

TASTEMAKERS

William Beckford is included in James Stourton and Charles Sebag-Montifore, *The British as Art Collectors: From the Tudors to the Present* (Scala, 2012). The book presents a marvellous overview of the great art collectors and is divided into four main sections (Royalty – Collecting at Court; Aristocracy - The Country House Boom; Plutocracy – Metropolitan Apogée; and Democracy – Collecting in the Museum Age).

Chapter 13 Tastemakers (pp 164-173) is devoted to Beckford and Thomas Hope, 'aesthetes and tastemakers interested in

every aspect of art and design ... whose taste converge at certain points but generally had a different emphasis. Beckford's was a private passion, the occupation of a misanthropic perfectionist, while Hope had a didactic plan to influence a rich – and in his view – debased London society'.

Other collectors considered in the book include Sir William Hamilton and Beckford's son-in-law the Duke of Hamilton, Horace Walpole and George Lucy of Charlecote, who made many purchases at the Fonthill Abbey sale.

With over 350 pages and some 383 colour illustrations together with a fascinating appendix on private collection catalogues, this is a book to delight anyone interested in the history of collecting. The perfect volume put to put alongside Frank Hermann's *The English as Collectors* (1972).

BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

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Items of Beckfordian interest are always welcome.



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 37 - SEPTEMBER 2012

THE BECKFORD LECTURE



AFTER BECKFORD.

PROFESSOR CAROLINE DAKERS

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2012

AT 6.30PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB
106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1

TO BE FOLLOWED BY DINNER

DRINKS WILL BE SERVED FROM 6.00 PM

SEE ENCLOSED FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
THE LECTURE AND DINNER

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A record number of members and guests attended our Annual General Meeting held in the Reading Room at Fonthill Bishop on Saturday 9 May.

Sir Malcolm Jack, our Chairman, reviewed recent activities. *The Beckford Journal* appeared for the second time in its new format. The Society was grateful to Bet McLeod, the editor for her work and also to the contributors. The cost of producing such a publication is expensive and we will investigate whether savings can be made without sacrificing quality. We are also looking at the way forward for publishing the Beckford Lectures. Three volumes have been produced so far, and we hope to bring out a fourth before possibly including future lectures in the Journal. A Portuguese Excursion is among activities being planned for 2013.

The Treasurer's report showed income of £5,192 and expenditure £6,379. The Society would review whether there were advantages in becoming a registered charity.

After lunch, members visited the landscape around Fonthill Abbey and Bitham Lake. We are very grateful to Stephen and Bonnie Morant for welcoming us and allowing an exploration of Beckford's landscape.

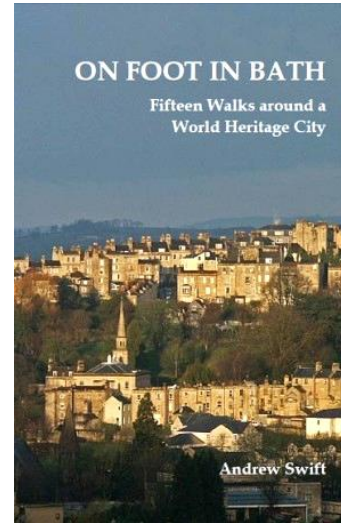
Finally, a visit was made to Fonthill Gifford church where we had the opportunity to see the foundation stone of Alderman Beckford's earlier building.

WEBSITE

As members heard at the Annual General Meeting, we now have a website. We are indebted to Mike Fraser for establishing the foundations of the site which we hope, over time, to expand. At present this contains basic information about the Society, together with recent Newsletters (where illustrations appear in colour!). www.beckfordsociety.org

We plan to send out occasional news and items of Beckfordian interest by email. Do let the Secretary (see back cover) know if you would like to be included in such mailings.

THE CALIPHATE OF LANSDOWN



Andrew Swift's *On Foot in Bath* (Bath: Akeman Press, 2012) takes us on fifteen walks around the city exploring the familiar as well as seeking out hidden treasures in out-of-the way corners, and the old villages now absorbed into the city itself.

One walk (a 6.5 mile trek) is devoted to William Beckford. In 'The Caliphate of Lansdown: A visit to Beckford's Tower' the walker is guided from the city centre, through the lower slopes of Lansdown to the Crescent, and then up to Beckford's Tower and, finally, by way of Charcombe, back to the starting point.

With splendid illustrations, this volume is perfect for walkers wanting to explore Bath. It is a perfect foil to Michael Forsyth's *Pevsner's Architectural Guide to Bath*.

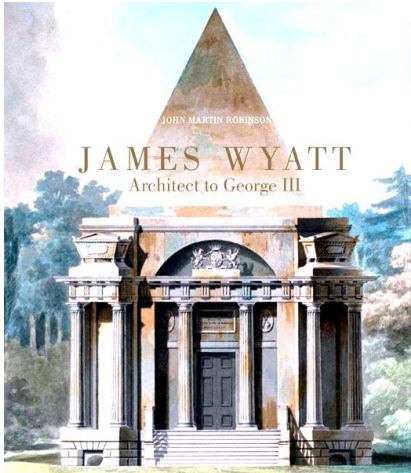
HIGHWAY TO THE SUN

In *The 303: Highway to the Sun* (Simon & Schuster, 2012) Tom Fort takes a nostalgic journey along this English road exploring its landscape and history. He recounts (pp 214-222) the story of Fonthill Abbey, Beckford and the earlier shameful episode concerning the Earl of Castlehaven. He writes that 'William Beckford's vainglorious tower at Fonthill can be seen as a cry for attention, a plea to the society that preferred to ignore him to take him and his obsessions seriously' (p 237).

PREPOSTEROUS ERECTIONS

Peter Ashley in *Preposterous Erections* (Francis Lincoln: 2012) presents photographs and descriptions of sixty towers from all corners of England. Included is Fonthill Abbey, shown in a photographic re-creation) and Lansdown Tower.

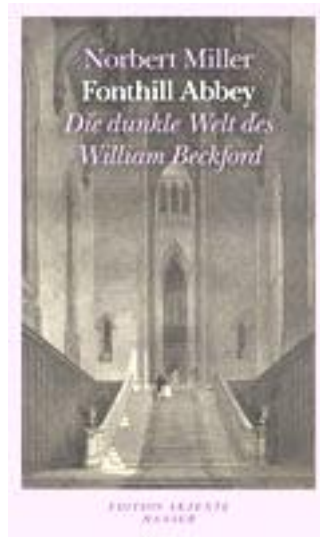
JAMES WYATT



John Martin Robinson's *James Wyatt 1764-1813: Architect to George III* (Yale Books, 2012) is the first detailed study of the architect of Fonthill Abbey since Anthony Dale's 1936 (revised edition 1956) work.

This richly and beautifully illustrated overview of the architect's career shows his designs, stylistic experimentation, and influence on both his contemporaries and successors. Robinson believes that Beckford's own enthusiasm for the French neo-classical architect Ledoux turned Wyatt into a 'Regency' architect.

THE DARK WORLD OF WILLIAM BECKFORD



Norbert Miller, emeritus professor of literature at the Technical University of Berlin has written widely on Romanticism, including studies of Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill and Goethe in Italy. His latest offering is a study of Beckford. *Fonthill Abbey: Die dunkle Welt des William Beckford* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2012) 320 pp with numerous illustrations.

PORTUGUESE EXCURSION

13 – 20 May 2013



Batalha

Portugal had a very special place in William Beckford's affections. He first went there in 1787 and returned again in 1793 and 1798. He was so taken with the country that in 1805, some seventeen years after his first stay, he wrote '... my love for Portugal and my desire to return there will last as long as I live'.

We made our first excursion to Portugal in 1999, so another visit is long overdue. As before, we will visit the places associated with Beckford, most importantly Sintra, where we will stay for our first four nights. We will then spend one night in Batalha (close to great gothic monastery) and the final two nights at Oporto. Our tour is organised by Heritage Group Travel.

One member who came on our last visit was Carmen Blacker FBA, the distinguished scholar of Japanese culture. Here are a few extracts from the letter she wrote about the visit. 'You chose a delightful hotel [at Sintra] for us to stay in, and I shall never forget the view from my balcony of pink palaces peeping out of dark forests and the mountainside sloping down to the sea. It was the perfect base for the party to stay in ... I feel I am just beginning to digest everything we saw – palaces, monasteries, scenes in azulejos, gardens with ruined hermit cells and Etruscan faces and Mogul arches. The week was a marvellous stimulus to the imagination, as well as full of good fellowship, delicious food and memorable conversations at every meal'.

If you would like to receive the full itinerary for the tour, please contact Penny Withers at Heritage Group Travel, 12 Charlotte Street, Bath BA1 2NE. Tel 01225 466620. heritage@grouptravel.co.uk

BECKFORD'S MARGINALIA ON LORD BYRON

Robert J. Gemmett in "Fruits of Conceit and Flowers of Nonsense": William Beckford's Marginalia on Lord Byron' gives a general account of Beckford's marginalia, and then considers in detail his annotations in Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, 1830. Gemmett writes that Beckford's notes personalized his readings and left behind, in effect, a journal of his thoughts and opinions.

The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America. Vol 105:3 (September 2011) pp 354-357

IN THE AUCTION ROOM

FONTHILL TICKETS

At the Cotswold Auction Company in Cheltenham on May 1, an incomplete copy of the 1823 Fonthill Abbey sale catalogue was sold for £300. The particular interest in this lot were the two Fonthill sale tickets pinned to the back page, each personally signed by the auctioneers: James Christie (of the cancelled 1822 sale) and Henry Philipps who conducted that of 1823.

THE WESTMINSTER CABINET



A George IV ormolu mounted ebony and pietra dura cabinet, by Robert Hume, with panels supplied by Gregorio Franchi, once in the Crimson Drawing room at Fonthill Abbey, was sold at Christie's in London on 5 July for £157,250. At the 1823 Fonthill sale it was purchased by Robert Hume, for Robert, 2nd Earl Grosvenor, and remained in the family until this year's sale.

A TURNER WATERCOLOUR

At Sotheby's in London on 4 July, J M W Turner's watercolour over pencil of Fonthill Abbey, which was once owned by the Beckford scholar Boyd Alexander, was sold for £36,050 (including buyer's premium). The watercolour may be a sheet from the Fonthill sketch book (Turner Bequest XLVII)

SOME BECKFORD QUERIES

I'm following some lines of enquiry about William Beckford, and would be grateful if anyone would contact me, if in the course of their researches, they come across any references to the following.

1. BECKFORD, BRUNEL, AND THE GWR

We know that Brunel visited Beckford to get his support for his design for the Clifton Suspension Bridge - and this in itself raises the question why Beckford's support was so important. But the connection with Brunel does not seem to have stopped there. H. E Goodridge gained the job as surveyor for the GWR in the Bath area - was it through Beckford's lobbying on his behalf. When Prince Albert visited the station, Beckford supplied the flowers - this is definitely reported - but did he also supply the furniture from the tower, given that the paper comments on the red furnishings?

2. WAS BECKFORD SUPPORTING DEPENDENT RELATIONS?

I discovered that Charlotte Beckford, the widow of his cousin William Beckford of Somerley, was living in Bath at No 5 Upper East Hayes, from 1819 - then subsequently moved to Cavendish Crescent where she died. I am certain when Beckford writes disparagingly of 'Queen Charlotte' (1807) he meant

Charlotte Beckford, not the Queen. William of Somerley had died in poverty. So was he supporting her in order to avoid her wanting a closer connection? However, I then discovered that Mrs Thomas Beckford was living nearby in Brunswick Street in 1826. She was the widow of one of the Alderman's illegitimate children, and hence William's half-brother. I have discovered when he was born and died but no date for his marriage. I wonder if like other Beckford's they simply did not bother! I have been in touch with John Fox descendant of the Alderman, who has also failed to track down such family details. When Thomas was alive he lived at Dunsford Place in Bath, a large elegant house. But it appears that after his death, Mrs Thomas fell upon hard times, so was William Beckford supporting her as well.

If any one comes across anything that relates - however tenuously to these matters, I would be very grateful to learn about it. I will, of course, pass this on to John Fox, who is equally anxious to sort this out. It might explain why, when Beckford died, he had very much less money than anyone expected, if he had been supporting less well-off relatives.

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