sustains its serious art publication by producing more popular books, still of good quality. Kathleen Mahoney, an editor of glossies, *House Beautiful* and *Colonial Homes*, understandably concentrated on what was there to be photographed, and on American examples, but Fonthill Abbey could not be left out. In a copiously-illustrated book, the engraving of the northern view from Rutter is given a page, and the text, half a page. This can be contrasted with Strawberry Hill which, with the advantage of still being in existence and to be photographed, receives ten pages, including one and a quarter of text. If one of Beckford's purposes in building was *pour épater le bourgeois*, he still succeeds in doing so.

*Fonthill Abbey: the egotistical sublime in stone.*³⁰

Chris Brooks, 1999

Chris Brooks's *The Gothic Revival* is one of an ambitious series projected by Phaidon Press under the title, 'Art & Ideas'; the 'series plan' lists 130 intended titles, and at the time of writing the publisher's list includes some thirty of these. The writer is an academic working within the Humanities who has a proven enthusiasm for architecture and culture of the nineteenth century, and the aim was to relate the movement in architecture and the decorative arts to other realms of fashion and creativity. This is a particularly beguiling notion in relation to the 'Gothic' because of the intimate relationship of the early Revival with a literary genre, and the fashions in cinema and personal style and adornment that have

adopted the label. Brooks is careful to link *Vathek* to orientalism, but its central character is ‘as great a tyrant as any in gothic fiction’.³¹

Brooks identifies ‘two main branches of the secular Gothic Revival during the Romantic period [...] monastic gothic of which Fonthill is the supreme statement, and castellar gothic.’³² Beckford’s reclusive life, his exclusion of the profane, his ‘personal cult of St Anthony of Padua that was more about sensuousness and silver candlesticks than about sanctity’, his collection of former sacred objects, his personal wealth, akin to that held by the monasteries before their Dissolution, ties him firmly to the monastic. But then, Beckford’s wealth is ‘new, originating in the commerce that was basic to Britain’s capitalist revolution’. The Abbey ‘was a manifestation of power epitomising the link between the Sublime and the gathering forces of capitalism’.³³ For Brooks, Beckford was its creator, Wyatt just a necessary means. Brooks does not make the link, but in a book that moves eventually to Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building in New York (1910-1913), he could have argued that the Fonthill tower was the first capitalist skyscraper, albeit not filled with typewriters. Two illustrations of the Abbey are used: Charles Wild’s watercolour rendering of the house with the spire that was intended to surpass Salisbury, and the perspective from St Michel’s to King Edward’s Gallery in Rutter’s *Delineations*: an unfulfilled dream and a lost reality.

*‘The stunning complex effectively ended the Georgian phase of the Gothic Revival.’*³⁴

Michael J. Lewis, 2002

This is part of the invaluable and authoritative *World of Art* series published by Thames and Hudson. Professor Lewis briefly introduces Gothic architecture and Gothic Survival as pan-European phenomena, then carries the reader effortlessly from seventeenth-century antiquarianism and eighteenth-century literary roots to the Neo-Gothic of the 1930s and the Gothick Revival of Quinlan

Terry. As befits its broad view, the cover image is of the Houses of Parliament in Budapest.³⁵ England figures largely as it should, but parallel movements across the Continent are given appropriate discussion in each chapter, and American developments are naturally well covered.

Three illustrations accompany Lewis's succinct consideration of the Abbey: the engraving of the Great Western Hall and an engraved ground plan with details of the vaulting in various parts from Rutter's *Delineations*, and the familiar view of the north-western aspect of the completed building from Britton's *Illustrations*. Lewis reiterates the inaccurate idea of the Abbey as an intended sham ruin that grew to be a house, a product of Beckford's mania for building, but he awards the title of 'the first of the Gothic romantics' to Wyatt, who demonstrated: 'that a building might thrill by its sheer scale, confronting the imagination rather than merely titillating the intellect. In other words, a building might be sublime'.³⁶

The contrast is pointed: 'If Walpole lived at Strawberry Hill in an imaginary world of Gothic dreams, Beckford lived them.'³⁷

Lewis gives the informing ideas due mention, but his theme is the architecture, and he has a limited space to cover a worldwide movement. Fonthill Abbey and its creators detain the reader for five out of 190 pages. In contrast with Brooks, Wyatt is the creator, Beckford his 'ideal client'.³⁸ Other writers here reviewed have variously realised that the Abbey represented the end of the decorative, and if it were not for the pretension of Batty Langley's intentions, the dilettante phase of what is sometimes distinguished as 'Gothick' and the beginning of the more robust application of medieval elements that we associate with the Gothic Revival. 'Gothick' with a 'k' works well on the printed page, but is hopeless in a lecture; Lewis's shorthand for it, 'the Georgian phase', has its merits but begs many questions, as does Davis's view of it as a Rococo variant.

Cottage Gothick did not disappear; it simply continued in parallel with the widening main stream of the Gothic Revival. It was a decorative choice that could be made, but no longer part of the

architectural *avant garde*. For a brief moment, Fonthill Abbey was part of that, and a harbinger of Victorian Gothic. By its very fall, it contributed to the solidity of what was to follow.

Conclusion

What then emerges from this brief survey? For Eastlake, the Abbey was a prodigy, and probably a precursor; for Clark, the surprising product of an architect with an interesting client; for Goodhart-Rendel a portent for the nineteenth century; for Yarwood an unavoidable mention (unlike Strawberry Hill); for Davis the leap from the merely decorative to the ‘associational’; for Aldrich a work that could only come from the conjunction of client and architect; for Mahoney an unavoidable legend; for Brooks a transient achievement that could only have come from Beckford with Wyatt as confederate; from Lewis a transient achievement that could only have come from Wyatt with Beckford as client. The Abbey could only have come from the eighteenth century but it presaged the nineteenth; it was Romantic and eccentric but it pointed to the substantial and the worthy; it leaves only a fragment, but like the missing ‘Seven Wonders’ it excites the imagination. Its images in colour by Wild and Turner invite disbelief; in monochrome sketches, engravings and lithographs it carries more conviction than the restored remnant in the clearing in the woods above Fonthill Gifford.

It has been tempting to mark the various accounts of Beckford and Wyatt’s remarkable building by the pound, but the validity of such elementary cliometrics is very doubtful in view of the writers’ tendency to make weight with Beckfordian anecdote rather than architectural commentary. When the writer is thinking about the cultural aspects of Gothic, Beckford looms large; when they are writing about architecture, it is Wyatt who is examined. What dimly emerges from the literature cited herein is that Beckford’s building mania incited Wyatt to produce something remarkable that he never transcended, and the patron must be accorded full recognition in the result.

- 1 Terence Davis, *The Gothick Taste*, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1974, 100
- 2 Harold Colvin, 'Gothic Survival and Gothick Revival', *Architectural Review*, Vol. CIII, 91-8
- 3 James Stevens Curl, among others, has advocated the term 'Doric Revival' as only the reappearance of Grecian Doric can be detected as specifically Greek in Classically-inspired architecture. He also advocates the renewal of the term 'pointed' in place of 'Gothic'.
- 4 James Stevens Curl, *Dictionary of Architecture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999
- 5 *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex, with An Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c.*, third edition as part of *The Works of Horatio Walpole*, London, 1798, 454
- 6 *Ibid.*, 468
- 7 Charles L Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival: an attempt to show how the taste for mediæval architecture, which lingered in England during the past two centuries, has since been encouraged and developed*, London: Longmans, Green 1872, p. 65.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 62
- 9 *Ibid.*, 61
- 10 Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste*, London: Constable, 1928, second edition 1950; third edition London: John Murray, 1962, 83
- 11 Clark, *op. cit.*, 89
- 12 *Ibid.*, 66
- 13 *Ibid.*, 89
- 14 *Ibid.*, 86
- 15 *Ibid.*, 91
- 16 Clark, Letter to Michael Sadleir (1949), *The Gothic Revival*, second ed., 2
- 17 Clark, Letter, *op. cit.*, 4
- 18 H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, *English Architecture Since the Regency: An Interpretation*, London: Constable, 1953, 25
- 19 Clark, Letter, *op. cit.*, 2
- 20 John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823
- 21 Goodhart-Rendel, *op. cit.*, 35
- 22 *Ibid.*, 37
- 23 Doreen Yarwood, *The Architecture of England*, London: Batsford, 1963, 372-3
- 24 Yarwood attributes the engraving from Britton's *Delineations* to J. Lambert after G. Cattermole. George Cattermole (1800-1868) was a notable artist and illustrator, working chiefly in watercolour.
- 25 Terence Davis, *The Gothick Taste*, Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1974, 122
- 26 Davis, *op. cit.*, 13
- 27 *Ibid.*, 117
- 28 Megan Aldrich, *Gothic Revival*, London: Phaidon Press, 1994, 83
- 29 Kathleen Mahoney, *Gothic Style: Architecture and interiors from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, New York, Harry N. Abrams 1995, p. 90
- 30 Chris Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, London: Phaidon Press, 1999, 157
- 31 Brooks, *op. cit.*, 155
- 32 *Idem.*, 155

- 33 *Idem.*, 156
- 34 Michael J. Lewis *The Gothic Revival*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2002, 41
- 35 Only Brooks cast his net as wide as Victoria Terminus in Mumbai or into the Southern Hemisphere
- 36 Lewis, *op. cit.*, 37
- 37 *Ibid.*, 38
- 38 *Idem*

The Beckford Society Tour, Scotland, 2019

AMY FROST

The recent re-presentation of Brodick Castle by the National Trust for Scotland, and the many Beckford objects housed there, offered the ideal opportunity for a Beckford Society tour to Scotland in May 2019, FIGURE 1. The five-day tour was expertly curated and run by Committee Member and Beckford Journal Editor Bet McLeod; her expert knowledge of the Hamilton family and extensive research into the Beckford objects in Scotland ensured that even the most knowledgeable of members were encountering new information and gaining new insights.

Many members took advantage of the tour to arrive in Edinburgh a day or two early and visit the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The historic position of the Dukes of Hamilton as Keepers of Holyroodhouse locates the family at the centre of Scottish nobility, and a visit to the Palace, and use of its very good audio tours, provided a solid background for the four days that followed as the Hamilton-Beckford connections were explored.

The key connection is of course the marriage between Beckford's daughter Susan and Alexander, the 10th Duke of Hamilton and Brandon, resulting in many Beckford items coming to Scotland following Susan's inheritance of her father's collection after his death in 1844. The 10th Duke was, like his father-in-law, a notable collector and our introduction to him came at the National Museum of Scotland, where Principal Curator of European Decorative Arts Dr Godfrey Evans revealed the items on display from both the Beckford and Hamilton collections. Dr Evans has spent his



Fig. 1. William Beckford eyeing his treasures in the Beckford room at Brodick Castle. ©David Allen.

career reconstructing the lost building and collections of Hamilton Palace, the contents of which were largely sold during two series of auctions, 1882-4 and 1919-20, and the house was demolished in 1921. A selection of Beckford items are displayed in the *Art of Living* Gallery at the museum, including a silver-gilt tea teapot by Paul Storr, 1812-13, and a silver-gilt tea service decorated with Beckford's heraldic devices and including a 1819 sugar bowl and milk jug by Philip Rundell. The extravagance and wealth of the 10th Duke was best illustrated by an object he regarded as one of his most valuable possessions, the Hamilton-Rothschild Tazza. Comprised from a Byzantine bowl that Hamilton believed had been owned by Charlemagne, and a gold stand once part of a monstrance gifted by Philip II to the Escorial monastery in Spain, it is a fantastic piece, and shows the clear similarities between what Beckford and his son-in-law were collecting.



Fig. 2. Lennoxlove, main entrance front. ©David Allen.

The morning at the museum provided the ideal introduction to an afternoon visit to Lennoxlove House, in East Lothian, now the principal seat of the Dukes of Hamilton and Brandon. Originally known as Lethington Castle, it was renamed in 1703 when given by the trustees of the Duchess of Richmond and Lennox for the use of Walter Stuart, later 6th Earl Blantyre. An L-plan Tower House that was enlarged into a mansion in the 17th century, Lennoxlove was extensively refurbished by architect Sir Robert Lorimer in 1912, FIGURE 2. The property was purchased by the 14th Duke of Hamilton in 1946.

Excellent tour guides covered the essential details of the house and its collections, but it was Bet McLeod's intimate knowledge of the collection that ensured as many Beckford items as possible were revealed to the group, many of which would have easily have been missed without such expert knowledge. Of particular importance

was seeing the Andrea Casali portrait of Beckford as a young boy. Tucked away above the lift doors was another key picture for the group, a watercolour by Beckford's Bath architect, Henry Edmund Goodridge of his proposed design for a new Hamilton mausoleum, which Goodridge was commissioned to design by the 10th Duke in 1841. The painting was a prologue for the following days visit to the site of Hamilton Palace and the surviving mausoleum.

The scale of the 10th Duke's architectural ambitions and consideration of his place in history is perfectly summed up by the monumental Hamilton mausoleum began in 1842 by architect David Hamilton and completed in 1858, five years after the Duke's



Fig. 3. Hamilton Mausoleum, entrance to the crypt. ©David Allen.



Fig. 4. Hamilton Mausoleum, side aspect with Society members. ©Amy Frost.



Fig. 5. Interior view of the cupola of the Mausoleum. ©David Allen.



Fig. 6. Interior of Chatelherault, showing the restored ornate plasterwork.
©Amy Frost.

death. The initial concept for the building by Goodridge, seen in the Lennoxlove watercolour, was for a tall elaborate structure with cupola immediately adjacent the large mass of Hamilton Palace. However, plans soon altered to relocate it around 200 metres north in the park, creating a key landmark in views to and from the Palace, FIGURE 3 , FIGURE 4, FIGURE 5. The relocation of the mausoleum is no doubt what ensured its survival, as had the original site next to the palace been chosen the structure would surely have been demolished alongside the Palace when the mining near the house was found to be destabilising the structure. The mausoleum did not escape fully, as subsidence and flooding resulted in the coffin of



Fig. 7. Chatelherault with Society members. ©David Allen.



Fig. 8. Hamilton Tomb at Bent Cemetery, Hamilton. ©Amy Frost.

the 10th Duke, Duchess Susan Euphemia and other ancestors once laid to rest in the building being re-interred in Bent cemetery. The weather was clear and bright for our visit ensuring that the views from the mausoleum site, over the park towards where the palace would have once stood, were particularly impressive.

The other surviving structure at the wider Hamilton Palace site is Chatelherault, the hunting lodge built in 1732 for the then Duke by architect William Adam, FIGURE 6. The name derives from James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Arran having been granted the French title Duc de Châtellerault in 1548 for his involvement in arranging the marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots, to Francis, Dauphin of France.



Fig. 9. David Mason lays a wreath at the Hamilton tomb. ©David Wiltshire

Sitting across the gorge from the ruins of Cadzow Castle, the views from the rear of the lodge are wonderfully picturesque, while from the front the vista stretches across what would have been the Palace site towards the Mausoleum. The lodge and park were given in lieu of death duties in the 1970s, and it was then that Historic Scotland began a programme of restoration to Chatelherault which resulted in beautifully- restored plasterwork ceilings under which the group enjoyed a convivial lunch, FIGURE 7.

Our day ended with a visit to Bent cemetery, where the 10th Duke, and others originally interred in the Mausoleum, were buried. The Hamilton monument sits in its own small section of the cemetery, and of particular significance for our group, also marks the final resting place of William Beckford's daughter and heir, Susan Euphemia Beckford, Duchess of Hamilton, FIGURE 8. One of the group, David Mason, a descendant of Alderman Beckford,

marked this moment with the laying of a wreath on the monument, a poignant and fitting ending to our day following in Susan and her husband's footsteps, FIGURE 9.

The weather was particularly kind to us as we embarked by boat to the Isle of Arran and saw our first glimpse of Brodick Castle across the water. It proved even better the following morning as we reached the castle and were able to appreciate its building and gardens under clear, cloudless blue sky. The main tower house dates from a rebuilding of 1510, but the bulk of the building was undertaken from 1844 by architect James Gillespie Graham. The castle had for some time been the residence of the eldest son of the 10th Duke of Hamilton, William, Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale and grandson of William Beckford. And it was the many items from the Beckford collection now housed at the castle that was our main destination. The recent redisplay by the National Trust for Scotland



Fig. 10. The Beckford Room at Brodick Castle. ©Amy Frost.

of Brodick has resulted in a ground floor exhibition room dedicated to Beckford and his collection at the castle, and it was here that our tour started, FIGURE 10. In the central display is the Barr, Flight and Barr porcelain tea service emblazoned with Beckford's armorial devices. The cinquefoil, Latimer cross and martlet from Beckford's heraldry are used to form striking patterns on the various pieces of the service, and when seen collectively in the display case makes an impressive centre piece to the room.

Two large display cases contain an array of Beckford pieces, from a John Scofield pair of silver gilt candlesticks from Beckford's



Fig. 11. A pair of Scent Flasks, James Aldridge. ©Amy Frost.



Fig. 12. Society members viewing some of the Hamilton archives. ©Amy Frost.



Fig. 13. Ruins of Eglinton Castle. ©David Allen.

1781 coming of age, to hard-stone spoons with wonderful mounts. Several Oriental porcelain bowels, jugs and dishes with silver-gilt mounts by a variety of makers, in particular James Aldridge, are found in the ‘An Eye for the East’ cabinet, which, when added to the pieces located throughout the rest of the Castle interiors, illustrate the quantity of the mounts Beckford and Gregorio Franchi were designing. In particular included here are two of this author’s favourite Beckford pieces, the pair of small but exquisitely made scent flasks by James Aldridge 1820-1, with glass bodies imitating sardonyx, delicate gold mounts and twisted handles, FIGURE 11.

Given an entire wall to itself is the Willes Maddox deathbed portrait of Beckford commissioned by his daughter. It is now displayed at Brodick above the same ebony cabinet that can be seen at the head of Beckford’s bed in the painting.

Leaving the Beckford collection room and roaming the many



Fig. 14. Gothick bridge at Eglinton Park. ©David Allen.

spaces in the castle soon revealed the extent of the Beckford items in the castle, and under Bet's expert eye, yet more porcelain was discovered. Keen eyes noticed girandoles designed around Beckford-Hamilton heraldry now converted to electric lights, a fine nautilus shell tucked away in a cabinet and several volumes with Fonthill bindings in bookcases. Pictures too are scattered around the Castle, with the main salon fireplace flanked by works from Beckford's collection. We left the public rooms and ascended into the office spaces where several items from the archives and stores were brought out just for the group including more volumes with Fonthill bindings and charming early photographs of the more recent inhabitants of the castle, FIGURE 12. That evening the items we had seen and the methods of interpretation used in the castle were hot topics of conversation as over dinner the day's highlights were debated.

We left Brodick on another clear day headed back to Edinburgh and home, but with a wonderful detour to stop at Eglinton Country Park, the former estate of the Montgomerie family and the Earls of Eglinton, now a wonderful park with the romantic ruins of Eglinton Castle at its heart, FIGURE 13. In 1839 Archibald, 13th Earl of Eglinton held an extraordinary medieval revival tournament, when 10,000 spectators flooded into Ardrossan and its surrounding villages to watch jousting, while the Earl and his friends processed in armour. After all the planning and expense the event was soon cut short as the weather was so bad the site flooded, the procession was a muddy chaos and the banqueting hall collapsed. Visiting the site, exploring the ruins and contemplating the symbolism of the Romantic Scotland made popular by Walter Scott, was a wonderful way to connect the romantic gothic pageantry of Beckford and Fonthill with the advent of the Victorians, and the ideal way to conclude our brilliantly informative and thoroughly enjoyable tour of Scotland, FIGURE 14, FIGURE 15.



Fig. 15. Society members at Eglinton Park. ©Amy Frost.



Mirella Billi 1937 -2019 © Francesca Saggini

Mirella Billi

(Florence, 22 October 1937 – Prato, 20 April 2019)

An appreciation

FRANCESCA SAGGINI

The Beckford Society has lost one of its greatest friends, Mirella Billi, the eminent scholar of English literature, who died suddenly in April. Until her retirement, she was Professor of English Literature at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia (Viterbo, Italy), where she taught for nearly twenty-five years after serving as Assistant Professor in Florence and later as Associate Professor in Udine. During her time in Viterbo she served several times as Head of Department, Head of the Modern Language Centre, member of the Senate, and in several other capacities.

Mirella Billi published extensively in many areas of English literature and language, from the Early Modern period to the contemporary, but her interests were too wide and varied to be enclosed by disciplinary boundaries, genres or, indeed, historical periods. In the words of E. M. Forster, one of the authors she taught so many times, ‘only connect’ might sum up Mirella’s critical agenda and methodological vision. Clear-sighted and rigorous, Mirella wrangled closely with the text, she married context and text, always wary of biographical pitfalls, always mindful of textual structure. As she liked to point out with a sly look, her first marriage was to structuralism and she was, indeed, very proud to own it. Mirella was a sharp cultural historian, a fine scholar of film and the arts, a talented translator, a versatile host and, not last, a lively member of several literary societies, including The Beckford Society, whose

annual dinner she looked forward to and attended with invariable gusto as a learned *rara avis* – one of the rare events combining conviviality and erudite talk among dear friends.

Her remarkably productive career as a literary critic and essayist began in Florence under the mentorship of one of Italy's leading critics, Marcello Pagnini, with a book dedicated to a great master of the eighteenth century, *Strutture narrative nel romanzo di Henry Fielding* (1974). She then demonstrated her versatility by publishing a study on Virginia Woolf in 1981, before gaining widespread recognition with *Il Gotico inglese: il romanzo del terrore, 1764-1820* (1986), a meticulous work of scholarship that remains to this day an invaluable reference for students of the genre. *Il testo riflesso. La parodia nel romanzo inglese* (2000), her last monograph, is an extraordinary tour de force, in which her analysis of a wide range of authors, from Jane Austen to Angela Carter, is introduced by a theoretical/methodological section on the study of the novel. Mirella's sensitivity as a translator was equally remarkable; she would spend many hours absorbing, *feeling*, the flow of each author's style, whether non-fiction prose, fiction or drama. She translated, among others, William Beckford (*Memorie autobiografiche di pittori straordinari*, 1995), Virginia Woolf (*La stanza di Jacob*, 1994 and *Voltando pagina. Saggi 1904-1941*, 2011), Mary Shelley (*Matilda*, 2005) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*La scuola della maldicenza*, also of 2005). Her essay writing embraced all the major English and American authors, with closely argued, rich essays that often resembled miniature books. These are so many that no list could do them justice: dreams in Romanticism, love-sickness in English literature, the culture of sensibility, the Grand Tour, the *femme fatale* in painting and in film, the spaces of the Gothic – from medieval castles to the spaceships of *Alien*, *nihil humano a me alienum puto!* – postmodern rewritings, the literature of the Indian diaspora, the most eminent Victorians and the most popular ones – from Dickens and the Brontës to sensation fiction – *noir* cinema and literature, Elizabethan theatre, poetry ranging from nineteenth-century reli-

gious authors to contemporary women authors (especially notable is her monograph on Sylvia Plath, *Il vortice fisso*, of 1983), the major Modernists, and the language of women's periodicals in the eighteenth century – a favourite literary period throughout her career, as evidenced by numerous excellent contributions, among them her chapter on the eighteenth century in *Storia della Letteratura Inglese*, edited by Paolo Bertinetti (2000).

An irreplaceable reference point for scholars of the Gothic, in all its forms and artistic declensions, Mirella contributed decisively to the diffusion of gender studies in Italy. But her unique ability to *read* texts also prompted her to push beyond the boundaries of the standard Italian university curriculum; with a brave spirit of innovation and great openness, she brought contemporary plays, poetry, novels both to the classrooms of the small universities where she taught for so many years and to the conference halls where she delivered her keynote addresses. Angela Carter, Wendy Cope, Salman Rushdie, Harold Pinter, Antonia Byatt were on the reading lists of unforgettable modules where Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Alfred Tennyson were studied side by side with *The Winter's Tale* and *Clarissa*. Opening up the canon, rereading the history of literature so as to let its many voices speak, both the louder and the more muffled ones, is unquestionably one of Mirella's more lasting achievements. It is no accident that she edited the volume tellingly titled *Studi sul canone* (2007), one of her final works, after publishing collections on literature and the arts in the 1960s (*In and Around the Sixties*, 2005); on the relationship between literature and aesthetics in the eighteenth century (*Eighteenth-Century Literature and the Languages of Aesthetics*, 2003); on India (*Voci dall'India e sull'India*, 2001) and, earlier, on Joyce (*Intorno a Joyce. Cinquant'anni dopo*, 1995).

I wish to conclude this celebration of Mirella's life and works by describing an episode that has remained vividly impressed in my memory, and may well resonate with many who knew her. During a winter afternoon many years ago, we travelled in a decrepit old

train that slowly made its way through the snowy mountains of central Italy, sitting in a first-class carriage – always her preferred choice. She wore a cobalt blue Mandarin collar blazer and skirt suit, with a beautiful gold brooch in the shape of a butterfly. Her blue fur collar matched her fur hat exactly. Her makeup was impeccable, her wonderful blonde hair freshly coiffed. From her ample handbag, which of course complemented her outfit and designer shoes perfectly, she took out two or three voluminous fashion magazines, lovingly dog-eared and bursting with colorful sticky notes (each trip to the stationer's was a real treat for Mirella, who loved elegant cards, funny pencils, striking little notebooks). During that unforgettable journey, she spoke of Manolo Blahnik, *Sex and the City*, love in cinema, post-structuralism, Julia Kristeva and Algirdas Greimas. And all, incredibly, appeared *connected* as she spoke, her words revealing deep structures, signs and discourses that blossomed, like magnificent flowers, in that bitterly cold train carriage. I understood then that no one would ever be able to convey things like Mirella, explaining them with the ease and lightness of touch that only a great master, 'l maestro di color che sanno', 'the Teacher of those that know', possesses. Even the most banal conversation always produced an illuminating aside, a creative spark, a flash of insight that made you reflect, that made you understand, and that would never leave you, like a genetic legacy bestowed with spontaneous, natural generosity. 'We are always studying', she said, 'even when we are watching *E.R.*' And this love of study – a humble, serious, constant, love – is what Mirella gifted to so many generations of students, young researchers and seasoned scholars who learned their craft from her writings and her voice in the classrooms where she taught.

Our memory of Mirella immediately evokes laughter and joy; her teaching, rigour and discipline; her insatiable curiosity, an iconoclastic spirit and great exuberance. Not elegy, but words of the heart; not elegy, but life's living force. Mirella's loss as a mentor, colleague, and academic, is only equalled by her loss as a friend.

Notes on Contributors

CHARLIE COURTENAY, the Earl of Devon, lives with his wife, AJ (nee Langer), and their two children at Powderham Castle, near Exeter, Devon. Powderham has been the Courtenay family home since 1390, and Charlie and AJ run the Castle as a heritage business, sustainably managing the ancient land and buildings for social benefit, and hosting all manner of visitors throughout the year. See www.powderham.co.uk.

Charlie is an English Barrister and a California attorney; between 2003 and 2014 he lived in AJ's home town of Los Angeles, California, where she plied her trade as a television actress and he became an Intellectual Property and Technology litigator for Latham & Watkins. Since returning with his family to England in 2014, Charlie succeeded his father to the ancient Earldom of Devon, moved his practice to the city law firm of Michelmores LLP, and recently took a seat in the House of Lords as a cross-bench hereditary peer.

Charlie is a passionate advocate and a champion of his home county of Devon; and enjoys researching and sharing stories of Powderham and its remarkable cast of characters through the ages. Of principal recent interest has been William, 3rd Viscount Courtenay, who was discredited in Charlie's youth as a flamboyant spendthrift, who fled England in disgrace pursued by creditors in 1810 – never to return. Recent research has revealed a much more complex man, of considerable ability and achievement, who deserves fame for much more than his scandalous liaison with William Beckford that allegedly precipitated the downfall of both men. In his essay, Charlie challenges the popular account of the Beckford-Courtenay relationship, and offer insights from recent research into the influences that shaped the remarkable destinies of both men.

PETER FORSAITH is a historian of society, religion and culture in 18th and early 19th century Britain. He is Research Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University, from where he gained his Ph.D. (2003). He is author of *Image, identity and John Wesley; a study in portraiture* (Routledge, 2018) and *'Unexampled labours': Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to leaders in the Evangelical Revival* (Epworth, 2008). He has also co-edited several volumes including *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* [Ashgate, 2013], has written numerous articles and book chapters, as well as lecturing in Britain, Europe and the U.S.A. and has co-curated art exhibitions. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His career has been varied, initially in catering. His interests including swimming, motorcycling, trains, antique furniture and silver tableware.

AMY FROST is the Senior Curator of Bath Preservation Trust, which operates No.1 Royal Crescent, Beckford's Tower & Museum, the Museum of Bath Architecture and the Herschel Museum of Astronomy. She specialises in British architecture of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and is an expert on the life and aesthetics of the British collector and writer William Beckford (1760-1844). Dr. Frost is a part-time Teaching Fellow at the University of Bath, School of Architecture.

MALCOLM JACK is President of the Beckford Society. His books include *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo* (1996). He has edited *The Episodes of Vathek* (1994); his anthology, *William Beckford, Vathek and Other Stories* was published in Penguin Classics (1995). He has written histories of Sintra and Lisbon. He was appointed visiting Professor of Enlightenment Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2015. His book on travellers to the Cape of Good Hope, *To the Fairest Cape: European Encounters in the Cape of Good Hope* has recently been

published by Bucknell University Press. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. He was appointed KCB in 2011.

ERIC RATCLIFF practices as a consultant psychiatrist in Launceston, Tasmania. In his spare time he is an architectural historian, with a particular interest in the extended nineteenth century. He has lectured on architectural history in the University of Tasmania, has published on a variety of architectural topics, and also contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture* (2012). His most recent publication is *A Little Compendium of Archiquotes* (2013). His major work, *A Far Microcosm: Building and Architecture in Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania 1803-1914*, was published in 2015 (Fullers Bookshop & Foot and Playstead, Hobart, 4 vols).

FRANCESCA SAGGINI is Professor in English Literature at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia (Viterbo), Italy. She is the author of *The Gothic Novel and the Stage. Romantic Appropriations* (2015, Honourable mention at the ESSE Book Awards), *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* (2012, Walken Cowen Memorial Prize for an outstanding work in eighteenth-century studies) and *La messinscena dell'identità. Teatro e teatralità nel romanzo inglese del Settecento* (2004, 'Mario di Nola' Prize awarded by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei). Francesca's main field of research is popular culture, in particular adaptations and afterlives. Her most recent publications is *Transmedia Creatures. Frankenstein's Afterlives* (co-ed. Anna Enrichetta Soccio, 2018). She has written extensively on Frances Burney, Jane Austen, the Romantic canon, the Gothic and its transformations across genres and periods. Francesca is the recipient of several international fellowships, including the ASECS-McGill Burney Fellowship (2015); the Lucy Cavendish College Visiting Research Fellowship (2017); the IASH Visiting Research Fellowship (2019).

