



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 44 MARCH 2016

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 11 JUNE 2016



DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE
17, GOUGH SQUARE
LONDON

FOLLOWED BY A VISIT TO
THE COLLEGE OF ARMS

AGENDA AND BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

BECKFORD LECTURE 2015

The Beckford Lecture was held on 27 November when Professor Thomas Keymer, of the University of Toronto, lectured on 'Beckford and Bad Verse', in which he examined the poetic burlesques in Beckford's novels.

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

WEBSITE

The Society's website has been 'live' for around three years now and regularly receives visitors from around the globe.

With web traffic one must be careful to ascribe particular reasons to website visits, for example these can be mistaken travellers passing through, or even hackers trying to break in! Nonetheless, the number of unique visitors to the site fluctuates between about 500 and 2000 per month, with an overall monthly average of 1000 to date. Most of our visitors come from North America and Europe, with a few further afield including occasional views from Brazil and Japan.

By far the most popular features on the site are the Society newsletters, each of which are

downloaded hundreds of times per year.

In a new development we have launched the option to pay for Beckford Society membership through the website using Paypal, which we hope will significantly lower the barrier to joining especially for new members who are accustomed to online payment, and we are pleased to note that this option has already been taken up a few times.

Looking forward, plans include a 'members only' area which could include digitised versions of early volumes of the *Beckford Journal*.

MIKE FRASER

www.beckfordsociety.org

***Gift Aid* – UK MEMBERS**

We are very grateful to those members who have signed-up for *Gift Aid*. This is already making a very useful contribution to our income.

A *Gift Aid* form is enclosed for members living in the UK who have not yet joined the scheme.

AGM – 11 JUNE 2016

This year's AGM on Saturday 11 June, will be held at Dr Johnson's House in the City of London. It was here that Samuel Johnson lived 1746 – 39 whilst compiling his great *Dictionary of the English Language*.



Court Room, College of Arms, 1816

In the afternoon, members will have the opportunity to visit the College of Arms the 17th century home of the royal heralds. Following the fire of London, the college was rebuilt to the designs of Maurice Emmett, Master Builder to the Office of Works. Given William Beckford's obsession with ancestry and heraldry this is a particularly appropriate visit for our members.

Our visit is at the kind invitation of Dr Clive Cheesman, Richmond Herald, who will be our guide and show us various manuscripts and grants of arms relating to the Beckford family.

An agenda and booking form for the day is enclosed.

AN OXFORD VISIT FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER



Bodleian Library from Loggan, *Oxonia Illustrata*, 1675.

We have contemplated an Oxford visit to see the Beckford Papers for some time, but this has been delayed in recent years by the transformation of the New Bodleian into the stunning Weston Library, which opened to the public last year.

Our day will start at 10.30am with a tour of parts of the Bodleian Library, including the Divinity School, Convocation House, Chancellor's Court and Duke Humphrey's Library. We will see a selection of items from the Beckford Papers, William Beckford's personal archive, which remained in the ownership of the Hamilton family until 1977, when purchased by Blackwell's and in 1984 donated to the Bodleian.

Participants will then be free for lunch, which can be taken in the Weston Library's café or in any of the famous pubs and eating places nearby. Some might even succumb to the temptations of Blackwell's bookshop or the Ashmolean Museum.



All Saints Church, 1834

In the afternoon we will visit Lincoln College by kind invitation of the Rector, Professor Henry Woudhuysen. Lincoln has preserved the character of a 15th century college more than any in Oxford. We will be shown the Hall, and Chapel with splendid enamelled glass windows (1629-31) by Abraham van Linge. We will also see the library housed in the adjacent church of All Saints (1706-8) possibly designed by Dean Aldrich of Christ Church. The building has been described as 'one of the most perfect English churches of its date'.

The tour will be limited to twenty participants. The cost for the day is £20. A booking form is enclosed.

SCOTTISH TOUR 8 - 12 MAY 2017

The itinerary for our Scottish Tour 8 - 12 May 2017 is enclosed with this Newsletter.

A four day tour with visits to Brodick Castle, Lennoxlove House, and museums in Glasgow and Edinburgh to see objects which were once in the collection of William Beckford or that of his son-in-law the 10th Duke of Hamilton. The tour will be led by Dr Bet McLeod.

**BECKFORD LECTURE 2016
THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER**

Owing to an accident, Professor Didier Girard was unable to give the 2014 Beckford Lecture. We are delighted that he will be able to give this year's lecture when he will talk on 'Beckford's Magick'. The lecture, to be followed by dinner, will be at the Travellers Club in London on Thursday 24 November.

Didier Girard is a literary editor, translator and essayist. He is Professor of European Literature at the Francois Rabelais University, Tours and general coordinator of the Erasmus Mundis joint doctorate in the humanities at the University of Bergamo. He is author of *William Beckford: Terrorists au Palaid de la Raison* (1993) and has edited many of Beckford's works for the French publisher José Corti.

OLD FONTHILL ABBEY

OPEN DAYS

There will be two open days this year when visitors and dogs (on leads) will be welcome to explore the grounds and woods of Old Fonthill Abbey.

Refreshments all day and simple barbecue (homemade soup if cold). No entertainments, but Beckford and local/natural history books to browse and marked paths to follow (some steep and rugged) around the woodland and Bitham Lake. Bluebells, rhododendrons and some special trees.

In aid of local charities and
Parkinsons UK

SUNDAY 1 MAY
SUNDAY 15 MAY
11 am – 5 pm

Entry
is only via Stone Gate Lodge
(on Hindon – Newtown Lane)
SP3 6SP

MICHAEL BISHOP (1926 -2015)



Michael Bishop with his model of Bath Abbey

Members will be saddened to learn of the death of Michael Bishop, husband of Philippa who was one of our founding members and first Treasurer.

The focus of Michael's life was Kingswood School, Bath. He was a pupil there, returned as a teacher 1950-87, and in retirement was School Archivist. Michael had a passion for and great skill in model making, which he used in set design for many school productions.

He made watercolour drawings of the interiors of Beckford's Tower for the Holburne Museum's Beckford exhibition (1966). He also made, for display in the tower, a model of Fonthill Abbey which was shown in the *William Beckford: An Eye for the Magnificent* exhibition in New York and London (2001/2002). Shortly before his death, Michael

was at work on a complex model showing Bath Abbey and its surroundings in about 1800

MICHAEL PORTILLO AT BECKFORD'S TOWER



Michael Portillo with Amy Frost

Beckford's Tower was visited by Michael Portillo (the former MP and Government Minister) as part of his seventh TV series *Great British Railway Journeys*.

The episode (Stroud to Bath) was shown on BBC2 on 20 January. The BBC's pre-view synopsis describes the presenter's visit to Bath where he 'discovers a scandalous novel written by an eccentric recluse, once the wealthiest man in England'.

In the programme, Mr Portillo climbs Beckford's Tower and Dr Amy Frost, the Tower's Curator, invites him to read a passage from *Vathek*.

CARATHIS IN SINGAPORE



Sarah Daud as Carathis in front of the Chinese Heritage Centre

Our President, Sir Malcolm Jack was Visiting Professor of Enlightenment Studies at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University last autumn. Eye-brows were raised when a student and Beckford Society member Sarah Daud impersonated Carathis, when giving a presentation on Beckford's *Vathek*. Her performance was accompanied by Freitas Branco's symphonic poem inspired by the novel.

THE LIBRARY AT BRODICK CASTLE

The Winter 2015 issue of *The Book Collector* (Volume 64, no. 4) carries an article by Murray C. T. Simpson, the former Head of Manuscripts at the National Library of Scotland, on Brodick Castle Library. Brodick belonged to the Hamilton family, of whom

the tenth Duke married Susan Euphemia, Beckford's younger daughter, and is now owned by the National Trust.

The article notes that although most visitors to the Castle see relatively few books, and there are only about a thousand printed books at Brodick in all, these books do include some forty-eight titles in ninety-five volumes that belonged to Beckford, and escaped the Hamilton Palace sales of Beckford's library in 1882-3. Thirty-seven of these post-date the Fonthill Abbey sale of 1822, and the vast majority are post-1800. They are mostly in the fields of history, biography, current affairs, and literature, and are many of them bound with the Beckford insignia of quatrefoil and Latimer cross gilt motifs on their spines. Choice items are Benjamin Disraeli's presentation copy to Beckford of his novel *Contarini Fleming* (1832), and Horace Walpole's annotated copy of Thomas Davies's *Memoirs* of David Garrick (1780), bought by Beckford at the Strawberry Hill Sale.

Many of the books are annotated by Beckford - his notes on Frances Burney's hopelessly discursive 'Memoirs' of her father, Dr. Charles Burney, might make particularly good reading.

STEPHEN CLARKE

GIBBON'S LIBRARY

The friendship between the historian Edward Gibbon and John Holroyd, first Earl of Sheffield is explored by Bryan Welch in an article in *The Bookplate Journal* Vol 12 No 2 (Autumn 2014) pp 89 - 101.

Holroyd and Gibbon first met in Lausanne in 1763, when making the Grand Tour. In later life, Gibbon returned to the city taking part of his library (the remainder being left in Lord Sheffield's house in Downing Street). It was the Lausanne library that Dr Frédéric Schöll purchased in the winter of 1796-97 for £950 on behalf of William Beckford.

Beckford's relationship with Gibbon is described as is the subsequent dispersal of the library which Beckford claimed to have purchased to 'have something to read'.

VATHEK FROM THE CENTIPEDE PRESS

An edition of *Vathek* has been published in America, by Centipede Press, which reproduces the New York 1928 edition illustrated by Mahlon Blaine.

Donald Sydney-Fryer, the Californian poet and performer, provides an introduction in which

he gives an account of Beckford's life and works, and also considers the novel's influence on other writers, including the Californian poet and writer Clark Ashton Smith, who 'read and re-read the novel with wonder and enthusiasm in his adolescence'.



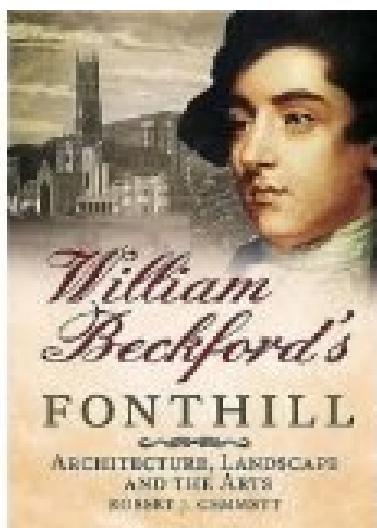
Dustjacket by David Whitlam

He also sees touches of Beckford in the writings of Lafcadio Hearn who lived and worked in the United States before settling in Japan. His novels *Chita* and *Youma* 'display the same tropical exoticism, vividness and colour, not to mention theatrical effect, as does *Vathek*'.

Lakewood: Centipede Books, 2015.
xlix + 229 pp. 23½ cm.
Edition of 250 copies, signed by Donald Sydney-Fryer and David Whitlam.

**WILLIAM BECKFORD'S
FONTHILL:
ARCHITECTURE,
LANDSCAPE AND THE ARTS.**

Robert J Gemmett is the leading American scholar on the life and works of William Beckford. He is the author of *William Beckford* (1977) and *Beckford's Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (2003). He has published editions of Beckford's works and *The Consummate Collector*, (2000 and 2014) Beckford's letters to his bookseller and agent George Clarke.



Just published, from the appropriately named Fonthill Media, is *William Beckford's Fonthill: Architecture, Landscape and the Arts*, which examines Beckford's building, landscaping and collecting habits which led to the 'Fonthill fever' when over 7,000 people came to see the

Fonthill estate when offered for sale in 1822. This volume with its wealth of information from many diverse sources, will be of great interest to anyone interested in Beckford and his fabled creation.

**Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2016.
Hardback. 234 x 136 mm
234pp. 49 mono/39 colour illustr.**

Jon Millington has kindly drawn-up a table (enclosed with this Newsletter) for the book, which gives ranges of text pages and the corresponding page of endnotes. This avoids trying to determine which of the twenty-five pages of endnotes is the one wanted.

GUY CHAPMAN

Books and photographs from the collection of the Beckford scholar Guy Chapman (1889-1972) and his wife Storm Jameson were sold by Morphets of Harrogate on 3 March.

A group of albums with photographs of Chapman at Westminster School; Christ Church, Oxford; and during World I, together with medal ribbons and other material (lot 35) sold for £280.

His own copy of his *Beckford* (1937) with other literary and historical works (lot 53) made £170.



BECKFORD'S TOWER

ALL AREAS TOURS

An opportunity to discover what lies behind the door at the top of the Tower. Book onto the monthly all areas tour to see the parts of the building the public can't normally reach!

SATURDAY 21 MAY

11.00 AM & 2.00 PM

£10.

Limited to 6 per tour,
so booking is essential.

Contact
tower@bptrust.org.uk
tel. 01225 460705

THE TOWERS OF BATH

LAUNCHING 4 JUNE

TRAIL AND DISPLAY

From follies and church spires to chimneys, Bath is full of towers.

The Towers of Bath trail explores these soaring structures on a journey from Bath Abbey to Beckford's Tower.

The trail will be available in print from Beckford's Tower and Bath Abbey and to download from:
www.beckfordstowert.org.uk

BECKFORD BOOK GROUP WEDNESDAY 9 JUNE

Come along to the quarterly book group at Beckford's Tower exploring writings (loosely) related to the work of William Beckford. You don't need to have read the book, just be interested in an evening of stimulating discussions, with tea/coffee (maybe wine).

Susan Sontag's
The Volcano Lover

7.00 PM £5

TOWERS OF BATH LECTURE WEDNESDAY 22 JUNE

Lecture at Beckford's Tower to coincide with the launch of the *Towers of Bath* trail, Dr Amy Frost, Curator of Beckford's Tower, explores the structures that rise up above the terraces of Bath.

6.00 PM £5

A PORTRAIT OF BECKFORD?



Last year, Wooley and Wallis, the Salisbury auctioneers offered for sale an English School 19th century 'Portrait of a gentleman, possibly William Beckford' in their paintings sale of 10 December (lot 330). With an estimate of £800 - 1,200. It had been purchased from Frost & Reed in 1976. Unsold at the December sale, the picture re-appeared on 16 March 2016 (lot 264), with an estimate of £500-800, and sold for £550.

A CURIOUS FRIENDSHIP

Anna Thomasson uses the friendship between the writer Edith Olivier, who lived in Wiltshire at Wilton, and artist Rex Whistler to tell their life stories in her book, *A Curious Friendship. The Story of a Bluestocking and a Bright Young Thing*. (Macmillan, 2015).

There are various references to Beckford and Fonthill.

Of Edith's friend Elinor Wylie, American poet and novelist: 'She had always considered England a haven and had first been drawn to Wiltshire because William Beckford had lived there – she had a penchant for eccentrics' (p. 140). And 'At the end of November 1942, the 2nd Welsh Guards, now the 'Armoured Reconnaissance Division', had moved camp to Fonthill Gifford a few miles away and Rex went out on tank exercises where William Beckford had once wandered as he conjured up visions of fantastic follies to build on his estate' (p.409).

TREASURES FROM THE HAMILTON COLLECTION

In 1882 the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (Prints and Drawings Museum) acquired from the 12th Duke of Hamilton, Sandro Botticelli's spectacular series of drawings illustrating scenes from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It also purchased nearly all of the items in the duke's collection of illuminated manuscripts. Almost 700 items were shipped to Berlin. The manuscripts had been collected by the duke's grandfather, Alexander, 10th Duke, Beckford's son-in-law.

The Botticelli drawings and other treasures from Berlin are included in the exhibition *Botticelli and Treasures from the Hamilton Collection* at The Courtauld Gallery, London. The exhibition opened on 18 February and continues until 15 May.

HENRY VENN LANSDOWN'S *RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LATE WILLIAM BECKFORD*

Anyone reading the dust jacket of the 1969 Kingsmead reprint of *Recollections of the Late William Beckford* by Henry Venn Lansdown (1804–1860) might get the wrong impression, where the blurb reads, in part, ‘first published privately in 1893 and limited to 100 copies’. In fact, the first publication was in the *Bath Chronicle* during the July and August of the previous year, when it appeared in its entirety in six weekly instalments. Moreover, the typesetting in the book is identical to that in the *Chronicle* with two very minor exceptions, both occurring at the beginning of a line: on page 9 the ‘f’ of ‘full’ is missing because that line of type had become displaced to the left, leaving a slight gap at the right margin, and on page 27 the ‘l’ of ‘loopholes’ is absent. The very wide margins in the book can be accounted for, as they correspond exactly to the width of the columns in the *Chronicle*.

At that time the *Bath Chronicle* appeared on Thursdays, with eight pages of six columns per page. All six instalments occupied most of the first two columns on page 6, and this table shows when they were published in 1892 and the corresponding number of pages in the 1893 book (to show the length of each instalment) with page numbers, and first line of text:

21 July	6	[5]	My Dear Charlotte,— I have this day seen such an
28 July	7¼	11	Italian beauty ! didst thou not inspire Raphael ? “How
4 Aug	7¼	18	Mr. Beckford next pointed out a charming sketch by
11 Aug	7¾	26	We pursued our way to the Tower by a path of a quarter
18 Aug	6	33	How poor dear Mozart would be frightened (moralised
25 Aug	8½	39	The evening was most lovely. A soft haze had pre-

Not present in the book was the *Chronicle*'s introduction to the first instalment:

We have been favoured by Miss Lansdown, daughter of the late Henry Venn Lansdown, artist, of this city, with a very interesting manuscript record by her father of recollections of the late William Beckford of Fonthill and Bath. Mr. Lansdown had the privilege of knowing the author of “Vathek,” and of seeing the magnificent collection of pictures and other works of art in the lifetime of Mr. Beckford during his residence in Bath. He embodied his impressions and recollections in the form of a series of letters to his daughter, and it is this record which has been placed at our service. We propose to publish instalments thereof from week to week, feeling quite sure that they will be read with pleasure by all who have an interest in the city, and who admire the works of the celebrity who once made it his home.

Unless the writer of this introduction was mistaken, Lansdown wrote the letters to his daughter, Charlotte (1842–1910), which contradicts the theory in my article in the 2005 *Beckford Journal* that they were to his sister, also Charlotte (1810–1891). Since the *Chronicle* didn't publish a correction, it must now be assumed that ‘My Dear Charlotte’ referred to the eldest of Lansdown's four daughters, even if she wasn't born until some four years after the date of the first letter, 21 August 1838. The dates on the letters may well have been those of his actual visits.

JON MILLINGTON

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