



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO. 64 APRIL 2026

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SATURDAY 4 JULY 2026



AT THE HOLBURNE MUSEUM, BATH
AGENDA AND BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

BECKFORD LECTURE 2025

Forty-two members and guests attended the annual Beckford Lecture at the Travellers Club on 7 November, when our Chairman Stephen Clarke lectured on 'Beckfordian asides and well-conditioned Books: New discoveries from William Beckford's Library'.

The lecture described the marvellous group of over fifty books from Beckford's library that were discovered when the Honresfield Library was offered for sale in 2021. The collection had been formed by William Laws a Rochdale mill owner in the 1880s and 1890s.

Saved by the Friends of the Nations' Libraries, the Beckford volumes were presented to Beckford's Tower with a group of Horace Walpole-related books with a Beckford provenance going to Strawberry Hill.

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

Afterwards, members enjoyed lunch in the splendid setting of the Club's Library. We are very grateful to five members whose donations supported the event.

Cover illustration. Nautilus cup with Chinese processional scene, c. 1580-90. Schroder Collection, Holburne Museum..

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 4 JULY 2026

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held at the Holburne Museum in Bath on Saturday 4 July.

This will give members an opportunity to see the new gallery of Renaissance treasures, which opened last autumn, displaying the Schroder family's collection which is on long-term loan to the Holburne.

An agenda for the AGM and booking form are enclosed.

BECKFORD LECTURE 2026

This year's Beckford Lecture will be held on Friday 27 November when Dr Timothy Schroder will lecture on 'William Beckford, patron and collector of goldsmiths' work'.

Dr Schroder is an historian of silver and goldsmiths' work, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and former President of the Silver Society. Former roles include Curator of Decorative Arts at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Curator of the Gilbert Collection at Somerset House and Consultant Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He has twice served as Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company. Publications include *British and Continental Gold and*

Silver in the Ashmolean Museum (2009) and '*A Marvel to Behold*', *Gold and Silver in the Court of Henry VIII* (2020).

The lecture at the Travellers Club, London SW1 will be followed by lunch.

FONTHILL OPEN DAYS 2026

Old Fonthill Abbey

The grounds of Old Fonthill Abbey will be open to the public on Sundays 3 and 17 May from 10.30 – 4.30, giving visitors the opportunity to enjoy bluebell woods, rhododendrons, lakeside walks and views of the Abbey. There will be a barbecue and homemade refreshments.



The openings are in aid of Cure Parkinson's and local charities. Entry donation, suggest £10 per adult. Polite dogs welcome. Unfortunately, in the event of high winds the grounds must close.

Old Fonthill Abbey, Fonthill Gifford SP7 6SP, on the Hindon-Newtown lane.

Fonthill House

The gardens of Fonthill House will be open on Sunday 26 April, in aid of the National Gardens Scheme, and on Saturday 4 July hosting a Rare Plant Fair.

The house has 12 acres of varied gardens designed by Tannia Compton. There is a formal garden, walled sunken garden and an impressive Himalayan-hillside woodland garden.

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

JOURNALS & NEWSLETTERS

A member, who lives near Bath, is looking for a new home for a collection of *Beckford Journals* (vol. 15 onward) and Newsletters (no. 20 onward). Collection/delivery and any postage to be agreed.

Please contact Robin Davies
robinjdavies2@gmail.com

DR MICHAEL FORSYTH (1951 - 2026)



The death occurred on 14 January of Michael Forsyth, architect, academic, musician and collector who in recent years lived in Beckford's Library at 19 Lansdown Crescent, Bath.

A gifted violinist, he played in his youth with the Merseyside Youth Orchestra and in the same week that he sat for his final architectural exams achieved a performer's diploma in violin from Trinity College. He graduated from the University of Liverpool with a BA in 1973 and BArch in 1975.

He worked in the US Virgin Islands, Gothenburg and Toronto. He was awarded the Rome Prize in Architecture and spent a year at the British School in Rome,

His interest in music recognised the absence of a comprehensive architectural history of concert halls as a building type. His doctoral

research was expanded into the seminal and award-winning work, *Buildings for Music: The Architect, the Musician, and the Listener from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge University Press and MIT, 1985).

He joined Bristol University as a lecturer in architecture in 1979 and later became Director of Studies for the Conservation of Historic Buildings Course at the University of Bath. Alongside this work he maintained an architectural practice.

As well as his published reference works on the conservation of listed buildings, he restored several historic buildings in Bath. He wrote the *Pevsner Architectural Guide to Bath* (Yale, 2003) the first comprehensive architectural guide to the city. He was also an enthusiastic collector of 18th century flintlock pistols and Georgian-era portraiture.

Members will remember the highlight of our AGM in Bath in 2019, when Michael and Marion Harney most generously welcomed us to Beckford's library, with its mahogany bookcases and yellow scagliola pilasters and told us about the history of the room. We've also enjoyed his friendship and presence over the years at Society events. We offer the Society's condolences to Marion Harney.

IN THE AUCTION ROOM

Passports for Dr Schöll and Nicholas Williams

A signed autograph letter by the Duke of Portland, in the third person, Whitehall 2 June 1797 to Henry Dundas, who served as Home Secretary, confirms that passports were issued at the request of Mr Beckford to Dr Scols [sic] on 17 February and to Nicholas Williams on 29 March, ‘the latter is the person whom the D of Portland mentioned to Mr. Dundas yesterday’.

Dr Frederick Schöll was a Swiss physician and long-standing friend of Beckford. Nicholas Williams, Beckford’s servant and agent, was in Paris in 1797 attempting to secure Beckford’s property.

The letter was included (lot 1530) in International Autograph Auctions Europe’s, Malaga, 26 March sale.

Signatures of Members of Parliament

Beckford’s was included in an extensive collection of signatures of almost all the Members of Parliament and House of Lords, 1811. Other signatures included Lord Byron, William Wilberforce and Spencer Perceval, whose assassination is recorded ‘Shot May 11, 1812’.

The register was used by the Inspector of Franks to check for authentic autographs of members whose franking privileges entitled them to free postage on free franked and signed covers.

This was sold by Forum Auctions on 22 January (lot 36).

A River View with a Bastion

Dreweatts the Newbury auctioneers recently sold a painting by the Dutch Golden Age artist Salomon van Ruysdael.

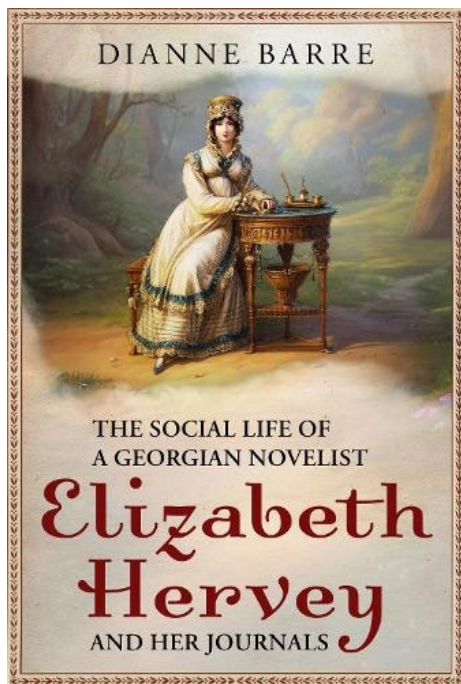


The work ‘A River View with Bastion’ signed and dated 1645 had been sold in the Beckford Sale at Christie’s, London on 27 February 1802, lot 35.

At Dreweatts auction on 3 March the picture (lot 213) sold for £29,000.

GEORGIAN NOVELIST

Stored away and forgotten for 200 years, the private journals of William Beckford's half-sister Elizabeth Hervey (1749 -1820) vividly describe her life and times. These are revealed in Dianne Barre's latest book.



Elizabeth's teenage years were spent in the luxury of Fonthill Splendens. She married an army officer who turned out to be a gambler, and with him fled abroad to escape his creditors.

Widowed and with two small children, she returned to England, where she settled in London. She associated with Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill set and the Bluestockings. Every day she wrote her journal, describing theatre visits,

family dramas, society gossip, politics and visits.

Her first novel was published in 1788, launching a career that put a strain on her relationship with Beckford. Theirs was a complex relationship, marred by literary rivalry and after a quarrel in 1798 they never met again.

Dr Dianne Barre co-authored *Staffordshire* (Historic Gardens Series) (2009) and published *Historic Parks and Gardens of Derbyshire* (2017). Her article on Elizabeth Hervey's journals appeared in *The Beckford Journal* (vol. 23, 2017).

To be published May 2026
by Pen & Sword Books Ltd.
240 pp. 16 and 27 colour illustrations.
ISBN: 9781036156350. Price £25.

The book will be reviewed in next year's *Beckford Journal*.

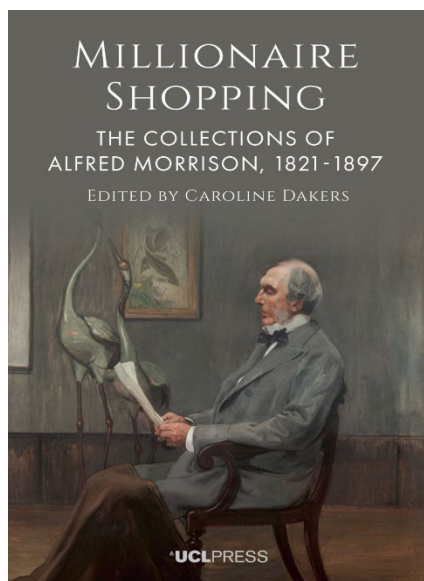
TALK AT BECKFORD'S TOWER
Thursday 2 July 18.00 – 20.00.

Dianne Barre will talk about Elizabeth Hervey and her relationship with William Beckford, including a description of Fonthill Abbey under construction, and their final quarrel.

Tickets £10 can be bought from <https://beckfordstower.org.uk/whats-on/> On sale from May.

MILLIONAIRE SHOPPING

Caroline Dakers' studies of the Fonthill Estate and its owners continue with *Millionaire Shopping. The Collections of Alfred Morrison, 1821-1897*, published in September last year.



This is the first detailed account of Alfred Morrison, one of the most influential and avid collectors and patrons of art in Victorian England.

An obsessive and comprehensive collector, he used his extraordinary wealth to accumulate collections including old master paintings, autograph manuscripts, coins and medals; his commissions were equally eclectic.

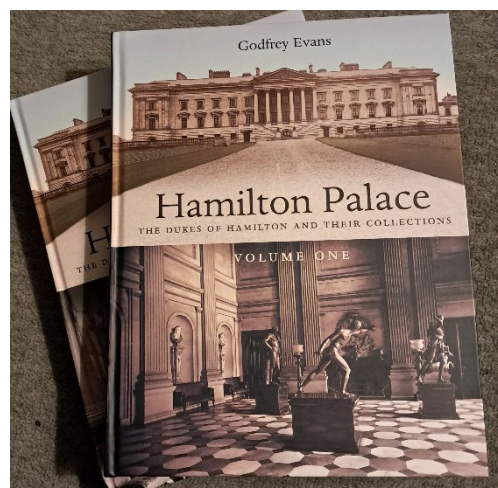
UCL Press. 588 pages. £60.
ISBN 978180089006. Also available
as a free Open Access PDF.
[https://uclpress.co.uk/book/
millionaire-shopping/](https://uclpress.co.uk/book/millionaire-shopping/)

HAMILTON PALACE

Godfrey Evans's study *Hamilton Palace: The Dukes of Hamilton and their Collections* was published last September.

The book examines the enormous palace of the premier peers of Scotland, and the hundreds of works of art acquired by twelve Dukes over 300 years.

Yet by 1920, tens of thousands of items had been auctioned off, and the awe-inspiring building was about to be demolished.



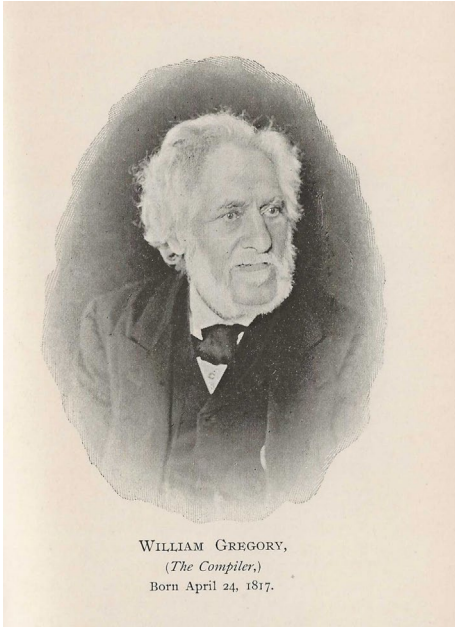
A major section of the book concentrates on Beckford's son-in-law Alexander, 10th Duke, including his display of works from Beckford's collection.

2 vols. 832 pp. NMS Enterprises
£120. ISBN 9781910682494

The book will be reviewed in this year's *Beckford Journal*.

WILLIAM GREGORY'S *THE BECKFORD FAMILY*

JON MILLINGTON



An article in vol. 9 of *The Beckford Journal* for Spring 2003 (pp. 45–51) discussed the two editions of *The Beckford Family. Reminiscences of Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower. Compiled from Various Sources by W. Gregory*. The first edition of 1887 was limited to 100 numbered and signed copies, while there were 250 numbered copies in the second. It had five new chapters and twenty whole-page illustrations. Both were bound in red cloth over bevelled boards with all edges gilt.

A few copies of the first edition, including those in Bath and Salisbury Libraries, contained three additional engravings: Fonthill Abbey from the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1822), Lansdown Crescent and Beckford's Tower, both from Peach's *Views* (c.1886). Copy No. 1 had a further engraving, the Western Entrance to Fonthill Abbey from Neale's *Fonthill* (1824). In this copy William Gregory wrote a dedication to his second wife on the verso of the portrait frontispiece: 'To my dear wife with much love August 1887'. She was Susanna Jane Gregory née Barnard (1815–1893) whom he married in 1880. She is buried in Smallcombe Vale Cemetery, Bath, near the Non-Conformist octagonal chapel by Alfred Goodridge. His first wife was Margaret Gregory née Jones (1816–1874) with whom he had five children.

Copy No. 4 of the second edition has this inscription on the verso of the front free endpaper: 'William George. Received from my old friend the Author on Feb.18, 1898. He died on the 24th of the following month, aged 80. I spent a day with him two months before his death. His portrait, facing page 144, is as good a one as could be desired.' Pasted at the front and back are seven press cuttings relating to William Gregory from the *Bath Chronicle* and other sources, together with a funeral card 'In Loving Memory of William Gregory...' The two families were linked in January 1896 when William George's eldest son, Charles William George (1853–1935) married secondly William Gregory's younger daughter Anna Maria (1856–1935). It is possible that this William George was the well-known Bristol bookseller who set up in business in 1847 at the age of 17 and owned a large shop at the top of Park Street for many years.

Beckford: A Personal Selection of Some Key Works

JON MILLINGTON

The list presented here is a subjective one, as implied by the title, and is also concise, so there are bound to be omissions of what others would regard as important works. With a leaning towards earlier publications, it is a mixture of books and articles in journals.

In what follows, the chapter headings and page numbers are taken from the bibliography of William Beckford, published by the Beckford Society in 2008, and the works appear in the same order as they do there.

1. Accounts of Beckford's Life

Cyrus Redding. <i>Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill</i> . 2 vols. 1859.	23
Lewis Melville. <i>The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill</i> . 1910.	23
Guy Chapman. <i>Beckford</i> . 1937.	24
Harold Brockman. <i>The Caliph of Fonthill</i> . 1956.	25
James Lees-Milne. <i>William Beckford</i> . 1976.	25
Brian Fothergill. <i>Beckford of Fonthill</i> . 1979.	26
Boyd Alexander. <i>England's Wealthiest Son</i> . 1962.	27
William Gregory, ed. <i>The Beckford Family</i> . 2nd ed. 1898.	28
Henry Venn Lansdown. <i>Recollections of the Late William Beckford ...</i> 1893.	29
Marcel May. <i>La Jeunesse de William Beckford et la Genèse de son «Vathek»</i> . 1928.	29
André Parreaux. <i>William Beckford, Auteur de Vathek</i> . Paris: Nizet, 1960.	29
Sacheverell Sitwell. <i>Beckford and Beckfordism</i> . 1930.	30
<i>Conversations with... Beckford</i> . Memoirs from the <i>New Monthly Magazine</i> , 1844.	31
'William Beckford, Esq.' Obituary in the <i>Gentleman's Magazine</i> . Aug 1844.	34
John Britton. <i>Auto-biography</i> . Part 1 (Beckford) & 2 (Fonthill). 1850 [?1857].	34
[William Haig Miller.] 'The Man of Wealth.' In <i>The Mirage of Life</i> . [1867]. Tenniel.	36
Rev. Erskine Neale. 'The Man of Taste...' In <i>The Closing Scene</i> . 1849.	37
Charles Whibley. 'The Caliph of Fonthill.' In <i>The New Review</i> , Jan 1897.	42

2. Aspects of Beckford

Sidney Blackmore, ed. <i>The Beckford Newsletter</i> . 1996 to date.	44
Jon Millington, ed. <i>BTT Newsletter</i> , 1980–1994 & <i>Beckford Journal</i> , 1995–2005.	44
Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, ed. <i>WB... Bicentenary Essays</i> . <i>Cairo Studies</i> , 1960.	44

4. Contemporaries

- Joseph Farington. *The Diary of Joseph Farington*. 16 vols. 1978–1984. 85
Boyd Alexander. *The Story of the Chevalier Franchi, Beckford's Friend*. 1977. 85

5. Fonthill

- Douglas Crowley, ed. *A History of Wiltshire*. Vol. 13. *Dunworth Hundred*, 1987. 98
Richard Colt Hoare. *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth*. 1829. 99
John Britton. *The Beauties of Wiltshire*. 2 vols. 1801. Fonthill Splendens in vol. 1. 101
[Henry Tresham.] Nelson's visit. In *Gentleman's Magazine*. March, April 1801. 105
James Storer. *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*. 1812. 107
John Rutter. *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*. 1823. 110
[Sir George Beltz.] Heraldry at Fonthill Abbey. *Gentleman's Mag*, Sept–Nov 1822. 115
Robert J. Gemmett. *Beckford's Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon*. 2003. 134
Stephen Clarke. 'The Ruin Of Fonthill.' In *WB & the New Millennium*. [2005]. 135
Harold Brockman. 'Fonthill Abbey.' In *Architectural Review*. June 1944. 148
John Wilton-Ely. 'Genesis & Evolution of Fonthill Abbey.' In *Arch. History*, 1980. 149
'Fonthill Abbey... Seat of Sir Michael Shaw-Stewart.' In *Country Life*, 28 Dec 1901. 157

6. Beckford's Tower and Bath

- Edmund English & Willes Maddox. *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*. 1844. 161
Jon Millington. *Beckford's Tower, Bath*. Bath Preservation Trust. 7th ed. 2002. 161
[Alfred Goodridge.] 'Beckford's Tower.' In *Bath & County Graphic*, June 1901. 164
Philippa Bishop. 'Beckford in Bath.' In *Bath History 2*, 1988. 192
Hugh Crallan. 'Beckford in Bath.' In *Architectural Review*. March 1968. 192

7. Landscape Gardening

- Christopher Thacker. *Building Towers, Forming Gardens...* 2002. Chapters 3–6. 201
John Claudius Loudon. 'Notes on Gardens...' In *Gardener's Magazine*, Sept 1835. 202

8. The Collection

- Clive Wainwright. 'Fonthill Abbey.' In *The Romantic Interior*. 1989. 206
Anthony Hobson. 'William Beckford's Library.' In *Connoisseur*, April 1976. 210
Christie's. *Magnificent Effects at Fonthill Abbey, Wilts*. 1822. 232
Phillips. *Valuable Library of Books... Unique and Splendid Effects... Pictures*. 1823. 232
Christie's. *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures, Works of Art...* 1882. 233
Sotheby's. *Catalogue... of The Beckford Library*. Four parts. 1882–1883. 233

9. Exhibitions

<i>William Beckford...</i> Peter Summers & Philippa Bishop. Holburne Mus., Bath, 1966.	236
<i>William Beckford Exhibition</i> [Julian Berry, ed.] Salisbury & Bath, 1976.	237
<i>William Beckford & Portugal</i> , Palace of Queluz, near Lisbon, 1987	239
<i>Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey</i> . Jon Millington. Bath Preservation Trust. 1994.	242
<i>Wm. Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent</i> . Derek Ostergard, ed. 2001.	243

10. Beckford's Works: First Editions

<i>Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters</i> . 1780.	251
<i>Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents</i> . 1783.	251
<i>Life at Fonthill 1807–1822</i> . Ed. Boyd Alexander. 1957.	253
<i>The Consummate Collector. WB's Letters...</i> Ed. Robert J. Gemmett. 2000.	254
Alfred Morrison, coll. <i>The Collection of Autograph Letters</i> , vol. 1 (A–B). 1893.	254
<i>WB. Esq...</i> In <i>Repertorium Bibliographicum; or...Account of...Libraries</i> . 1819.	256

11. *Vathek* and *The Episodes*: Editions

Richard Garnett, introduction to <i>Vathek</i> . 1893	260
<i>Vathek</i> . Ed. Roger Lonsdale. 1970.	263
<i>The Episodes of Vathek</i> . Ed. Malcolm Jack. 1994.	264

13. Travel

<i>The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill</i> . Ed. Guy Chapman. 2 vol. 1928.	314
Malcolm Jack. <i>William Beckford. An English Fidalgo</i> . 1996 [1997].	321
Rose Macaulay. 'Aesthete. William Beckford.' In <i>They Went to Portugal</i> . 1946.	324

14. Beckford's Other Works

<i>Modern Novel Writing</i> (1796) and <i>Azemia</i> (1797). 4 vol. in 1. Facsimile. 1970.	332
Timothy Rogers. <i>Catalogue of the papers of William Beckford</i> . 1987.	340
Sotheby's. <i>Valuable Autograph Letters</i> . 6 July 1977. The Beckford Papers.	340

17. Bibliographies

Chapman & Hodgkin. <i>A Bibliography of William Beckford of Fonthill</i> . 1930.	367
--	-----

A FONTHILL MUG BY
GRAINGER, LEE & CO, WORCESTER



The Salisbury auctioneers Woolley and Wallace offered in their sale of British and Continental Ceramics and Glass on 22 January, a mug with a painted view of Fonthill Abbey, flanked by gilt scrolled foliage, inscribed 'Fonthill Abbey, Wilts' and 'Grainger Lee Co, Worcester' in iron red to the base. 8.3cm high. Lot 1189; it was sold for £483.

THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER
IS EDITED BY
SIDNEY BLACKMORE
THE TIMBER COTTAGE
CROCKERTON
WARMINSTER BA12 8AX
sidney.blackmore@btinternet.com
www.beckfordsociety.org