

BILL BRYSON'S *AT HOME*

'In terms of politics of past and place, where does Bryson sit?... *At Home* often calls attention to the toil and trouble of common folk as unearthed in the works of socialist or feminist historians. Yet it also feels perfectly comfortable in the fogeyish purlieus of country-house history, that terrain of madcap improving toffs – such as William Beckford with whose grand folly at Fonthill Abbey Bryson has such fun – and punctilious homes-and-gardens connoisseurship'.

Bill Tonkin, reviewing Bill Bryson's *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (Doubleday, 2010) in *The Independent*, 28 May 2010.

HEROES AND EXILES

Tom Ambrose's *Heroes and Exiles: Gay Icons Through the Ages* (New Holland Publishers, 2010) includes a chapter entitled 'The Scandal of William Beckford' (pp. 49-60). Ambrose shares the opinion that Beckford was as much a martyr as Wilde and almost certainly a more interesting and civilized man. The book received a very mixed review from Simon Callow (*Guardian* 30 April) under the heading 'Strange Bedfellows'. Sadly, Callow used the review to attack 'the loathsome Beckford' who had 'suffered no imprisonment and never wanted for money, unlike Wilde, and that his books are unreadable'.

THE BOOK COLLECTOR

This summer's issue of *The Book Collector* (founded in 1952 by Ian Fleming) has an article by Stephen Clarke on 'The Beckford Society'. It is the sixth in the journal's series on Author Societies. There is also a review by Paul Grinke of Jon Millington's *William Beckford: A Bibliography*. And in 'Bibliographical Notes & Queries', Stephen Clarke contributes a note on the Beckford/Rosebery copy of Walpole's 1798 Works containing extensive notes by Beckford. One note on a letter from Walpole to Hannah More, is simply: 'MORE nonsense'.

The Book Collector, Summer 2010. Vol. 59. No 2.

THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

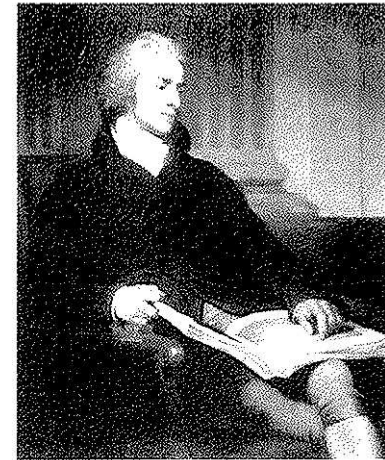
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Items of Beckfordian interest are always welcome.

THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BECKFORD SOCIETY

ISSUE NO 33 - SEPTEMBER 2010

THE BECKFORD LECTURE
THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2010



Modern Novel Writing and Azemia: Beckford and the Rise of the Novel

LECTURE BY
PROFESSOR PETER SABOR

6.30 PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB
106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1

DRINKS WILL BE SERVED FROM 6.00 PM

AGM 201

Thirty-seven members and guests attended the fifteenth Annual General Meeting held in Bath on Saturday 12 June.

The Chairman, Dr Malcolm Jack, in his report commented on activities during the past year including Perry Gauci's lecture on Alderman Beckford and Jeremy Black's Guildhall lecture on 'London in the Age of Alderman Beckford'.

Sales of Jon Millington's Beckford bibliography continued at a steady pace, and had received an enthusiastic review from Robert Gemmett in the pages of the *Burlington Magazine*. Professor Gemmett's edition of *Azemias* had recently been published.

The Chairman paid tribute to Amy Frost, the curator of the tower, for her enthusiasm and devotion over the last few years and offered congratulations on her PhD. He encouraged members to visit the Tower's special exhibition William Beckford: The Sultan of Lansdown.

The Treasurer, Jane Wainwright, reported on Society's finances. Income for the year amounted to £5,858, with expenditure at £4,940; leaving a surplus of £918.

Stephen Clarke and Mike Fraser were elected to the committee.

Bet McLeod, Editor of the Beckford Journal reported on progress in producing this year's special edition.

Special thanks were recorded to those members who had subscribed to the anniversary issue.

After lunch, Min Wood gave a fascinating lecture on 'Landscape as biography: William Beckford and the grounds of Fonthill Abbey'.

GARDEN PARTY



Our Chairman, Dr Malcolm Jack, cuts the birthday cake

A garden party to celebrate William Beckford's 250th birthday was held on Sunday 13 June in Lansdown Place East close to Beckford's Lansdown Crescent houses. We are very grateful to Dr Marianna Clark for her hospitality in so kindly allowing us to use her secret garden, which made the perfect setting for the party.

The highlight of the afternoon was the series of guided tours to visit Beckford's Grecian library at 19 Lansdown Crescent. Members were very appreciative of the opportunity to see

this splendid interior, and were very grateful to the owners who received us with such kindness and explained the history of the room. A leaflet about the library made a fine souvenir of a memorable occasion.

BECKFORD LECTURE 2010 THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER

This year's Beckford Lecture will be given by Professor Peter Sabor who will lecture on *Modern Novel Writing* and *Azemias*: Beckford and the Rise of the Novel.

Professor Sabor holds the Canada Research Chair in Eighteenth-Century Literature and is Director of the Burney Center at McGill University. He has edited works by Samuel Richardson, Sara Fielding, Horace Walpole and Jane Austen. He is author of *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* and general editor of the six-volume edition of her Court Journals, and co-general editor of a twenty-five volume edition of Samuel Richardson's Works and Correspondence.

The lecture will be held at the Travellers Club, 108 Pall Mall, London SW1 on Thursday 4 November at 6.30pm. The Society's ninth Beckford Dinner will take place after the lecture.

A booking form is enclosed.



BECKFORD'S LANSDOWN CRESCENT HOUSES AND GRECIAN LIBRARY

SUNDAY 7 NOVEMBER



Lansdown Crescent, 1828

Those who missed the chance to visit Beckford's Grecian Library in June will have another opportunity on Sunday 7 November.

The owners have agreed to show the Grecian Library of No 19 and other architectural features created by Goodridge for Beckford. This also provides a rare opportunity to visit both of Beckford's Lansdown Crescent houses. Between 12.30 and 3 p.m. there will be a buffet and wine on offer in No 20 where visitors can see the hall and staircase.

The price of tickets (in aid of the Friends of the Holburne Museum) is £20 to include buffet and wine. Numbers will be limited. If you wish to express interest in buying tickets, please send your name and address, telephone number and email address with a s.a.e. to David Machin, Flat 5, 20 Lansdown Crescent, Bath BA1 5EX by 30th September. (Do not send money at this stage).

IN THE SALEROOM

One of Beckford's pictures by Salvator Rosa's *The Death of Socrates* came up for sale at Christie's in London on 8 December 2009. It was one of three paintings by Rosa in Beckford's collection. He also owned a *Job* now in the Uffizi and a *Preaching of Saint Anthony*.

Watercolours once in Beckford's collection by John Robert Cozens were offered at Sotheby's on 14 July. The stupendous *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo* fetched £2,393,250. And a copy of Edmund English's *Views of Lansdown Tower* (1844) with illustrations by Willes Maddox made £3,750.



Flemish School 16th Century, *A Knight of the Golden Fleece*

Two pictures with a Beckford provenance, from the estate of the late Niel Rimington of the Fonthill Old Abbey estate, were sold at Christie's on 6 July. A Fragonard *A Lady and her Maid Chastising a Spaniel*, which had

been included in the *William Beckford: A Eye for the Magnificent* exhibition in New York and Dulwich (2001/2002) was sold for £229,250.

A Portrait of a Knight of the Golden Fleece, a 16th Century Flemish School painting, once thought to represent the Duke of Alva, made £97,250. (Both prices include buyer's premium).

At Lawrences Auctioneers of Crewkerne on 9 July a *Portrait of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford* after Van Dyck was sold for £4,000. It had been sold for 9gns at the 1823 Fonthill sale.

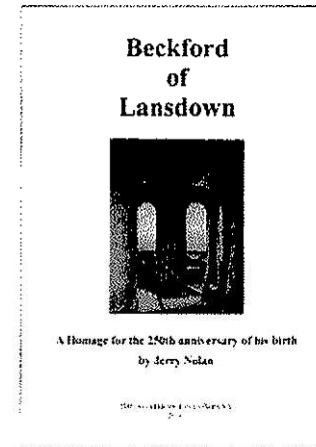
Four views of Bath by Felix Kelly (1916-1994) which appeared as illustrations in the magazine *Lilliput* in September 1947 were sold at Christie's South Kensington on 15 July. The tempera on card painting of Beckford's Lansdown Tower (which we used as the frontispiece of Jon Millington's Beckford bibliography) made £2,500 (including buyer's premium).

THE BECKFORD CANDLESTICKS

In our last issue we mentioned that a pair of Beckford's splendid silver-gilt candlesticks by Charles Aldridge (1787-88) had been sold at Christie's on 17 November last year.

The candlesticks, based on a Roman bronze lamp stand excavated at Herculaneum, have been purchased by the V&A Museum and are now on display in the British Silver Pre-1800 Gallery: Room 65, case 7, shelf 2.

BECKFORD OF LANDSDOWN A HOMAGE



Jerry Nolan has been a regular contributor to *The Beckford Journal* over many years. He has been particularly interested in Beckford's Bath years and his research has shown that this period, far from being an empty time, was one when he was busy revising and publishing his earlier writings and in communication with members of the younger generation whose talents he both challenged and encouraged.

Jerry Nolan has now collected his writings on Beckford into an attractive volume which he offers as a homage for the 250th anniversary of Beckford's birth. Also included is an extract from his play *Extraordinary Views at Lansdown Tower* (published in 2008) which dramatises the relationship between Beckford and Cyrus Reading. The volume ends with a poem

'Chiselling Self-Illustration: William Beckford at 250'.

Paper back: 134 pages. Published by The Agathopolis Company, 8 Antrobus Road, London W4 5HY. Price £7 including postage. Cheques should be made payable to J. Nolan.

HELL

The Guardian Review has been publishing on Saturdays 'Ten of the Best', an ongoing series listing ten works of literature on various themes. The 24 April issue listed under the theme of 'Visions of Hell' Virgil (*Aeneid*), Langland (*Piers Plowman*), Dante (*Inferno*), Milton (*Paradise Lost*), Swift (*The Place of the Damned*), Shelley (*Peter Bell the Third*), Joyce (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), Satre (*Huis Clos*), Pratchett (*Eric*) and Beckford's *Vathek*.

The note on *Vathek* was: Beckford's oriental despot and his companions discover an underworld palace, where 'the payment, strewn with gold dust and saffron, exhaled so subtle an odour as almost overpowered them'. 'A throng of Genii and other fantastic spirits of each sex danced in troops, at the sound of music which issued from beneath'. Nice they think. But this is Hell, where they will be 'prey to grief without end'.



Fonthill Abbey as depicted on a blue & white plate

**WILLIAM COURTENAY
THIRD VICOUNT COURTENAY AND
NINTH EARL OF DEVON**



Richard Cosway, *William Courtenay*

Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum has recently acquired the miniature of William Courtenay painted by Richard Cosway in 1793. The portrait is painted in watercolour on ivory and includes an unidentified sealed lock of hair. It is an appropriate purchase for the Exeter museum, as Cosway was born locally at Tiverton and Courtenay was one of the artist's most important patrons.

A folio of letters written by Courtenay's lawyer John Wilkinson of Lincoln's Inn, discovered in the 1970s in a Teddington coal shed and later passed to the Courtenay family, is the basis of Dorothy Presswell's small book *The Exiled Earl: William Courtenay – Fact and Fiction*. The book provides interesting details of Courtenay's life both before and after his enforced exile.

His extravagance and luxurious lifestyle is shown in an account from a local newspaper of the three days of festivities for his birthday in 1790 including

masquerades, a concert and ball. His interest in theatricals meant paying £210 for scene painting and an inventory records over 140 costumes and props.

The book challenges Farington's account of Courtenay's flight from England to America in 1810. A report in an Exeter newspaper shows that Courtenay travelled to New York on the *June Clarke* which five months later arrived in Plymouth with letters for his family and agents.

During Courtenay's years in France, John Wilkinson, Courtenay's London lawyer, as well as dealing with legal and financial affairs was also expected to act for more domestic matters, such as finding travellers to Paris who would smuggle shirts made by his tailor Condell of Bond Street. The tailor was instructed to send to Lincoln's Inn 'such number of Lord Courtenay's shirts as a single gentleman may venture to take over with him, in addition to his own'.

Powderham Castle remained unfurnished and unoccupied during Courtenay's years of exile. In 1824, he revealed his reluctance to allow a tenant to be found 'for supposing trumps should turn up and by chance I might be able to go to England it is natural that I should wish to visit the dear old place, although not live in it'.

Copies of *The Exiled Earl* can be obtained from The Harbour Bookshop, 2 Mill Street, Kingsbridge TQ7 1ED. Tel 01548 857233. Price £4.99, plus £1 postage.

VATHEK: SYMPHONIC POEMS

Naxos (the Classical music company) has announced the recording of the symphonic poem *Vathek*, written in 1913 by the Portuguese composer Luis de Freitas Branco (1890-1955). Inspired by Beckford's novel, the work is divided into Introduction, Theme (*Vathek*), Prologue, five Variations and Epilogue.

In reviewing an earlier recording of the work (Portugalsom Strauss SP 4130) Rob Barnett wrote that 'this magically orchestrated music is in the same territory as Schmitt's *Salome*, Dukas's *La Péri*, Rimsky's *Sheherazade* and Griffé's *Pleasure Dome*'.



Edward Bawden, *Vathek*, 1958

Vathek was also the subject for an earlier symphonic poem by Horatio Parker (1863-1919) the American composer. Parker's work was written in 1903 and not published in his lifetime. Reviewing a collection of American Orchestral Compositions (1890-1910) (Bridge 9124A/C) David Hurwitz wrote: 'Parker

is best known (to the extent that he is known at all) as the teacher of Charles Ives and as the composer of rather dull sacred oratorio. His symphonic poem *Vathek* is so lush and sexy that he was apparently embarrassed by it and failed to include it in his works. Certainly he wrote nothing else similar, and nothing better'.

IN THE JUNGLE

'We spent then day before yesterday at the ruins of Palenque, a city discovered in the jungle ... [by] a Indian in 1773, which flourished between 600 and 900 A.D., and where in 1959 a pyramid proved hollow with the tombs of the 'pure man', buried with all his jade necklaces and huge pearls – Well, that is not the impression the place gives. To begin with, the 'jungle' is more like the parkland of [a] great English country house than anything else. Then except for the colossal scale and solidity the ruins might have been built by Beckford (in solid masonry) if he had read *Kubla Khan* and determined to create Coleridge's vision. There is the sacred river, running through a vast conduit, a waterfall, orange groves, the various pyramids which might have been built to hold an eighteenth-century hermit'.

David Garnett writing to Sylvia Townsend Warner from Campeche, Mexico, 1 Feb 1967.

Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters, edited by Richard Garnett (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994) p.113