

THE BECKFORD JOURNAL



VOLUME 2 SPRING 1996

The Beckford Society

The aims of the Society are:

1. To promote an interest in the life and works of William Beckford and his circle.
2. To encourage Beckford studies and scholarship through exhibitions and publications, including an annual Journal and occasional Newsletters.
3. To hold an annual Beckford lecture or symposium.
4. To support the preservation of Beckford's Tower, Bath, and other buildings associated with him.

Membership of the Society is open to anyone interested in William Beckford who wishes to further its objectives. There is a minimum annual subscription of ten pounds, and the acting membership secretary is Sidney Blackmore, 15 Healey Street, London, NW1 8SR, England.

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The Beckford Journal

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EDITED BY JON MILLINGTON

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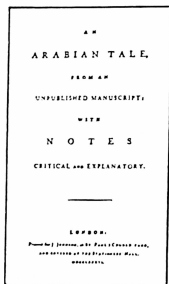
Editorial

One aim of the *Journal* has been to reflect Beckford's extraordinarily wide appeal and this can be seen by the range of articles in the present issue covering aspects of his literature, collecting, architecture and music. Among comparatively neglected areas are landscaping and gardening; perhaps these will be remedied next year.

Perceptive readers will notice that some contributions embody contentious views. While the Editor does not necessarily agree with these, he does accept responsibility for typing errors such as the one on page 8 of last year's *Journal*.

In that issue and in the fifteen years before, when the *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter* was published, items of news appeared in the Editorial. Now, however, this is one role of the *Beckford Society Newsletter* which is edited by Sidney Blackmore.

Articles on Beckfordian matters are always welcome in any format including disc (in Microsoft Word 6 for IBM compatible PCs), and should be sent to the Editor at 13 Downfield Road, Bristol, BS8 2TJ. He warmly thanks this year's contributors for generously giving their time, thus helping the *Journal* to thrive.



*Title Pages
from Vathek
(see p. 16)*



**Marquise de Santa Cruz: Love-Letters to
William Beckford
Transcribed and Annotated by Roger Kann**

ELIZABETH HILLIARD

Roger Kann has carried out a monumental work, for which all Beckford aficionados should be grateful, by presenting this series of letters which are housed in the Bodleian Library, and by providing a very comprehensive introduction.

There are forty-five of these letters written in French to W.B. by the Marquise, and dated between 30 May 1788 and 9 February 1789. Kann has found evidence of another dozen letters which have mysteriously disappeared. The famous love letters of Héloïse and the Portuguese Religieuse of Bêjá each number only four or five, but these number forty-five. Several of them were published in the first half of this century. Most are four pages long and in general quite legible, but some passages are vigorously crossed out. The French is often mis-spelt and often ungrammatical. Kann says that the aristocracy thought that writing a language correctly was *petit bourgeois* and to be left to lawyers and doctors.

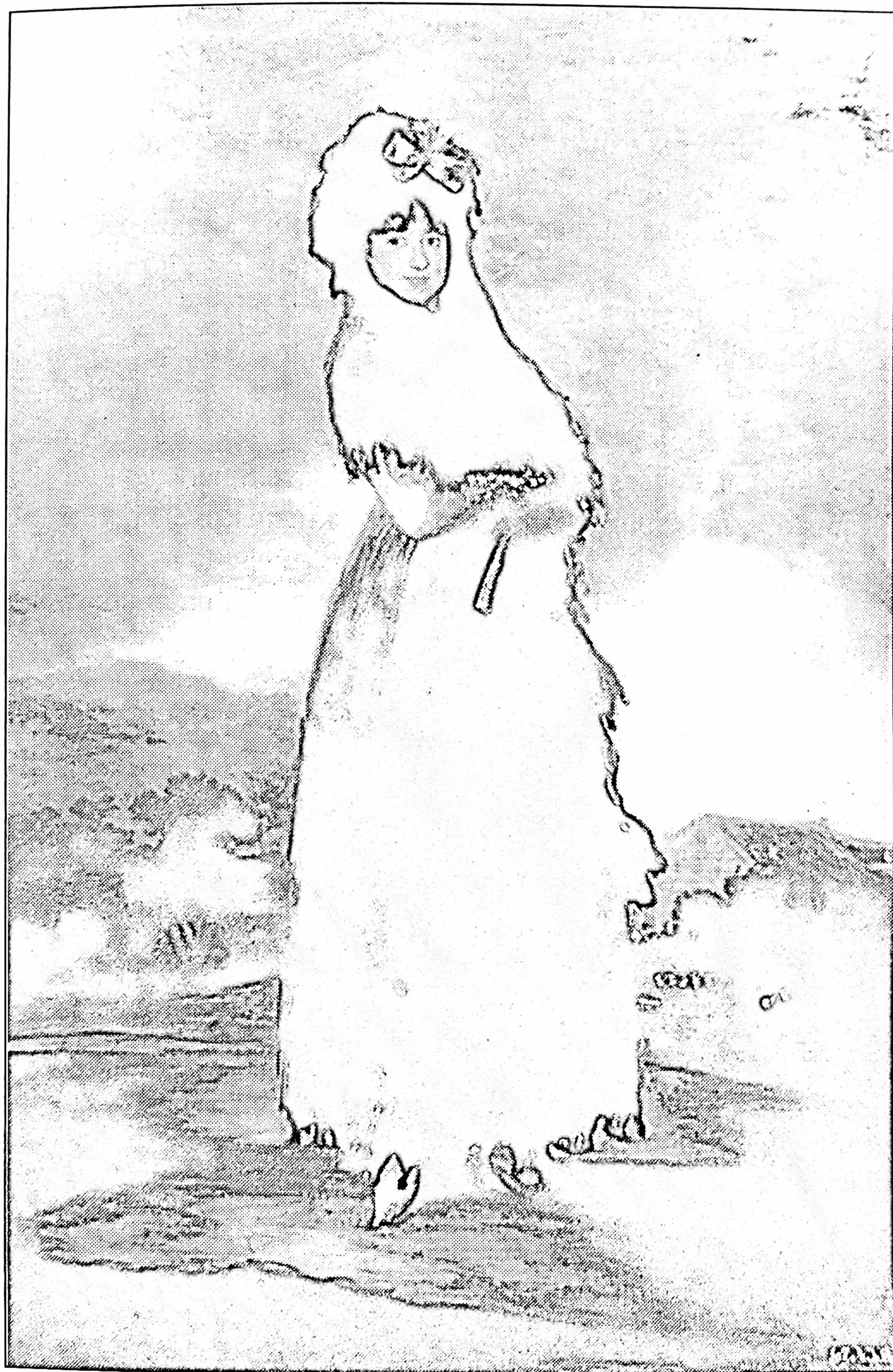
The contents of the letters fall into three periods. In the earlier letters, all but one of which were written after he had left Spain for France, she expresses her despair and is overwhelmed with sorrow at his departure. In the middle group, she is clearly still hoping for his return and she recounts the advances made to her by numerous admirers. As Kann says, this stratagem, aimed at arousing his jealousy, is as old as the world. In the third group she still expresses undying love but she has realised the inevitable and says she cannot pass her youth waiting for someone in so little hurry to return to her. Only one of Beckford's letters survives, written early in their correspondence.

The writer of these letters was Maria Ana, Countess of Waldstein-Wartemberg, daughter of a Princess of Liechtenstein. She was one of the most beautiful women in Madrid, with aquamarine blue eyes and a mass of black hair. An accomplished musician, she was also a very competent painter and was a member of the San Fernando Academy of Painting in Madrid. She was married at eighteen in Vienna to a grandee of Spain, a widower thirty years older than she, D. José Silva de Bazan, 9th Marquis of Santa Cruz, Chancellor of King Charles III and one of the supporters of Charles' reforms and particularly interested in the sciences. The first Montgolfier balloon in Spain lifted off from the courtyard of his palace. The Marquise, however, scoffed at him incessantly in her letters to Beckford.

Kann tells us that during his six months' stay in Portugal, Beckford kept a journal in which, among comments on the Portuguese and their country, he described himself, his periods of exaltation always followed by crises of depression and, something rare at that time, he admitted his ambiguous sexuality.

A lively young man, the Chevalier de Rojas who had known Verdeil, W.B.'s physician in Switzerland, presented himself at the Cross of Malta, the hotel where W.B. was staying and proposed himself as cicerone for him. He knew everyone and everything, including Robert Liston, the British Chargé d'Affaires, and introduced Beckford to him. (The British Ambassador was out of the country at the time.) Among other visits and introductions he took W.B. to the Palace of Buen-Retiro, the residence of Ahmed Vassif, the Turkish Ambassador, and Beckford was introduced to this representative of the Sublime Porte. Beckford's interest in and knowledge of orientalism much impressed Vassif and a warm friendship

Opposite: *Goya, Portrait of the Marquise de Santa Cruz (Mariana Waldstein). Musée du Louvre. © Photo R.M.N.*



sprang up between them. Beckford provided him daily with flaky pastry made in a crescent shape by his French cook.

Then the letters of the Marquise tells us of his brusque departure for France on 14 June 1788 (the date of the Marquise's second letter) without taking leave of anyone. On the reason for this behaviour, as strange as it was impolite, one can only hypothesise. Boyd Alexander suggests he may have been subject to an expulsion order demanded by the Marquis of Santa Cruz, made ridiculous by his wife's public attachment to Beckford, or perhaps by the refusal of William Eden, the English Ambassador recently returned to Madrid, to support his presentation at Court. Something in any case persuaded him to leave Spain stealthily so as not to expose himself to ridicule by friends and aristocratic acquaintances.

Later in the Marquise's life history the Spanish monarchs and their Minister, Godoy, thought of using the beautiful young woman to seduce the French Ambassador in Madrid so as to learn the secret designs of the French Government. The plan succeeded so well that the French Ambassador, Lucien Bonaparte, established his Embassy in her husband's palace. Recalled to France, he took her with him which 'had the whole of Paris chattering' and roused the wrath of the First Consul, his brother.

Eventually the Marquise joined the Queen of Etruria in Florence. She returned to painting, making copies of the great Italian painters. Her portrait by Goya is in the Louvre and the Uffizi Gallery possesses a self-portrait in a miniature dated 1803. She died at Fano, by the Adriatic, at the age of forty-five, in 1808.

Our grateful thanks to Dr Martin Smith for providing an advance copy of the letters. They will be published in *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century* in the summer.

An Early Nineteenth Century Dihl and Guerhard Porcelain Cup and Saucer made for William Beckford

PHILIP HEWAT-JABOOR

Mme. Plinval de Guillebon in *Paris Porcelain*, 1972, page 36 mark 17, tantalisingly illustrates a Dihl and Guerhard mark in conjunction with the unidentified devices of William Beckford - in this case a heron's head and the Hamilton oak in a black oval. This, in fact, belongs to a cup and saucer, shown below,



Dihl and Guerhard Porcelain Cup and Saucer. British Museum

sumptuously decorated in polychrome colours on a gold ground with marguerites and classical bands on a white ground. This cup and saucer, still with its unknown provenance is illustrated in Aileen Dawson, *French Porcelain, A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 1994, no. 270, colour plate 40.

J. Rutter *A Description of Fonthill Abbey*, 1822, 2nd edn., page 48 describes in the China Closet 'Two French cabinet cups and SAUCERS, gold-ground, antique borders, painted with flowers by *Van Spandonck*, in a style of peculiar excellence.' This must be one and the same as Lot 29 in the Third Day's Sale in Christie, *Magnificent Effects at Fonthill Abbey, Wilts...October 1, 1822*. It seems highly likely that the cup and saucer in the British Museum collection is one of these two.

Several cups and saucers are included in the same sale and are;

Lot 46 (Second Day's Sale) 'Two gold-ground cabinet coffee cups and saucers, 1 *painted in roses*, 1 *with tulips*, by Van Spandonck'.

Lot 29 (Third Day's Sale) 'Two French cabinet cups and saucers, gold ground, antique borders, painted with flowers by Van Spandonck in a style of peculiar excellence'.

Lot 23 (Fourth Day's Sale) 'Two gold ground French cups and saucers, exquisitely painted in roses and heartseases, by Van Spandonck'.

Lot 24 (Fourth Day's Sale) 'Two ditto, wild poppies and anemonies'.

William Beckford visited Paris towards the end of 1814 and it would seem likely that this cup and saucer were purchased at this time.

Also in the British Museum Collection are two Dihl cabinet plates with similar lavish floral decoration that were given to the Museum in 1926. The donor's grandfather was believed to have bought them at the Fonthill Sale. These could well have been Lot 84 (Sixth Day's Sale) and are fully described in Aileen Dawson op. cit. Nos. 268 and 269.

With acknowledgements to Mme. Regine de Plinval de Guillebon and Aileen Dawson.

Beckford's Manuscript Notes in Two Travel Books from his Own Library

GERLOF JANZEN

Early in 1995 two books from William Beckford's library came into the possession of the author: the first edition of William Dorset Fellowes' *Visit to the Monastery of La Trappe*, London, 1818 and the first edition of Louis Simond's *Journal of a Tour and Residence in Great Britain, during the years 1810 and 1811*, Edinburgh, 1817.

Both books have the familiar pencil remarks, some of which are revealing as to Beckford's sharp sense of literary, historical or political correctness but also of his consciousness of moral rights, whereas others only add to our knowledge of Beckford as an embittered, ironic and sarcastic *misanthropist*. Though they were certainly not among Beckford's most prized possessions at the time of auction - they were both sold to Bain, the Fellowes on July 13th 1882 for £1/11/0 and the Simond on July 11th 1883, for 15 shillings - it may nevertheless be interesting for the Beckfordian scholar to have available a short description of both books and of some of the more interesting texts of these pencil remarks in them.

2973 Fellowes (W.D.) *Visit to the Monastery of La Trappe*, 2 pages of MS. Notes by Mr. Beckford, coloured plates, half morocco, gilt edges, by C. Lewis 1818

Thus reads the description for lot 2973, on page 221 of the first part of the catalogue of the Hamilton Palace Libraries Sale, for the twelfth day of the auction, Thursday, July 13th 1882. It is beautifully bound in half morocco, with olive-green boards and endpapers, an elaborately leaf-designed gilt panelled spine and four morocco corners in an intriguing square cornered shape. On the inside of the first end-paper a pencil inscription reads:

Binding C. Lewis 0 - 12 - 5

No shelf number is visible. There is a blank page before the title-page (without a half title) and directly before that is one leaf, on both sides of which Beckford has written his pencil notes. The book contains 15 plates, including 12 hand-coloured aquatints.

All Beckford's notes are given below in *Italics*, most of them starting with the number of the page to which his commentaries refer.

His very first note is a characteristic sneer, ironising the joy of the author at the beautiful situation of the Monastery, by nearly literally quoting his ejaculations on page 9 of the book:

9 *first view of the monastery of La Trappe imposing even to breathlessness ---*

Did Beckford really become intrigued by the description of the Carthusian convent in Val de Dieu as given on page 39 and following? He does indeed give a sort of shorthand description, again more or less literally quoting the rather romantic descriptions. Or is there an ironic touch as well?

39 *A deadlike, awful silence reigns within the apparently boundless forests of la Perche - for miles together they form a dense shade which like an awning completely conceals the Sun from the view - even on the brightest day, the Sun's rays are only visible as from the bottom of a deep well -- the val dieu in which the Carthusian convent was situated - is surrounded by almost impenetrable woods - the buildings were of prodigious extent -- the remains of 600 fireplaces being still traceable -- a colonnade surrounded the whole forming an oblong Square, in the centre of which was a jet d'eau with several smaller ones, the basins of which are still to be seen --*

On page 88 we find a marginal pencil cross next to the following passage: '... inhabited by one of the greatest men that

France has produced, François 1. Connétable de Clisson, father to Anne of Bretagne ...' Obviously Beckford knew better, because he writes:

88 "François I Connetable de Clisson - father to Anne of Bretagne" -!-! & Son of Lewis the 14th w^d be just as accurate ...

Wouldn't Beckford know his Royalty! When Fellowes happily makes a mess of the dates of the accessions to the thrones of both Charles VII of Valois and Henry VI of the House of Lancaster (both in 1422) and the death of the latter (in 1471) by writing on page 165: 'During the reign of Charles VII in 1422, Henry VI of England died in this castle ...', Beckford mops the floor with him:

165 *more accurate historical information - "During the reign of Charles VII Henry VI of England died in the Castle of Vincennes"*

Another marginal pencil cross marks a passage on page 89 of the book and Beckford's commentary runs thus:

89 *Amidst the ruins of the splendid Castle of Clisson are now only to be seen & heard the birds of prey, hovering over a solitary tree planted to mark the spot where a deed was xxx committed which has not its parallel in the darkest histories of the most ferocious nations -- During the Vendean war, 27 women were thrown alive into a well where they perished - It has since been filled up & the lonely tree above mentioned now records the inhuman & horrid deed! --*

On page 145, an enthusiastic description of the well-preserved church of Orléans elicits the following commentary:

145 *"The Towers of the Cathedral of Orleans are of open fretwork & in excellent preservation" - no wonder, they have not been erected above 40 or 50 years --*

However endearing the modern reader may find Fellowes' somewhat naive texts and the prints, which we today would indeed find rather nicely coloured, Beckford, if we are to believe the following commentary, was not very partial to this book - *Upon the whole this is but a sorry performance - made up of remnants from the Mem^{oirs} of Mad^{lame} de la Roche Jacquelin and eked out with hackneyed quotations from Froissart, the plates poorly designed, miserably etched, & gaudily coloured.* -- Ending his pencil notes in this book thus:

186 -- *the only curious morsel in the whole book--the last will & testament of a promising youth, who having sucked in the sublime doctrines of Voltaire & Jean Jacques, found this stupid globe quite unworthy of him, so took a short cut to the next world & destroyed himself at the age of sixteen - .. most probably an xx excellent riddance for his family!*

So much for Fellowes and his *Visit to the Monastery of La Trappe*. The second acquisition is Beckford's copy of the two-volume set of Louis Simond's *Journal of a Tour and Residence in Great Britain, during the years 1810 and 1811*. Edinburgh, 1817. It was sold on Wednesday, July 11th 1883, during the Hamilton Palace Libraries Sale, part 3. The description on page 142 of the third part of the catalogue, runs thus:

2006 Simon (L.) *Tour and Residence in Great Britain, 2 vol. plates, half russia, gilt edges*, by C. Lewis Edinb. 1817

It has dark green boards and end papers. The book is bound in half russia with gilt edges, and obviously has been used a lot, as the binding was in a rather poor condition and had to be rebacked, while of course retaining the original Lewis binding. It has Beckford's idiosyncratic Latimer cross & cinquefoil on the spine. There are two bookplates in both of them, one on the inside left, giving a family crest (boar's head, looking left), a monogram looking like intertwined C's and a motto NE

OBLIVISCARIS, and another one, on the right part of the end paper, a seal with a coat of arms, bearing the motto BE MINDFUL TO UNITE, under which the name J.(?) Dawson Brodie is written in running script. There is a slightly vague shelf number in the first volume which looks like: W(?) -2297

The interesting thing about this book is that Beckford annotated it in the margins, on the pages, instead of writing on a separate sheet of paper as he was wont to do. There are quite a lot of passages in the book marked by vertical lines in the margins, or by underlinings, which of course are, as such, not with any certainty to be identified as Beckford's markings, but which in so many cases have something written next to them in Beckford's unmistakable handwriting, that it is very likely they are indeed his. Usually Beckford read and annotated his books on separate sheets of paper before sending book and commentary to one of his binders. One can only guess at the reasons why he did otherwise in this case; did he not find the book interesting enough to start reading it immediately? Moreover and interestingly enough, nearly all the - mostly scathing - notes are in the first volume, the second volume containing only two minor notes. Was enough enough, in this case?

Simond was a Frenchman who had been living in the United States of America for twenty years when he embarked on this tour through Great Britain. When Simond, in his Preface, tries to justify his publication by arguing (I, x) that 'no French travels in England had come to his knowledge deserving of notice', and continuing that 'M. Faujas de St. Fond gave all his attention to minerals;' erudite Beckford has underlined this last line, to punish immediately: *Not at all. He wrote about everything.* As if to prove to Simond that he is right, Beckford, on a page where Simond (I, 62) comments on how the bad habit of too much drinking during dinners leads to unavoidable consequences, for example 'that in the corner of the very dining room, there is a certain convenient piece of furniture, to be used by anybody who

wants it' dryly remarks: *Faujas St. Fond has made the same observation.*

And when Simond (I, 63) refers vaguely to Dr Johnson's wrath - during his tour in France when handed a lump of sugar which had been touched by the fingers of a servant - being 'faithfully recorded somewhere', Beckford immediately improves on the author, writing in the margin: *At Edinburgh he had a mind to (?)kill a waiter for this & pitched the glass of lemonade out of the window.*

Simond indeed can do very little good in Beckford's eyes, for when he remarks about the vastness of the country when travelling from Falmouth to London (I, 6) Beckford scathingly remarks: *An American seeing vastness in England.*

Some insight into Beckford's political views may be gained from the commentary that he wrote next to a rather tedious passage by Simond (I, 140) on the British voting system: *The answer to this argument is obvious. In the first place it assumes that influence is a factor not to be got rid of. A pure electorium (?) is one in which the operation of personal as distinguished from the public interests are reduced to a minimum Influence like that of family or name may be consistent with public interests. But the people sh^d judge.*

When Simond (I, 142) tries to defend the English political system by stating that though 'The government of England has been called, by way of reproach, an oligarchy ... most popular governments are in fact oligarchic ... and the authority of all is only that of one, or of a few ...' Beckford curtly remarks: *But the fact was that the people were not represented.*

Another interesting annotation is given by Beckford when Simond argues (I, 144) that for property to be protected efficiently, 'it must be effectually represented; and the first qualification to watch over property, is to have much to lose by the subversion of the established order'. Here Beckford, who no doubt fell into this category, but of whom it is also known that

he was generous towards the less endowed, underlines the words 'much to lose' and writes in the margin: *The phrase is purely relative. A poor man's little is as precious to him as the rich man's wealth. The poor man will be the first to feel taxation.*

When Simond embarks on the process of ageing in trees, stating that 'During another succession of ages the extremities begin to grow thin and perish, -the head becomes bald, -the heart is sound still, but the limb gives way ...' Beckford the Botanist cannot hold himself any longer and bursts out: *The "heart" is not sound you fool.* Very much in the same vein is Beckford's underlining of the two words 'fossil coal' with the pencil note: *what coal is not fossil!*

Neither apparently did Beckford appreciate Simond's social or socio-economic observations. When Simond (I, 417), mentioning Highland regiments still wearing *sans culottes*, remarks rather stupidly that he 'cannot see a Highlander officer appear in women's company, without feeling some sort of confusion', Beckford does not spare him: *This is because you are an ass of the first water.*

And on page 254 Beckford has marked the first three lines, where Simond states rather bluntly that 'there is no risk in predicting, that the population of London will never exceed a million and a half, and the other towns in proportion' and writes in the margin: *There is the greatest risk in making such predictions.* A remark by Simond about rocks which are less interesting to the painter than to the naturalist, is dismissed by Beckford - both a naturalist and great art collector - as *foolish*, and a marked passage about manufacturing towns in the Highlands brings out the following commentary: *This is non- sense. There were no manufacturing towns & villages in the Highlands.*

Almost the last of Beckford's pencil notes proves again how wide his interest and knowledge were. When Simond describes the head and gigantic antlers [in Warwick Castle] of an extinct species of quadruped, the remains of which are found sometimes

in the bogs of Ireland, Beckford simply adds the words: *Irish elk. Cervus antiquus.*

Remembering the none too flattering remarks Beckford made half a century earlier in his *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* about the Dutch, *the walking fish of the Low Countries whose oysterishness of eye and flabbiness of complexion were almost proof of [their] aquatic descent*, how gratifying at least to the new (Dutch) owner of these books must be Beckford's comment on Simond's statement that 'the English succeeded them (the Dutch) as best herring-fishers': No, says Beckford, *The English never came near them.*

Back Where it Belongs or *Vathek's* French Womb

LAURENT CHÂTEL

A few months ago Oxford caught up with William Beckford, as if in a desperate attempt to appropriate a writer who, in fact, cannot be appropriated. Indeed a stupendous collection of fourteen first editions of *Vathek* was displayed in the heart of Oxford at Blackwell's Rare Books Department. Should you have been interested¹, the sole mention of the "Code word: 'Beckford'"² and they were all yours - another proof, as if needed, of the everlasting attempt to codify Beckford!

But Beckford never honoured the University with his presence. Biographers who see through the character never fail to refer to his *private* education in the hands of tutors. 'His mother was against sending him to an English university, "most probably from the dissipation into which a youth of his expectations and vivacious temperament would infallibly be led".'³ The Begum and Beckford's guardians took one decision of considerable significance when they decided not to send him

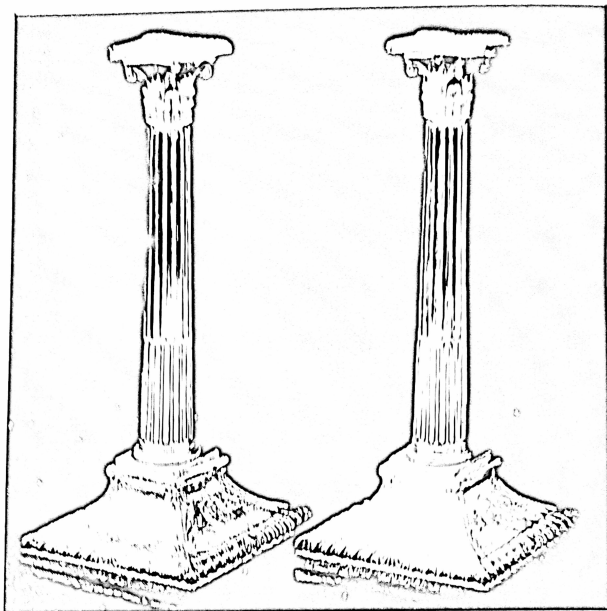
to school. Instead of being thrown into the rough and tumble of an English public school such as Westminster, where his father had been sent, Beckford remained in solitude'.⁴

The tutors, Robert Drysdale and the Reverend John Lettice had nothing Oxonian about them, since Drysdale was educated in Scotland at St. Andrews and Lettice at Sydney Sussex, Cambridge. And yet Oxford was the natural choice for the Beckfords: Alderman William Beckford (1709-1770) attended Balliol College, as did his brother Richard Beckford, and Peter Beckford (1740-1811) of Stepleton matriculated at New College in 1757. Less *natural*, though, is the fact that one of the Alderman's six bastard sons⁵ also went to Balliol; this might explain why the legitimate son never went there: '[His mother] may have been prejudiced by the fact that one of her husband's bastards had gone up to his old College, Balliol. They were all a rotten brood, and, with the Beckford background, she could not be too careful.'⁶

Even today Balliol still boasts its Beckford connection at High Table whenever it displays the 'Beckford Candlesticks'.⁷ But it would not be right to boast a Beckford provenance, for these candlesticks were not a gift from the Alderman's son, an irony worth noting, but from a cousin, also called William, great grandson of Peter Beckford of Jamaica.⁸

It would be fair to say that the only institution that truly got its grip on Beckford is the Bodleian Library which now holds his private papers and writings. The Hamilton estates had been the guardian of these papers since the death of Beckford's daughter, but in 1977 the Duke of Hamilton sold them at Sotheby's (6 July, lot 272).⁹ They were bought by Blackwell's who deposited them with the Bodleian, and finally donated them to the Library in 1984. But Oxford's assimilation has been limited to this. For he always shied away from being swallowed up by categories, academia and institutions.

Thus as soon as these editions were advertised, Oxford's



The Beckford Candlesticks at Balliol College

efforts were outclassed. Professor Bent Juel-Jensen's Oxonian collection of *Vatheks* went for sale and the French swiftly seized on them. A sole mention of the password, and through the dark, Beckfordian-like tunnel, they - in the person of Monsieur Serge Plantureux - retook possession of their due chattels: *Vathek*!

For, as should be constantly remembered, *Vathek's* true roots are in France. First of all, the tale was conceived in French. Why is that? What is it that the French language had which English did not possess?¹⁰ Critics have often seen the use of French as an act of defiance and perhaps even, in those Revolutionary days, as

a sign of dissidence. And it is true that it could have been a 'mask' behind which Beckford chose to hide his oddities and idiosyncracies. But in my opinion, Beckford did not mean *Vathek* to be simply defiant. For him it was a way of asserting his singularity, peculiarity and difference. For it is assertion and authority for which Beckford's character always craved. And there is something odd and idiosyncratic about *Vathek* - the work seems to be an *ex nihilo* creation: 'Although informed by scholarship, *Vathek* has no original, and the story which Beckford attaches to him is entirely his own composition.'¹¹

It is circular and self-referential - an act of art for art's sake *avant la lettre*. Beckford's work marked indeed one of the first contributions to the Romantic cult of idiosyncrasy. So the use of French was part of Beckford's peculiarity. And this is the reason why he decided to write it in *French*. In fact, he probably did not make a self-conscious decision; however ungrammatical it may be at times, Beckford's French actually came naturally to him: it was not an artificial hide-out, or a conspicuous act of rebellion. *Vathek* could only have been written in *another* language, the language of Beckford's *own* world, his *self-taught* language: French. It is not that French was the *only* language that could capture the otherness of the story. But as a performative literary assertion of *différence*, it was. It made sense that *Vathek* come out in French only, at first.

The use of French was also meant to make *Vathek* a pure and sacred work, unsullied by the English tongue and pseudo-oriental English tales. The sole fact that *Vathek* was 'Frenchified', to use a Beckfordian term¹², made it a serious enterprise. It is worthwhile underlining the seriousness of a work¹³, whose linguistic and literary *performativity* meant a lot to Beckford's esoteric and spiritual experimentation. For Beckford there is no doubt that his work was, if not sacred, sacrilegious - on a par with God's creation¹⁴ (as *The Long Story* had been): 'You ought to be extremely cautious to whom you

show the long Story, for certain I am the greatest number of readers would despise, ridicule or make neither head nor Tail of it... All that concerns the Sanctuary is too *solemn* and *sacred* to be prophaned.¹⁵

It is clear that *Vathek* was not intended to come out in English *first*. However, as is well-known, the originality of Beckford's enterprise was sullied by Henley's profanation of the initial project in 1786: the effect was spoiled. And Beckford could only deem *Vathek* to be truly born when it came out purified in Lausanne and Paris in French (in its unadulterated version). Henley's treachery even threw suspicion on Beckford's authorship and the original language of the tale - enough suspicion, in fact, for literary history to forget about Beckford.¹⁶ Gladly, it did not, but asserting Beckford's authorship and literarity today is still an uphill battle. Which shows that Henley's duplicity did succeed in desecrating Beckford's sacred project: *Vathek et Les Episodes*.¹⁷

So the use of French was not an artificial veneer, or a 'mask' but a natural propensity, a perfect match to the contents of the story itself. Rather than seeing it as another sign of provocation, I would interpret it as a means for Beckford to subdue his oddity and to make it his *own* - what is called in French *une mise en sourdine*. Stylistically, writing in French enabled a distancing effect, a wit and caustic irony which many critics have traced back to Voltaire and Anthony Hamilton's tales. When critics imagine Beckford to be a hyperbolic or bombastic writer, they speak without any knowledge of the texts themselves. When other critics highlight Beckford's humble prose, they are right but do not always justify their argument. Professor Lonsdale, however, did specify: 'Potential melodrama and horror are almost invariably undermined and deflated by Beckford's detached, urbane, and often comic tone... Many of Beckford's stylistic effects, his fondness for zeugma and bathos, the frequent deflationary touches at the end of paragraphs, the ludicrous

hyperboles, as well as much of the comic tone as a whole, can be related more closely to Hamilton than to any earlier fiction.¹⁸

I would add that there is indeed a form of restraint in Beckford's prose; by that is certainly not meant 'constraint', but rather containment and placidity of a prose, which, despite its wild and romantic dreams, remained terse. As an example, this description: 'Le palais nommé *Délices des Yeux*, ou le *Support de la Mémoire*, était un enchantement continuel. Des raretés, rassemblées de tous les coins du monde, s'y trouvaient en profusion et dans le bel ordre.'¹⁹ is more staid than this one: 'The Palace named *The Delight of the Eyes*, or *The Support of Memory*, was one entire enchantment. Rarities, collected from every corner of the earth were there found in such profusion as to dazzle and confound, but for the order in which they were arranged.'²⁰

From the point of view of the content of the story, the use of French seems to me also hardly escapable. There are a number of elements that French made possible, two of which I mention here. It secured the work's dissidence by allowing for possible hints at Beckford's homosexuality, as a doctoral dissertation pointed out a few years ago.²¹ Homosexuality was not so *risqué* in eighteenth-century French literature²² and also, only the French language could have conveyed the ambiguities in gender which Beckford could not fail to enjoy and which Henley's translation into English did not contain.

But above all, it secured the tale's orientalism. For orientalism was French; it had been naturalised by the French. Writing in French inscribed *Vathek* in the wake of an oriental tradition which English literature lacked. *Vathek* and the *Suite de contes arabes* transport the reader into the narrated world of the *Mille et une nuits*. Here again there was nothing 'picturesque' about it; it was not a décor, but a sign of what Byron praised as 'the exactness of costume', which his knowledge of oriental matters had made possible. Indeed the scholarship that underlies

Vathek is mostly French. If one lists all the references that make up the Notes to *Vathek*, one finds a majority of works written in French, even if they were sometimes read in translation. I will

VI



Portrait de William Beckford d'après Joshua Reynold.

56 William Beckford. *Vathek*.

Collection de 15 exemplaires exceptionnels des éditions publiées du vivant de l'auteur.
Lausanne, Paris, Londres, 1786-1834.

"Un fastueux gentilhomme anglais fit un jour œuvre d'écrivain français, et enrichit notre littérature d'une manière de chef-d'œuvre avec *Vathek*, conte arabe.

La publication de *Vathek*, en 1787, ne suscita aucun intérêt; pas même celui d'une curiosité d'honnête et bon aloi. En eût-elle suscité, ce que rien ne prouve, vingt-cinq années de révolutions et de guerres expliqueraient de reste le silence et l'oubli.

Singulière destinée que celle de ce petit roman dont la naissance a longtemps paru prodigieuse sur la foi de ces mots de l'auteur: je l'ai écrit dans une seule séance et en français, en trois jours et deux nuits de grand travail.

Ce serait en effet un assez joli tour de force, de la part d'un jeune homme de vingt ans.

[Plus exactement], ayant réuni une dizaine d'amis dans sa somptueuse résidence de Fonthill, transformée pour la circonstance en une sorte de palais enchanté, il s'était plongé avec eux, pendant les trois jours de Christmas 1781, toutes fenêtres et portes closes, dans la plus extravagante orgie.

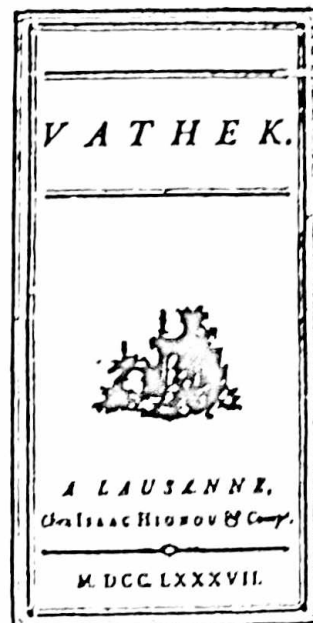
C'est au sortir de cette réclusion, et tout imprégné encore de son atmosphère d'exaltation émotion poétique, que Beckford se mit à l'œuvre et réussit à achever *Vathek* en plusieurs mois de travail inspiré.

Singulière destinée que celle de *Vathek*. Ignoré en France, *Vathek* fut présenté à Londres ainsi que l'avait été auparavant l'inoubliable *Château d'Otrante*. *Vathek* devint la traduction d'un de ces livres de l'Orient fabuleux qui ont pué leur inspiration au génie même d'une race et qui ont pour auteur un peuple tout entier.

Singulière destinée que celle de ce livre auquel Mérimée s'intéressa au point d'en vouloir donner une édition et qui dut, finalement sa résurrection à l'enthousiasme fervent de Mallarmé" (José Corti, préface à l'édition de 1946).

"L'histoire de *Vathek* est l'un des romans les plus étranges et les plus difficiles à classer du XVIII^e siècle. Au fil des épisodes alternent les scènes de force, de sadisme. Les vingt dernières pages du récit, d'une écriture mulotienne (mais on pense aussi au Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse de Poulgny), font apparaître en un final grandiose et fantastique le domaine souterrain d'Eblis: lieu enchanté où les audacieux, après avoir accédé à la connaissance suprême deviennent bientôt des damnés au regard phosphorescent, errant dans d'immenses salles et des corridors pareils à ceux de Fonthill...

L'innéaire de *Vathek* est celui qui conduit à la damnation un homme possédé du désir de jouir et de savoir" (Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française I, 225).



only refer to the major ones: Galland's *Mille et Une Nuits* (1706); D'Herbelot de Molainville, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tout ce qui regarde la connaissance des Peuples de l'Orient*, Paris, 1697; *Fleur d'Epine* et autres contes d'Hamilton; Pétis de la Croix, *Les Mille et un jours, Contes persans* (1710); Jean Chardin, *Voyages...en Perse, et autres lieux de l'Orient* (1711); Jean Frédéric Bernard, *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the various Nations of the Known World*, (originally published in French in 1723-43); George Sale, *The Koran, Commonly called The Alcoran of Mohammed*, trans. into English (1734); N.A. Boulanger, *Recherches sur l'origine du despotisme oriental* (1761); J. F. de la Croix, *Anecdotes arabes et musulmanes* (1772); Habesci's *Manuscript of The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, translated by Alexander Ghiga (1784). The list is too long for me to be comprehensive. It attests to Beckford's wide range of reading. These French texts are the womb which Beckford created for himself and out of which came *Vathek* and other oriental tales.

How, then, could the French not honour properly an author which half belongs to them! When in turn Serge Plantureux offered the editions for sale in Paris a few weeks later, he bestowed great honour on Beckford's sensual and sensuous story by producing a sumptuous entry in his catalogue²³, *Les cinq sens*, of which part is shown above.

¹May I point out the cost of these editions was £ 10,000.

²Blackwell's Rare Books, Cat B114, "Please Quote Catalogue B114 When Ordering, Codeword: 'Beckford'", 1.

³Alexander, Boyd. *England's Wealthiest Son*, London: Centaur Press, 1962, 60 (the quotation is from Redding, *Manuscript*, i. 79).

⁴Jack, Malcolm Ed. *Vathek and Other Stories. A William Beckford Reader*, London: William Pickering, 1993. xi.

⁵Lees-Milne, James, *William Beckford*, Tisbury: Compton Russell, 1976, 11.

⁶Alexander, op. cit., 60.

⁷On the bases of these four candlesticks are the words: 'D.D.Gulielmus Beckford A.M. Filius Unicus Richardi Beckford Armigeri de Insula Jamaica et hujus Collegii Socio Commensalis A.D. 1765' They were made by William Watkins in 1771. (Height 12½ inches; London marks.) The fluted Corinthian columns are on square gadroon filled bases with leaf ornament at the corners. Reproduced by permission of Dr. Jasper Griffin, Balliol College.

⁸He was in fact son of Richard Beckford (1712-1756) [arm. Balliol Coll. matric 15 Jan 1727-8, aged 15; University College BA 1731, of the Middle Temple 1730, also an Alderman of London], one of the Alderman's brothers. It is interesting to note that this William (1745-?) matriculated at Balliol on 17 March 1762, was created MA 6 April 1765 and would have been living during our William Beckford's lifetime. See Chapman's genealogical tree in *Beckford* (1937) and Foster's *Peerage* (1879).

⁹Alexander, Boyd, 'The Sale of the Beckford Papers' in *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 July 1977, 833.

¹⁰Mallarmé himself was very much puzzled by this feature: 'Selon quelle très mystérieuse influence, celle sue qui du tout au tout transmuait un séjour, le livre fut-il écrit en Français? parenthèse que ne comble aucun vestige dans les notes laissées ou les propos retenus. Autant que la nécessité de puisser aux quelques ouvrages...sources à peu près de tout l'appareil ancien oriental, un usage sûr de notre langue, apprise tôt à Londres et pratiquée dans la société parisienne et trois ans à Genève, explique les motifs ou le don qu'eut l'écrivain de la choisir. Le fait général du recours à un autre parler que le natal, pour se délivrer, par un écrit de l'obsession régnant sur toute une jeunesse: renoncez à y voir mieux que l'espèce de solennité avec quoi il fallut s'asseoir à une tâche de caractère unique, ell. différente de tout qui allait être la vie.' (my emphasis) in Préface de 1876 à *Vathek*, Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1893, xvi-xvii.

¹¹Blackwell's Rare Books, op. cit., 6.

¹²As we wound along the aisles, the sounds of harmony came peeling from the recesses of the subterrene* / *Note: I have made bold with this frenchified expression. (*Beckford's note.*)' in *The Long Story*, published as *The Vision*, Ed. Guy Chapman, London: Constable & Co., 1930, 38. Beckford apologises for 'making bold of this frenchified expression'. In using it, I wish to emphasise Beckford's boldness in *Vathek*.

¹³This is *literally* what Didier Girard did: 'Sulfureuse, curieuse, souvent incomprise, toujours présente dans les bibliothèques sans jamais être devenue populaire, la bombe *Vathek* est à retardement. Rarement un livre a donné naissance à autant d'anecdotes, d'interprétations et de rebondissements.

Vathek est un livre sérieux et si son auteur le décrit comme une fantaisie, il faut savoir que la fantaisie, ici, n'est pas vraiment drôle... Mais Vathek est un livre sérieux: Beckford, à 22 ans, jouissait d'une connaissance stupéfiante dans le domaine des coutumes et des philosophies orientales.' in D. Girard, *William Beckford: terroriste au palais de la raison*, Paris: José Corti, 1993, 90-92.

¹⁴Parreaux naturally referred to the sacrilegious aspect of Beckford's creativity [André Parreaux, *William Beckford*, Paris: Nizet, 1960, 208-209]. As for accounting for the use of French, he wrote: 'Pourquoi ce choix délibéré du français comme moyen d'expression dans ce genre particulier? Faut-il y voir une persistance de la tradition orientaliste française?... Ou encore l'orientalisme apparaissait-il à notre auteur comme la manifestation d'une dissidence qui ne pouvait trouver une expression pleinement appropriée dans sa langue nationale? Autrement dit, quelle est l'origine de cette impulsion étrange et tenace qui poussa Beckford, sa vie durant, à rédiger en français tous les contes d'inspiration arabe-tandis qu'il composait en anglais ses autres ouvrages et qu'une partie importante de sa correspondance était écrite en italien? Il n'est possible de répondre à cette question que par des hypothèses ou des conjectures. Beckford n'ayant jamais jugé utile de s'expliquer sur ce point.' (my emphasis) in Parreaux, op. cit., 137-138.

¹⁵Letter to Alexander Cozens, Geneva, Dec. 25th 1777. 'What may very well be called a Dedication.' in MS. Beckford c.28, fol. 117.

¹⁶Henley's preface in 1786 implies the tale is in the Arabic tongue. I hope to publish a few more remarks on the *extent* of Henley's treachery soon.

¹⁷A French publisher produced a choice edition of *Vathek* and *The Episodes*: see *Vathek et les Episodes*, Ed. J.B. Brunius, Paris: Stock, 1948, 1948. *Les Episodes* had come out with *Vathek* in Britain in French in 1929, though; see *Vathek with the Episodes of Vathek*, Ed. Chapman, CUP, 1929.

¹⁸Lonsdale, Roger, Introduction to *Vathek*, Oxford: OUP, 1970, xxv-xxvii.

¹⁹*Vathek et les Episodes*, Paris: Stock, 1948, 70.

²⁰*Vathek*, op. cit., 2.

²¹Farrell, John T., *A Reinterpretation of the Major Literary Works of William Beckford*, Drexel University, Philadelphia (University Microfilms), 1984.

²²Lees-Milne, James, 'A Reinterpretation...' in *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter*, Ed. Jon Millington, Spring 1985, 4.

²³Reproduced with the permission of the author, Serge Plantureux, 61 Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, 75009 Paris. As I was submitting this article, he assured me the *Vatheks* were still in residence in Paris, unsold.

Cyrus Redding: Beckford's First Biographer

JON MILLINGTON

Beckford's delight can be imagined when he turned to the literature column in the *Bath Guardian* for 12 July 1834. There he read a review of his newly-published *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal* which began, 'This work is from the pen of our accomplished fellow citizen, Mr Beckford who has long been distinguished in the world of letters, if not by the quantity of his productions, by the far more important adjunct of their high quality.' William Smith, his London printseller, chanced to hear him comment, 'Good heaven, here is one man that really understands me. He has caught the very best parts of my Italy, and I would give the world to know who he is. Can you find out for me? It is really a good work, though of my own production, but I don't think the fools of the present day are able to appreciate it. This man's criticism gives me a better idea of modern literature. As Pope said of Dr Johnson, no matter who he is, he will soon be déterré'¹

As it happened, Beckford found out by other means that the reviewer was Cyrus Redding, editor of the weekly *Bath Guardian* since its inception in the February of that year. When he later asked to see the Tower on Lansdown, Beckford sent his carriage for him, and so began a friendship which lasted until Beckford's death nine years later and resulted in Redding's life of him.

Cyrus Redding was born at Falmouth in 1785, the son of a Baptist minister. At the age of twenty-one, he settled briefly in London and began work as a journalist. After returning to the West Country in 1808, he spent the years 1815-18 in Paris as editor of *Galignani's Messenger*. From 1821 to 1830, he was the working editor and a major contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine* which was nominally edited by Thomas Campbell.²

This was followed by two years as editor of another literary monthly, the *Metropolitan*, which failed in 1833, the year when his best-known book, *A History and Description of Modern Wines*, using information acquired while he was in France, was published. For a time he turned to provincial journalism, as first editor of the *Bath Guardian* during 1834-5, and after this he was persuaded to set up and edit another new paper, the *Staffordshire Examiner*, which he did for the next five years.

For the rest of his life Redding mainly devoted his energies to writing anecdotal books about the notable people he had met during his journalistic career. The autobiographical *Fifty Years' Recollections* of 1858 was the most successful of these and went into three editions in his lifetime. When he died in 1870 at the age of 86, the *Illustrated London News* was one of the periodicals carrying an obituary of him. Another was *Notes and Queries* which observed, 'It is not surprising that in later years this industrious writer and ready conversationalist, outliving his contemporaries, should have moved in a small circle, but the name of Cyrus Redding will not be forgotten as one of the hard labourers in the annals of literature.'³

This, in brief, was the man who was one of the elderly Beckford's few visitors, and his rambling biography and other reminiscences, repetitive and even contradictory though they are, remain indispensable sources of information. Over a period of more than twenty years, Cyrus Redding wrote about Beckford on four occasions, the first being when he contributed some recollections⁴ and an account of the Tower⁵ to the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1844. His two volume *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill. Author of "Vathek."*⁶ eventually appeared in 1859, soon after *Fifty Years' Recollections*⁷ which contained a chapter on Beckford, as did *Past Celebrities whom I Have Known*⁸ in 1866.

Although Cyrus Redding's articles for the *New Monthly Magazine* are the liveliest of all his pieces on Beckford, they are

by no means the chronological account that might be expected in an obituary. The first was accompanied by a round stipple engraving by Freeman after the portrait of Beckford, now lost, by Piat Sauvage that had previously been engraved for the *European Magazine* of September 1797. 'The Tower of the Caliph' was signed Nerke, but Redding acknowledged his authorship later in *Fifty Years' Recollections*.⁹ This article was written as if by a trespasser to Beckford's Tower, and Redding reprinted it almost verbatim in his *Memoirs of William Beckford*.¹⁰

At this point it should be mentioned that four further articles under the title 'Conversations with the late W. Beckford, Esq.' and numbered III, IV, V and VI appeared in the next volume of the *New Monthly Magazine*.¹¹ Clearly they are not by Redding too, being written in a quite different style. Numbers III (signed H), IV and V form a continuous account and are undoubtedly by the same author who, from internal evidence, was a middle-aged gentleman living near Bath with a daughter and an artistic son of about twenty-five. Yet Boyd Alexander attributed No. III to Redding¹² while Oliver credited to him a quotation from No. IV about Beckford's reasons for not wanting to meet Byron.¹³ This same quotation, but not attributed to Redding, appeared in *Beckford*¹⁴ by Guy Chapman who, in the introductory Memoir to his edition of the *Travel-Diaries*, referred to six articles in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1844 by three different contributors: 'All three obviously stood in terror of their host, whose conversation as reported, though this, of course, may be due to the fault of the recorder, was neither brilliant nor witty and was also extremely redundant. The same stories appear in each account.'¹⁵

Conversation No. VI was signed by W.H.H, who was William Henry Harrison, author of *Jennings' Landscape Annual or Tourist in Portugal*, 1839, indirectly mentioned in the 'Conversation' and a work Beckford had in his library.¹⁶ Further

confirmation of the authorship of No. VI occurs when Harrison said he gave Beckford a short satire of his on Queen Victoria's visit to the City of London. This poem, published by Jennings in 1837, was *A Royal Dream of the Ninth of November* by the Wooden Spoon, known to be a pseudonym of Harrison.

Boyd Alexander made extensive use of what he called Redding's Manuscript in *England's Wealthiest Son* where he said, 'Evidently Beckford's daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, took strong exception to it for its revelation of her father's character. In many sections she made Redding substitute colourless slabs which are a mere hashing-up of Beckford's books, and she presumably bought the original manuscript off him to ensure its suppression.'¹⁷ This misled the cataloguer of Sotheby's sale in 1977 of the Beckford Papers (which included Redding's Manuscript) who went so far as to say that Redding's *Memoirs of William Beckford* were published in a bowdlerised version by the Duchess.¹⁸

Redding disclosed his side of the story in *Yesterday and Today*, a three volume sequel to *Fifty Years' Recollections*. He said that after completing his 'Recollections of the Author of "Vathek"' for the *New Monthly Magazine*, he called on Henry Colburn, then the publisher of the magazine. Colburn asked him if he thought he could produce a short biography of Beckford, adding that there would probably not be sufficient material to fill more than two small volumes. Redding accepted the commission on condition that he could use anything he had already written on Beckford, and that not a line should go to press without his supervision. This was intended to ensure that no offence should be caused to any of Beckford's relatives particularly the Duchess of Hamilton. The completed biography was presented to Colburn in 1846 and this was the last Redding heard of it, although he often asked him whether it was yet ready for the printers.¹⁹ When Colburn died in 1855, Redding realised that he must have clandestinely sold the biography to the Duchess who may

already have suppressed a fictional and scurrilous life of Beckford by an unknown author.

Thus it was that Redding's Manuscript found its way into the Beckford Papers at Hamilton Palace, and to this day it remains among these Papers, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.²⁰ It would be a splendid contribution to Beckford studies if the Manuscript were now published. Having been cheated by Colburn, Redding had no alternative but to write his biography anew and it appeared in 1859. Coincidentally, the Duchess of Hamilton died later that year.

Meanwhile, Redding was also at work on *Fifty Years' Recollections*, published in 1858 amidst muted acclaim from such venerable monthlies as the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Their seven page review ended with some extracts on Beckford, and this observation, 'The most interesting portion of Mr Redding's third volume is that occupied by his anecdotes of Beckford. He had good opportunities of becoming acquainted with this eccentric Croesus.'²¹

Many anecdotes about Beckford from Redding's articles for the *New Monthly Magazine* understandably reappeared in *Fifty Years' Recollections*, but there was fresh material too, including references to two books by Redding in Beckford's library. These were the *History of Wines* and *Gabrielle*, an early poem of 1829 about the Swiss mountains which Redding presented to Beckford a few days before leaving Bath in 1835, bringing forth the acknowledgement, 'Mr Beckford will feel much pleasure in looking over this fervid and most impressive little poem with its author, any morning (between twelve and two) that might happen to suit Mr Redding's convenience.' When Redding came, Beckford went over the poem, which had been praised by Campbell and Rogers, and urged him to reissue it for the benefit of a wider public.²² Beckford's admiration of some, at least, of Redding's work makes it all the more surprising that none of it is to be found in the catalogue of the Beckford Library Sale of

1882-3. Perhaps it was disposed of before the sale or withheld for some reason.

Redding must have been very discouraged by the critical reception of his *Memoirs of William Beckford* in December 1858. The Athenæum said, 'As an authority, this book is quite worthless. There is no art in its construction. You might as well call a hodman an architect, as this writer an author.'²³ It should be added that this review was equally hostile to Beckford, as was that in the *Saturday Review* where Redding was described as a penny-a-liner whose prose style was flatulent.²⁴ Richard Garnett called *Memoirs* 'a most intolerable piece of bookmaking.'²⁵ Lewis Melville unwisely quoted this opinion in his *Life and Letters of William Beckford*²⁶ which moved Guy Chapman to make a marginal note in his copy: 'This volume, seeing the material at the disposal of the author, is even more intolerable.'

Admittedly Redding organised the available material badly, and a biography is hardly the place to reprint lengthy extracts from the subject's own works. For example, in the second volume he devoted more than fifty pages to portions of *Modern Novel Writing* and *Azemias*. But it must be said in his defence that he did not have access to the Beckford Papers and was primarily a journalist; moreover he had had to write the same book a second time when he was over seventy. Also, John Britton, Henry Goodridge, Henry Venn Lansdown and the others who knew Beckford well at some period in his long life have added far less to our understanding of him than has Cyrus Redding.

Why he should have felt he had anything further to say about Beckford after what he had already written remains a mystery. Presumably Charles Skeet, publisher of *Fifty Years' Recollections* and *Memoirs of William Beckford*, asked him for yet another book of anecdotes, and *Past Celebrities whom I Have Known* was the result. Here Beckford found himself among a varied assortment of notables, including Canning, Turner, Hazlitt, Cobden and Haydon. After fifty-five pages on

Beckford, Redding ingenuously referred to his *Memoirs* in a final paragraph, 'there is a Life of Mr Beckford, published in 1859, which contains nearly all the known circumstances of his life. It is not probable more will now be known from reliable authority, because almost all those who knew anything of the living man must have departed for that bourn whence no wisdom, knowledge, nor device returneth.'²⁷

¹Cyrus Redding, *Fifty Years' Recollections*, 1858, Vol. 3, p. 120.

²S.C. Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life*, 1883, Vol. 1, p. 315.

³*Notes and Queries*, 4th Series, Vol. 5, p. 550, (4 June 1870).

⁴'Recollections of the Author of "Vathek"', *New Monthly Magazine* 71 (June & July 1844), pp. 143-158, 302-319.

⁵'The Tower of the Caliph', *New Monthly Magazine* 71 (August 1844), pp. 457-466.

⁶*Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill. Author of "Vathek."* London: C.J. Skeet, 1859. 2 vols. 352, 402 pp.

⁷*Fifty Years' Recollections, Literary and Personal, With Observations on Men and Things.* London: C. J. Skeet, 1858. 3 vols. Beckford in vol. 3, pp. 87-124.

⁸*Past Celebrities whom I Have Known.* London: C.J. Skeet, 1866. Beckford in vol. 1, pp. 292-347.

⁹Vol. 3, p. 87.

¹⁰Vol. 2, pp. 261-278.

¹¹Vol. 72, (Sept-Dec 1844), pp. 18-24, 212-221, 418-427 & 516-522.

¹²Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, p. 296, note 26.

¹³J.W. Oliver, *Life of William Beckford*, 1932, p. 287.

¹⁴Guy Chapman, *Beckford*, 1937, p. 285.

¹⁵Guy Chapman, Ed., *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*, 1928, Vol. 1, p. lv, note 1.

¹⁶Sotheby, *Catalogue of the Second Portion of the Beckford Library removed from Hamilton Palace*, 1882, Lot 574.

¹⁷Alexander, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁸Sotheby, *Catalogue of Valuable Autograph Letters, etc.*, 5-6 July 1977, p. 150.

¹⁹Cyrus Redding, *Yesterday and To-day*, London: T Cautley Newby, 1863, Vol. 3, pp. 33-35.

²⁰MSS. Beckford c.85-6.

²¹*Gentleman's Magazine* 204, (Jan-June 1858), p. 494, (May).

²²Vol. 3, pp. 92 and 106.

²³*The Athenæum*, 11 Dec 1858, pp. 749-752.

²⁴*Saturday Review*, 18 Dec 1858, pp. 618-9.

²⁵D.N.B. obituary of Beckford, p. 85.

²⁶Lewis Melville, *Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 1910, p. vii.

²⁷*Past Celebrities whom I Have Known*. Vol. 1. pp. 346-347.

Westphalian Delights

MALCOLM JACK

Beckford round tables have become something of an institution at the four-yearly Enlightenment Congress. Beginning at Budapest in 1987, where the emphasis was on the Gothic, the round table at Bristol and Bath in 1991 had travel as its theme while Munster, in the heart of Westphalia, proved the unlikely venue to consider Beckford and the avant-garde in the sweltering days of July, 1995.

Before the afternoon proceedings began and the cunning eschatology of Kenneth Graham unfolded (heaven first, then hell), we listened to his warm tribute to Devendra Varma whom all Beckfordians will remember for his inspiring 'performances' (lectures are too staid a word to describe these events) and his unstintingly generous contributions to Beckford studies in particular as well as to English literature in general. We missed Devendra's genial presence, his sometimes impish and original interventions, his enormous sense of fun.

Elinor Shaffer began the afternoon's work with an appropriately locally-flavoured paper tracing Beckford's connections with Germany and things German. Her intention was to balance the view of Beckford as a 'Southerniser' by showing his important role in northern antiquities and, *en route* to stress the importance of his *Biographical Memoirs* in the

development of disciplined art history. She was followed by a lively and stimulating paper on colour (or lack of it) by Laurent Châtel who dextrously guided us through Beckford's dark, poetic landscape, with its forbidding black and white effects, suggesting that Beckford was applying Cozens' methods in art to literature. The time had come too, he added, to re-assess the relationship of Beckford and de Louthembourg, showing how it was the patron who influenced the artist as much as the other way around. From landscape on recognisable terrain, we were taken on a photo-real, extra-terrestrial tour by Kevin Cope. From the flight deck of the Copean space ship, we had to deal with space warps, dense energies and UF0s and crossed vistas that looked remarkably like the Nevada desert. On the journey, the inflight film consisted of contemporary Beckford newspaper clippings with fascinating illustrated marginalia ingeniously excavated by Kevin from the Oxford papers.

It was time to catch breath, to don darker garments and begin the descent into hell. This Dantean task was admirably started by Syndy Conger whose lecture on maternal negotiations with the underworld began to show us worlds where women could be as wicked as only women can be. Syndy traced parallels and differences in the maternal relations of Beckford in *Vathek* and Mary Shelley in *Proserpine*; universal gloom, necrophiliac undertones -- a total loss of domestic bliss and perfection soon engulfed us. Now deeply in the pit of Eblis, we were led on by the present reviewer into the alienated, frightening world of the *Episodes* where evil, universal and ineluctable, also seems pointless and where the imagery of the Arab tale only fleetingly obscures the surreal and desperate plight of modern man. It was left to John 'Sindbad' Garret to darken the scene further in a vertiginous *tour de force*, in which dream, fantasy, self eroticism and blasphemy made up a heady, dazzling cocktail of immoralities and amoralties. Superimposed on all this was his metaphor of *Vathek* as onanist: any idea that Beckford did not

belong to the most 'avant' of the avant-garde was dispelled by a giant, self-propelled vision of erection with which the startled assembly was left.

Ending on such a graphic note should not make me forget to mention the civilised presence of Michel Baridon, a true friend of Beckford, and that of Elke Heinemann whose charm and insights bring a welcome German representation to the Beckford community. Finally it would be remiss not to thank Kenneth Graham for making it all possible and for bringing an authoritative but lightly-worn presidency to our proceedings.

William Beckford and Music: 5. The Fonthill Abbey Organ?

ERIC DARTON

Some eleven years ago, writing about the Fonthill Splendens organ¹ I showed that the instrument had not, as was generally believed, been bought by the Prince Regent at the 1801 Splendens sale, as he never completed the purchase, but by Lord Pomfret at the 1807 sale. After being in his possession at Easton Neston for ten years, he had presented it to Towcester parish church, where it had remained (being rebuilt and enlarged) until 1979. After being vandalised it was removed and given to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it awaits restoration.

In conclusion I discussed briefly the possibility of there having been an organ in the Abbey, and that despite William Beckford's intention in this regard, this seemed unlikely. Since then, although no further evidence has been forthcoming, it does seem appropriate to consider more fully why a belief in this instrument arose and to a certain extent persists.

There is no doubt that Beckford meant to install an organ in the Abbey. John Rutter stated that it was originally intended to

place 'the organ over the Tribune between the Chapel and the Hall.'² The Great Western Hall was then planned as a refectory and the Octagon as a chapel. With the enlargement of the Abbey, it was decided to place the organ over the entrance to the Eastern Transept. Rutter referred to 'the Music Gallery and the Organ Loft, pannelled with golden lattice, on grounds of scarlet damask.'³ and 'the beautiful front of the Music Gallery...over which ... is the Organ Loft, constructed in the manner of an ancient altar screen.'⁴ This is shown in the engravings of the view looking east across the Octagon.⁵

John Britton, who was at the Abbey in 1822 during the same period as Rutter, wrote, 'the soft solemn organ sends its mellow tones through the echoing galleries',⁶ but no one else who visited the Abbey at that or any other time makes such a reference. Rutter gave considerable information as to the Abbey's contents, but did not mention an organ. He said that the Eastern Transept was in an 'unfinished state'⁷ and that the 'Organ Screen...had been recently erected'.⁸ The Abbey was sold in 1823, and this does make the installation of an instrument improbable at this late stage.

Britton's remarks appear to result from a 'romantic' idea and were possibly based on hearsay. In 1859, Cyrus Redding, who first met Beckford in 1834 and had never been to the Abbey wrote, 'the organ sending its deep prolonged music along the perspective of the immense galleries'.⁹ Some hundred years later Boyd Alexander said, 'the organ... reverberated down the empty, candle-lit galleries'.¹⁰ It is fair to say that these two statements appear to have been derived from Britton's and that without his original reference they were unlikely to have been made.

In December 1825 the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that when the tower fell it destroyed 'the Hall, the whole of the Octagon, and [a] great part of the Galleries, North and South, together with the first crimson room ... leaving the grand entrance standing, with the organ in *statu quo*'.¹¹ Two months

later the journal said, 'The painted windows are all taken out, and the organ, etc. etc. are removing to London.'¹² This raises a question. There may indeed have been an organ in the Hall, but nothing has been heard of it since its removal 'to London'. John Buckler's 1825 drawing of Fonthill in ruins¹³ shows the extent of the damage and it is questionable whether any instrument could have survived, especially when it was said that at the time of the fall 'Such was the concussion in the interior of the building, that one man was forced along a passage, as if he had been in an air-gun, to the distance of 30ft.'¹⁴

Outside the actual Beckford literature there are various references which are of interest. Andrew Freeman in his 1937 article on the Splendens organ, although stating that the Fonthill organ came from the Alderman's new house, went on to say, 'It is true that there were organs - or, at least, an organ - in the Abbey, for there was an organ gallery in the Octagon (and so presumably an organ)'.¹⁵ Michael Wilson wrote in 1968 that 'The organ from Fonthill which is now in Towcester Church did not come from Beckford's new Fonthill Abbey but from old Fonthill House which he caused to be demolished.'¹⁶ He also said, 'We are not surprised to learn that Fonthill Abbey ... contained an organ; on the contrary, the absence of an organ at Fonthill would have been far more surprising.'¹⁷ Both these statements are to the effect that in the absence of any other evidence, it is more likely to be so than not!

Nikolaus Pevsner stated in 1973 that the Splendens organ then in Towcester church came from 'the house of Lord Mayor Beckford,' but says that 'Lord Pomfret bought it at the Fonthill Abbey sale.'¹⁸ *Collins Guide to Parish Churches* referred to the 'Organ once at Fonthill Abbey.'¹⁹ It is apparent that a good deal of confusion exists in this matter. The Fonthill organ, although from Splendens and sold at the 1807 sale there, is believed by some to have been sold at one of the Abbey sales and is therefore thought to have been from the Abbey.

The delay in the completion of building work at the Abbey, Beckford's precarious financial position and the impending sale of the Abbey must have all conspired to frustrate Beckford's intention to install an organ. The belief in the instrument appears to rest on one or two statements (which have been picked up by more than one writer) general confusion between the earlier Splendens sales and the later Abbey sales and a degree of wishful thinking. Rather than the tones of 'the soft and solemn organ' we would have been more likely to have heard the sounds of the harpsichord or piano, both of which were in the Abbey, and the music of Haydn or Mozart, composers much favoured by Beckford.

¹Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter, Spring 1985, pp. 6-8.

²John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and Its Abbey*, 1823, p. 111.

³ibid. p. 20.

⁴ibid. p. 27.

⁵ibid. pl. 4 & 9.

⁶John Britton, *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, p. 47.

⁷Rutter, op. cit., p. 61.

⁸ibid. p. 28.

⁹Cyrus Redding, *Manuscript*, 1846, vol. 2, p. 30, quoted in Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, p. 172.

¹⁰Boyd Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 1957, p. 25.

¹¹*Gentleman's Magazine*, 95 pt. 2 (July-Dec 1825), p. 557, (Dec).

¹²ibid., 96 pt. 1 (Jan-June 1926), p. 123, (Feb).

¹³Terence Davis, *The Gothick Taste*, 1974, pp. 110 & 111.

¹⁴H.A.N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 1956, p. 181.

¹⁵Andrew Freeman, 'The Beckford (Fonthill) Organ at Towcester Parish Church' in *Musical Opinion*, June 1937, pp. 18 & 19.

¹⁶Michael Wilson, *The English Chamber Organ*, 1968, Note 1, pp. 18 & 19.

¹⁷ibid. p. 18.

¹⁸Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire*, 1973, p. 434.

¹⁹John Betjeman, ed., *Collins Guide to Parish Churches of England and Wales*, 1980, p. 330.

Some French Purchases by William Beckford

JOHN WHITEHEAD

*'Mylord Beckford est, dit-on, un amateur très curieux de réunir chez lui tout ce qu'il a de plus parfait en productions d'art et de manufactures.'*¹

Although many of William Beckford's purchases of French works of art are well recorded, two aspects of his collecting mania remain relatively unknown to Beckford enthusiasts, namely those of Savonnerie carpets and Sèvres porcelain.

Pierre Verlet has amply documented Beckford's purchases of two carpets specially woven for him at the Royal carpet factory known as the Savonnerie (because it used buildings formerly occupied by a soap works), situated on the Cours-la Reine, then just outside Paris, on the site now occupied by the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Both carpets were woven to designs approved by Beckford. Neither are known to have survived today, and we only have a summary description for one of them: *'un bouquet de fleurs sur un fond mordoré, entouré d'une bordure jaune'* (a bunch of flowers on a bronze background, with a yellow border). Both carpets were extremely small, measuring 227 × 113 cm and 227 × 83 cm.²

The first carpet was delivered to Beckford on 27 March 1792. A few days previously, the Sèvres porcelain factory sales registers³ record the delivery of a set of plates:

Le 13 Mars 1792.

Livré à Milord Betfort

72 assiettes unies, Parasol Chinois, Arabesques @ 33 2376 (livres).

A further set of forty-eight plates were sold on 23 November 1792⁴:

Mad. Lefébure Née le Clercq⁵

Pour Milord Betfort

48 Assiettes Parasol Chinois

@ 39 1872 (livres).⁶

So who was 'Milord Betfort'? No Englishman with a name of that precise spelling has been found to date. The only close candidates are the fifth Duke of Bedford⁷ and William Beckford. The latter is by far the most likely, for the following reasons:

1. He was in Paris in March 1792, as can be shown by the delivery he took of a carpet a few days later. It is also known he was there from November 1792 to May 1793.
2. The Savonnerie factory correspondence sometimes refers to him as 'Beckfort', a spelling half way to the Sèvres one. The bronzier François Rémond even spelt his name 'Befort' in a document of 1793.⁸ Such mis-spellings are not uncommon for difficult foreign names in France at this period. Milord was not a specific title, and was often used to refer to or flatter a rich Englishman.
3. Another purchase from Sèvres⁹ establishes a connection between 'Betfort' and the goldsmith Henri Auguste, whose work for William Beckford is already well documented¹⁰:

Crédit du voyage de Paris

du 25 Décembre 1792 au 13 Janvier 1793

A Milord Betfort.

Livré à M. Auguste

1 Tasse 24

1 ditto 72

2 id @ 240 480

576

Remise 9% 52

524 (livres)

The inordinately high price for the two cups (certainly with saucers) indicates a very lavish decoration. Many of the expensive cups and saucers sold by Sèvres at this period had portraits of literary or historical worthies, and it is not impossible

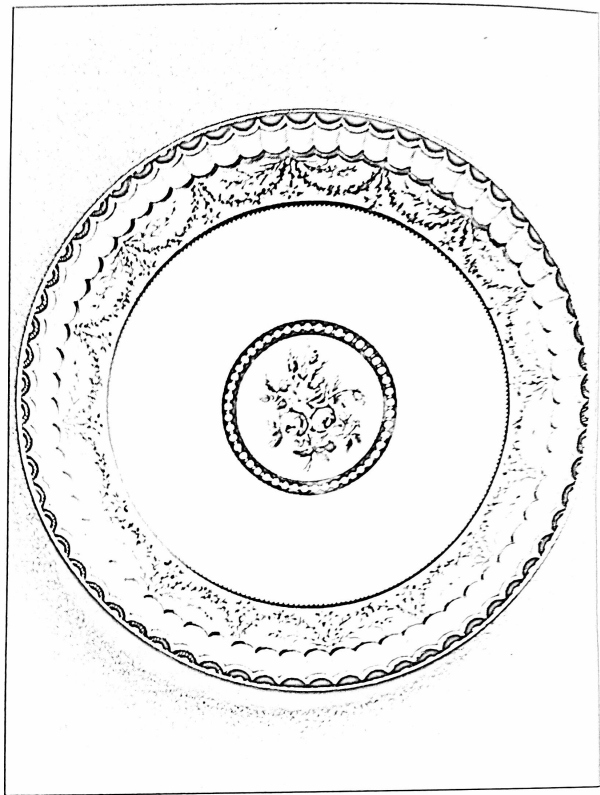
that these were of this kind.¹¹

What did the *parasol chinois* plates look like? David Peters has pointed out that the 120 were the only ones sold, and that they are probably identical to two sets of plates which have appeared at auction at Christie's recently, one at the house sale of Croxteth Hall, the Earl of Sefton's family seat in Liverpool, and the other in London¹².

The shape of these plates is perfectly circular, devoid of any of the lobes which characterised Sèvres plates until the 1780s. This simple shape was called by the factory *assiette bord uni*. The decoration consists of a border pattern comprising on the outside a red ground with gilt semicircles outlined with gilt dots, an umbrella-like shaded yellow frieze (giving the decoration its name), and a floral pattern of garlands of red flowers with blue cornflower sprigs. In the centre of the plates is a ring of dark blue with a gilt pearl frieze, enclosing a bunch of red roses. A drawing for the plates is included among the album of the factory's plate designs¹³ as no. 134, with the price noted as 39 *livres*. Normally, the Sèvres factory sold plates as part of services, with a variety of components of matching decoration. The absence of any with this set is further indication of a special, even eccentric, commission.

That the plates were specially ordered is almost certain. 78 white plates were given to the factory's painters on 10 January 1792 to be painted with this pattern, which would suggest that the client visited Sèvres shortly beforehand, and chose the pattern himself. In cases where the factory made a service for stock, pieces were usually given to the painters over a period of a few months. The plates had their final firing on 6 March, after which it only remained to burnish the gilding before the delivery on 13 March.

As is pointed out in the catalogue of Christie's 1980 sale, the plates are in 'the English Adam taste', despite being described as 'chinois' at Sèvres. The designer Jean-Démsthène Dugoure,



'Parasol Chinois' Plate by Sèvres

Belanger's brother-in-law, employed the fan pattern on a number of occasions at this period, especially for Spanish Royal palaces. It was then described as an *éventail antique*, or *à aile de chauve-souris*.¹⁴ Dugourc is not known to have supplied any designs to Sèvres at this period, but Jean-Jacques Lagrenée, who was employed by the factory, worked in a very similar style.

There were a number of Sèvres plates of unspecified decoration in one of the Fonthill sale catalogues.¹⁵ There were no Sèvres plates in the Hamilton Palace sale of 1882.

It seems probable to me that it was Beckford who purchased the *parasol chinois* plates, although no further evidence exists to substantiate this claim

Aileen Dawson has pointed out another piece of Sèvres owned by William Beckford.¹⁶ This is so unlike any other piece made by the Royal porcelain factory that it has been catalogued as Chinese, and the similar examples at the British Museum as Meissen. It is a ewer at Brodick Castle¹⁷, which is of hard-paste, has a brown ground upon its lobed body, and relief prunus decoration left white. It dates from the early 1780s, but it is not known when it was bought. Presumably Beckford at least knew what it was!

¹All the information concerning Beckford's purchases from the Savonnerie factory is taken from Pierre Verlet, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: The Savonnerie*, 1982. This extract is from a letter by the controller of the factory dated 11 June 1791.

²Boyd Alexander informed Pierre Verlet that neither of these carpets had appeared in any Beckford auction. Perhaps someone fortunate will one day discover them.

³Sèvres factory archives, Vy 10, folio 113.

⁴Sèvres factory archives, Vy 10, folio 146.

⁵Madame Lefebure (also spelt Lefebvre) was a dealer based in Amsterdam who purchased much Sèvres at this period, both for herself and for clients. Her connection with Beckford is not otherwise documented.

⁶There was a 12% discount on this price, bringing it down approximately to 34 *livres 6 sous*. David Peters, to whom I am most grateful for his help and

suggestions concerning these plates, and for reading this article, is unsure of the reason for the difference in price between the two sets. One possible explanation is that the plates were of slightly different sizes.

⁷The fifth Duke was a client of the Parisian marchand-mercier Dominique Daguerre, and was buying furniture and objects from him at this period, but never travelled to Paris.

⁸*Bernard Molitor 1755-1833: Ebéniste Parisien d'origine Luxembourgeoise*, exhibition catalogue, 1995-96, p. 87, quoted by Christian Baulez in connection with Beckford's order for a cabinet to be decorated with paintings by Piat Joseph Sauvage. Rédmond's spelling must have been especially atrocious, since the ébéniste Adam Weisweiler is called 'Vinchuler'.

⁹Sèvres factory archives, Vy 10, folio 152.

¹⁰See Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior*, 1989, p. 127: 'Auguste was Beckford's favourite goldsmith', and Michael Snodin and Malcolm Baker, 'William Beckford's Silver 1', *Burlington Magazine*, CXXII (1980), pp. 736-739 (November).

¹¹See for example a cup and saucer with a portrait of Rabelais in the Royal Collection, reproduced in Svend Eriksen and Geoffrey de Bellaigue *Sèvres Porcelain*, pl. 159. The caption mentions another one of this model bought by Louis XVI in 1791 for 240 livres.

¹²Christie's house sale, *Croxeth Hall, Liverpool*, 17-20 September 1973, lot 888, 12 plates. Christie's London, *Fine Continental Porcelain*, 30 June 1980, lot 82, 12 plates and lot 83, 17 plates. Both lots were formerly in the collection of Christian Dior.

¹³Sèvres factory archives.

¹⁴See *Soiries de Lyon: Commandes royales au XVIIIe siècle*, exhibition catalogue, Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon, 1988-1989, p. 129 and Dugourc à Pernon, *Nouvelles acquisitions graphiques pour les Musées*, exhibition catalogue Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon, 1990-1991, p. 72.

¹⁵Phillips, *The Unique and Splendid Effects at Fonthill Abbey ... 1823* (Lugt 10510), 11th day, lot 113: 'Twenty-four fine OLD SEVE dessert plates', (Howe £3 16s), 15th day, lot 486: 'Twelve fine OLD SEVE plates' (Swabey £2 18s), lot 487: 'Twelve ditto', (Swabey £2 18s), lot 488: 'Twelve ditto, and five ditto, various patterns', (Evans £3 13s 6d).

¹⁶Aileen Dawson, *French Porcelain: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 1994, p. 147.

¹⁷*Beckford and Hamilton Silver from Brodick Castle*, exhibition catalogue, 1980, cat. no. B35.

A Response to '*Vathek* and *The Episodes of Vathek* -separately but not together' by Elinor Shaffer

MALCOLM JACK

Elinor Shaffer's review, '*Vathek* and *The Episodes* -- separately but not together' (*Beckford Journal*, Vol. 1, Spring 1995) did not give the impression of being a balanced or well thought out piece.

Petulant in tone, Dr Shaffer's remarks reveal, among other lapses of judgement, a lack of understanding of contemporary publishing realities, which, if acted upon would ensure the non-production of Beckford's works in a reasonably priced form for another generation.

No British or North American publisher has been willing to risk an anthology of Beckford which did not contain his mostly widely known work, *Vathek*. Given this caution (which we may lament but can do nothing about), a volume that included *The Episodes* with *Vathek* would have given a ludicrously unbalanced view of Beckford as a writer of many parts.

But this is not all. In fact there are sound reasons for not accepting Dr Shaffer's demands for an integrated text of *Vathek* and *The Episodes*. With more knowledge of the traditions of the Arab tale than is evident in her review, she would have realised that stories that derive from 'frame' stories need not bear much connection with the original.

When the beautiful Princess Scheherezade told her nightly story to the forbidding King Shahriyar, she had to amuse him with a distinct tale each time. The freedom that such a form gave tellers of tales certainly appealed to a writer of fecund imagination like Beckford. *The Episodes* are not an intrinsic part of the tragedy of Caliph Vathek. Indeed their mood is quite different from the 'frame' story and both are diminished by being meshed together.

Dr Shaffer's review, short on analysis of any sort, asserts as its conclusion, that by achieving the publication of two books of Beckford's works in forms that will make his name much more widely known, I have joined an establishment censorship of him. This is as grotesque as it is absurd. It certainly does nothing to forward the Beckford Society's first aim of promoting an interest in the life and works of William Beckford and his circle.

Fonthill after Beckford

JON MILLINGTON

By 1822 Beckford had finally decided that it was time to leave Fonthill and start afresh in Bath, so he instructed John Christie to sell much of the contents of the Abbey, which were put on view that September and October.¹ However, behind Christie's back, Beckford secretly negotiated with a rival auctioneer, Harry Phillips, who succeeded in finding a buyer for the entire estate, and the Christie's sale was cancelled. This was John Farquhar who was born in Aberdeenshire and became a gunpowder millionaire. As a speculation, he was persuaded to invest some of his fortune, about £300,000, in buying the Fonthill estate.² Although Farquhar owned a London house, he mostly lived in the Abbey where he was sometimes visited by his relations, particularly his favourite nephew George Mortimer. When the central tower collapsed in December 1825 owing to inadequate foundations, Farquhar had already moved to the East wing, having been warned of the impending disaster.³ When he died on 6 July 1826 at the age of 75, the only near relatives who had a claim on his property were his three nephews and four nieces. However, it was many years before they were able to agree on a settlement because, although he had made a will in India in 1814, a search on his death failed to locate it. In February 1829,

the Prerogative Court declared that Farquhar must have destroyed this will and so declared him intestate.⁴

The Fonthill House Estate

Meanwhile, in 1824, George Mortimer, who was in the woollen trade, erected 'to the great disfigurement of the scene' a woollen mill and several buildings at the south end of Fonthill Lake. These had been paid for by Farquhar.⁵ It was probably in the following year, when Farquhar gave or lent Mortimer £20,000, that he also passed the eastern part of his estate on to him. Although apparently no money changed hands, this part was valued at £19,700 and consisted of the remaining wing of Fonthill Splendens, the 'Pavilion', together with 240 acres of low grounds near Fonthill Lake.⁶

The mill, a very large building, was finished by October 1827: 'The manufactory built on the beautiful lake in the grounds of *Fonthill* by the late Mr. Farquhar and Mr. Mortimer, is now finished. Every improvement in machinery as applicable to the manufacture of superfine cloths, has been introduced; and the manufactory, as a whole, is now one of the most complete in the kingdom. The quality of cloth manufactured is about from 40 to 50 ends per week, all the work of which, from the very first to the last process, is done on the spot, and employs of men, women, and children, no more than 200 persons, although, without the late improvements, it would have required 1000 hands. Mr. Mortimer has pulled down his new house near the manufactory, and carried the materials to the pavilion, which stood on the site of the late Alderman Beckford's mansion. The abbey still remains in a state of ruin.'⁷

A little-known magazine published fortnightly in Ringwood, *The Crypt*, copied this account, adding some interesting details: 'Mr Mortimer has given up the concern to a Mr. Tayler, a gentleman from Gloucestershire, who has no land; the plan, therefore, for supplying the workmen with land has been

abandoned. The children are paid from 2s. to 3s. per week, and the men earn from 10s. to 20s., for which they are employed from 12 to 14 hours a day. A weaver, who works 16 and sometimes 18 hours, will earn about 18s. per week. Mr. Mortimer has...enlarged and otherwise improved (the Pavilion), and detached it from the manufactory by a wall of great height and thickness. The latter building, with all its appendages, is said to have cost about £30,000. The workmen now employed are mostly culled hands out of Gloucestershire.⁸ As for Mortimer's house by the mill, Rutter noted in a letter to J.B. Nichols that it was 'in the Alpine Garden near the Factory, which as soon as erected was pulled down entirely - I have a sketch of this House, - which wd have been a large Mansion Ho.'⁹

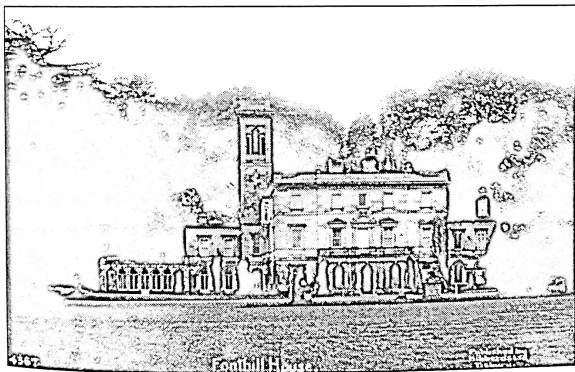


Drawing of Fonthill Pavilion, 1829

By 1828 Mortimer had greatly improved the Pavilion and added a west service wing.¹⁰ For a month or two in the summer of 1829 James Morrison, a wealthy London merchant, rented the

Pavilion furnished,¹¹ and on 29 October the estate was auctioned by George Robins in three lots: the Pavilion and park of 1000 acres, the woollen mill with twenty-four cottages and Lawn Farm (which was bought by John Benett of Pythouse).¹² The first two lots were unsold and there was to be no future for the six-storey woollen mill driven by three water-wheels;¹³ in spite of possessing many advantages, it 'failed to attract a clothier into unfamiliar country, and in 1830, the machinery was sold. No more is known of this large building being used for any other purpose, and with a working life of only two years, its stands high in the ranks of industrial white elephants.'¹⁴ The buildings were demolished between 1838 and 1886.¹⁵

James Morrison's offer for the Pavilion and part of the estate was accepted in September 1830, although, because of legal difficulties, the final deed of purchase was not signed until 1838.¹⁶ He commissioned alterations and a new south entrance gateway from J.B. Papworth who may have added an extra storey at the same time. Between the spring of 1846 and early



Postcard of Fonthill House, c. 1905

1848, T.H. Wyatt and D. Brandon added an Italianate tower and a south service wing.¹⁷ James Morrison, who died in 1857, made over Fonthill House, as the Pavilion was now called, to his second son, Alfred, in 1850.¹⁸ As well as amassing a fine collection of antiques, Alfred formed 'one of the most remarkable collection of historical documents ever made in this country'.¹⁹ These, which included fifty-one letters from Beckford (mostly to Henley) and almost the whole of the Hamilton and Nelson papers, were privately printed in the 1890s.

At the turn of the century there was a fire at Fonthill House and most of it was demolished in 1921; the name 'was transferred to Little Ridge, a house built by Hugh Morrison near the eastern edge of the park in Chilmark'.²⁰ Little Ridge, built between 1902 and 1904 by Detmar Blow, incorporated the rebuilt 17th-century facade of Berwick St. Leonard manor house.²¹ Between 1914 and 1920 the house was much enlarged by balancing wings in similar 17th-century style, so that it now resembled the Fonthill House of the early 1700s, sometimes known as Fonthill Antiquus. In spite of representations to the Department of the Environment to have the house listed, most of it was demolished in 1972²² and replaced by a smaller house in neo-Georgian style, designed by Tremwith Wills and built on the foundations of its central block.²³

'The estate descended from father to son in the Morrison family to Alfred (d.1897), Hugh (d. 1931), and John, Baron Margadale, all of whom added to it. In 1984 it belonged to Lord Margadale's son the Hon. J.I. Morrison. It then encompassed the north-east part of Fonthill Gifford, c. 800 a., and land in Hindon, Berwick St. Leonard, Chicklade, Fonthill Bishop, Chilmark, Tisbury, and elsewhere, a total of c. 9,000 a.'²⁴

No trace of Fonthill Splendens survives today although the west service wing of the Pavilion lingered on, remodelled as a pair of cottages, until it was demolished in about 1975.²⁵

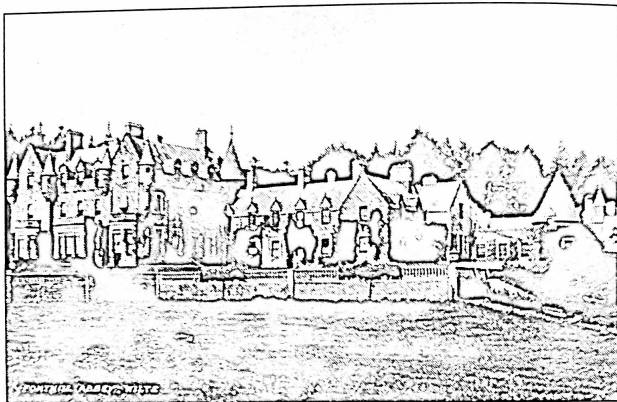
The Fonthill Abbey Estate

Prompted by the fall of the central tower of the Abbey on 21 December 1825, Farquhar immediately contracted to sell his entire estate, except for Fonthill House and the adjoining land which went to George Mortimer (see above). John Benett of Pythouse bought the Abbey ruins and the grounds enclosed within the walls, but no price had been agreed before Farquhar died intestate on 6 July 1826.²⁶ At about the time of the proposed sale to Benett, Earl Grosvenor acquired Beckford's manor and estate at Berwick St. Leonard²⁷ and Henry King of Chilmark bought the land north of Hindon.²⁸ Because of disputes over his will, terms for the sale of the Abbey estate were not agreed until 1838.²⁹

Benett was in financial difficulties by 1838 and instructed Phillips, who had handled the 1823 sale, to dispose of the estate by auction,³⁰ which failed. In 1844 Benett agreed to sell most of the estate to Earl Grosvenor who completed the purchase the following year after he had succeeded his father as second Marquess of Westminster.³¹ He was responsible for tidying up the ruins and constructing the wing on the east side of the Lancaster Tower using fragments from the cloisters and elsewhere.³² A drawing dated 2 November 1846 shows the Eastern Transept, partly under scaffolding and presumably being demolished.³³

'Between 1856 and 1859 a new Fonthill Abbey was built 500 m. south-east of the old for Richard, marquess of Westminster. The house, designed by William Burn, who had earlier worked for the Grosvenors at Eaton Hall (Ches.), was in Scottish Baronial style with a turreted three-storeyed main block and a stable court. Tisbury Lodge, south of Fonthill Gifford church, was built in similar style at the entrance to a new main drive, and Lawn Lodge was built south of the new house. Two red-brick and tile lodges in Tudor style north and south of Beacon Hill,

one in Tisbury, were built in 1860.³⁴ In 1940 the house was requisitioned by the army and in 1947 was bought by John Morrison, later created Lord Margadale. It 'was discovered to have a giant crack running down the central structure, and thus this second abbey went, in 1955, the same way of so many previous Fonthills.'³⁵



Postcard of the New Fonthill Abbey by William Burn, c. 1910

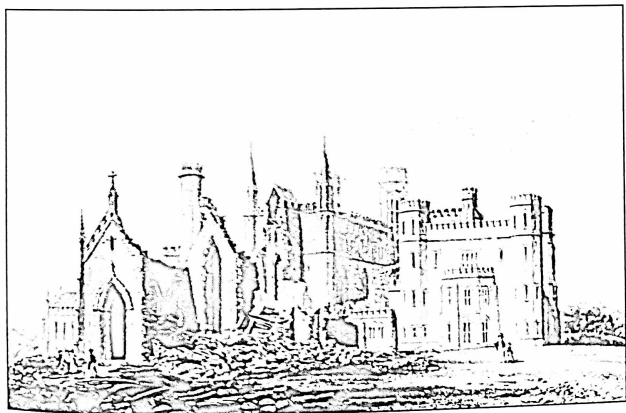
Dr and Mrs Hilliard visited the site in the 1960s and she noted that the demolition left intact 'the stable wing and courtyard which were integral to the main house' and they saw 'several Scottish baronial turrets lying sadly in the long grass ... After many years of negotiation, Professor Bernard Nevill bought Fonthill (New) Abbey in 1975 with seventy-five acres of the Abbey gardens and woodlands. The present stable wing had been allowed to fall into a ruin but had charm; built round a quadrangular courtyard with a clock turret over the entrance archway, it is approached by a long drive from Fonthill Gifford'.³⁶ In 1984 the stable block of William Burn's house was

being converted into a house.³⁷

At the Marquess of Westminster's death in 1869, the estate passed to his widow Elizabeth who died in 1891, with remainder to their daughter Octavia. She married Sir Michael Shaw-Stewart, Bt. who died in 1903 and on her death in 1921 the estate passed to her son Walter Shaw-Stewart. When he died in 1934, the estate passed to his widow Mary, and at her death in 1943 to his grandson Mr. N.W. Rimington, whose father, Brig. R.G.W. Rimington,³⁸ had died in 1941.

Accounts of the Abbey Ruins

According to the landscape gardener J.C. Loudon, only one man witnessed the collapse of the Abbey's central tower on 21 December 1825 and he 'is said to have described its manner of falling as very beautiful; it first sank perpendicularly and slowly, and then burst and spread over the roofs of the adjoining wings on every side, but rather more on the south-west than on the others. The cloud of dust which arose was enormous, and such as



Drawing of Fonthill Abbey in Ruins by Buckler, 1825

completely to darken the air for a considerable distance around for several minutes.³⁹

Another account appeared the day after the fall in an unknown evening paper:

(We have received the following communication this morning. The name of the writer, and his residence, are added. We lay it before the readers without being able to affirm or contradict the statement).

TO THE EDITOR

Sir, - The post having gone out, I embrace this opportunity of giving you the earliest intelligence of the fall of that fine (but flimsy) architectural structure, Fonthill Abbey. The tower fell in at three o'clock this afternoon, destroying the hall, the whole of the octagon, and great part of the galleries, north and south, together with the first crimson room, having quietly descended into the fountain court, leaving the grand entrance standing with the organ in statu quo, and the statue of the late Alderman Beckford in its niche, as if it remained to point to the ruins of his son's ambition.

I am just returned from the Abbey, and am happy to say, that only one accident has occurred, although the servants were engaged in taking out some of the windows, and had fortunately just escaped in time to avoid being buried in the ruins.

Mr Farquhar had taken the precaution to move to the East wing, together with Mrs Mortimer and her children. The latter had been in daily habit of playing in the galleries.

The only surprise is, on beholding the slightness of the foundation walls, that it has so long stood the violent gales it has been exposed to.

I remain Sir, your obedient servant. J.F.

Fonthill Gifford, Wilts. Dec 21.⁴⁰

Buckler's drawing of the ruins⁴¹ shows that the north, east and most of the south wings were relatively unharmed after the fall, so J.F. (perhaps John Farquar?) may have overstated the damage.

Papworth, however, on a visit to Mr and Mrs Morrison at Fonthill House in 1829 or 1830, wrote to his wife, 'All day yesterday we were at business, except a ride to the Abbey after dinner - It is a RUIN!! - and not capable of inspiring any other than painful thoughts of the instability of human affairs - and high towers ... Fonthill is a beautiful place - but does not come up to those ideas that from recent descriptions (George Robins's, Christie's and Phillips', for instance) I had imagined of it - in fact - altho' beautiful, it is not the refined place it has been reported to be. Gravel walks are in themselves beautiful if well disposed. None are here, however, - no, not one - the place is for the feet of Horses and not for those of Man - as if none were worthy to traverse it but such as have the privileges of a Centuar'.⁴²

'The kinds of masonry, brickwork, and carpentry which were used' wrote Loudon in 1833 'may easily be ascertained from the parts remaining. Nothing can be worse: the walls are carried up in some parts of brick, in others of stone, and in others of studwork, sometimes enclosed in stone or brick casing, but always of the very worst description of workmanship. The mortar seems to have been particularly bad, and never to have united either with the stone or with the brick. since even in the most solid parts of the wall which remain, it may be picked out with the fingers in a state of powder.'

Loudon continued: 'The appearance of the ruins, as they now stand, produces an impression of meanness mixed with grandeur that it is impossible to describe. The greatness of the dimensions of the parts which still exist, and which, from being covered with cement, have the appearance of stone; and the shattered remains of lath and plaster, studwork, and bricks, and bond timber; and, above all, the long strings of tarred pack-thread hanging from the

nails and other remains of what were once mouldings worked in Roman cement, have a tattered appearance, the very opposite of grandeur produced by durability of execution. We feel as if we had discovered that what, at a distance, we had supposed to be a marble statue, was, in reality, a mere bundle of rags and straw, whited over to produce effect.⁴³ And yet, in 1955, one hundred and twenty years later,' said H.A.N. Brockman 'the remaining fragment is of good masonry with a good finish, which itself makes the wall look almost like a veneer, but in which weathering has produced a beautiful grey-green texture with touches of golden lichen.'⁴⁴

John Rutter wrote to J.B. Nichols in 1835, 'The Ruins of Fonthill remain much as in Sir Richard's plate, except that the present owner, Mr Benett M.P. for Wilts is gradually connecting the brown parlour, yellow rooms into a residence of some sort by the addition of offices & other buildings - but these proceed very gradually & no part is at present inhabited.'⁴⁵ Writing on the Abbey in the same year, Nichols reported that 'Mr. Beckford himself had the curiosity to visit the place some weeks ago, and expressed much approbation of its appearance as a ruin.'⁴⁶

One afternoon in about 1843, Alfred Morrison walked up to the terrace from his home, Fonthill House, to look at the ruins of the Abbey, only to find someone was already there: 'An old gentleman, mounted on a sturdy little cob, had halted some way off, and he was gazing at the wood and at the ruins in so absorbed a fashion that he never observed the young man who had come upon him. It was William Beckford. He had ridden over from Bath to look for the last time on all that remained of the most stupendous of all the follies which he and his contemporaries had set upon a hundred hilltops. The old man and the young one looked at it in silence, and then each returned to his own place.'⁴⁷

Henry Venn Lansdown, who described Beckford's Tower and Lansdown Crescent in letters to his daughter, visited the ruins in

October 1844 and was surprised that enough of them remained to be visible from nine miles away. From his letter it is evident that far more of the Abbey had survived at this late date than is generally supposed. 'Of the noble octagon but two sides remain. Looking up, but at such an amazing elevation that it makes one's neck ache, still are seen two windows of the four nunneries that adorned its unique and unrivalled circuit. And what is more wonderful than all, the noble organ screen, designed by "Vathek" himself, has still survived; its gilded lattices, though exposed for twenty years to the "pelting of the pitiless storm," yet glitter in the last rays of the setting sun. We entered the doorway of the southern entrance hall, that door which once admitted thousands of the curious when Fonthill was in its glory. This wing, though not yet in ruins, not yet entirely dismantled, bears evident signs of decay. Standing on the marble floor you look up through holes in the ceiling, and discover the once beautifully fretted roof of St. Michael's Gallery. We entered the brown parlour. This is a really noble room, 52 feet long, with eight windows, painted at the top in the most glorious manner. This room has survived the surrounding desolation, and gives you a slight idea of the former glories of the place.'⁴⁸

Lansdown went on to relate in similar detail the condition of the north wing which 'does not seem to have suffered the fall of the Tower'; he found the Abbey locked and had to obtain the key from a bailiff living in the stables who was in charge of the building. Special admiration was reserved for the Sanctuary: 'the ceiling of the last compartment is beyond all praise; it gleams as freshly with purple, scarlet, and gold as if painted yesterday. Five slender columns expand into and support a gilded reticulation on a dark crimson ground. In the centre of the ceiling is still hanging the dark crimson cord which formerly supported the elegant golden lamp I had formerly admired in Lansdown-crescent'.⁴⁹

Many nearby houses contain doors and other fittings salvaged from the Abbey; in the parlour of the Beckford Arms Henry Lansdown saw 'a charming bow window, where are elegantly represented, in stained glass on distinct shields, the arms of Alderman Beckford, his wife, and their eccentric son.'⁵⁰ This stained glass probably came from the west-facing windows of St. Michael's Gallery, overlooking Fountain's Court, and was still in the parlour in 1967, more than one hundred and twenty years later. Sadly it was removed in the 1970s, possibly by the brewers, Wadworth's of Devizes.

¹Christie, *Magnificent Effects at Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*, 1822.

²*Literary Gazette* 6 (1822), p. 653, (12 Oct).

³*Gentleman's Magazine* 95 pt. 2 (July-Dec 1825), p. 557, (Dec).

⁴Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre*, 1829, pp. 230-233.

⁵J.B. Nichols, ed., *Historical Notices of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*, 1836, p. 32.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷*Gentleman's Magazine* 97 pt. 2 (July-Dec 1827), p. 362, (Oct).

⁸*The Crypt, or Receptacle for Things Past* 1 (Aug-Dec 1827), p. 220, (No. ix, 19 Dec).

⁹Letter dated 12 November 1835 bound in Nichols' copy of Britton's *Fonthill Abbey* in WANHS Library, Devizes.

¹⁰D.A. Crowley, ed., *A History of Wiltshire*, Vol. XIII, 1987, p. 162, (Victoria County History.)

¹¹Richard Gatty, *Portrait of a Merchant Prince*, [1977], p. 108.

¹²Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³Eric Darton, 'Fonthill: John Farquhar and After', *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter*, 1987, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴K.H. Rogers, *Wiltshire and Somerset Woollen Mills*, 1976, p. 252.

¹⁵V.C.H., *op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹⁶Gatty, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁷V.C.H., *op. cit.*, p. 162.

¹⁸Gatty, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹⁹Edith Olivier, *Four Victorian Ladies of Wiltshire*, 1945, p. 57.

²⁰V.C.H., *op. cit.* p. 162.

²¹*ibid.*, p. 119.

- ²² Simon Blow, 'Blow by Blow', *Guardian Weekend*, 24 February 1979, p. 11.
- ²³ V.C.H., op. cit., p. 119.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 161.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 162.
- ²⁶ V.C.H., op. cit., p. 161.
- ²⁷ Colt Hoare, op. cit., p. 24.
- ²⁸ V.C.H., Wilts, Vol. XI, 1980, p. 79.
- ²⁹ V.C.H., Wilts, Vol. XIII, p. 161.
- ³⁰ Phillips, *Particulars of the Fonthill Abbey Estate, in the County of Wilts. comprising nearly Two Thousand Acres*. 30 Oct. 1838, 8 pp. and plan.
- ³¹ V.C.H., op. cit., p. 161.
- ³² 'Fonthill Abbey. The Estate, and the Successive mansions.', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 December 1923.
- ³³ Jon Millington, *Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey*, 1994, p. 19, cat. no. D4.
- ³⁴ V.C.H., op. cit., p. 163.
- ³⁵ Blow, op. cit., p. 11.
- ³⁶ Elizabeth Hilliard, 'Fonthill Redivivus', *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter*, 1989, p. 2.
- ³⁷ V.C.H., op. cit., p. 163.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 161.
- ³⁹ J. C. Loudon, 'Notes on Gardens and Country Seats visited ... [in] 1833. during a Tour ...', *Gardener's Magazine* XI, (1835), p. 447, (Sept).
- ⁴⁰ Cutting from 'an Evening Paper' pasted into a copy of Christie's *Fonthill* Sale catalogue for 27 September 1822 (Bath Reference Library collection). My thanks to Sidney Blackmore for drawing this cutting to my attention.
- ⁴¹ Colt Hoare, op. cit., plate V.
- ⁴² Wyatt Papworth, *John B. Papworth, Architect to the King of Wurttemberg*, 1879, p. 139.
- ⁴³ Loudon, op. cit., p. 446.
- ⁴⁴ H.A.N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 1956, p. 183.
- ⁴⁵ See ref. 7, but this part of letter quoted in Millington, op. cit., p. 19, cat. no. D3.
- ⁴⁶ Nichols, op. cit., p. 39.
- ⁴⁷ Olivier, op. cit., p. 47.
- ⁴⁸ H.V. Lansdown, *Recollections of the late William Beckford*, 1895, (reprinted 1969), pp. 40-41.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 39.

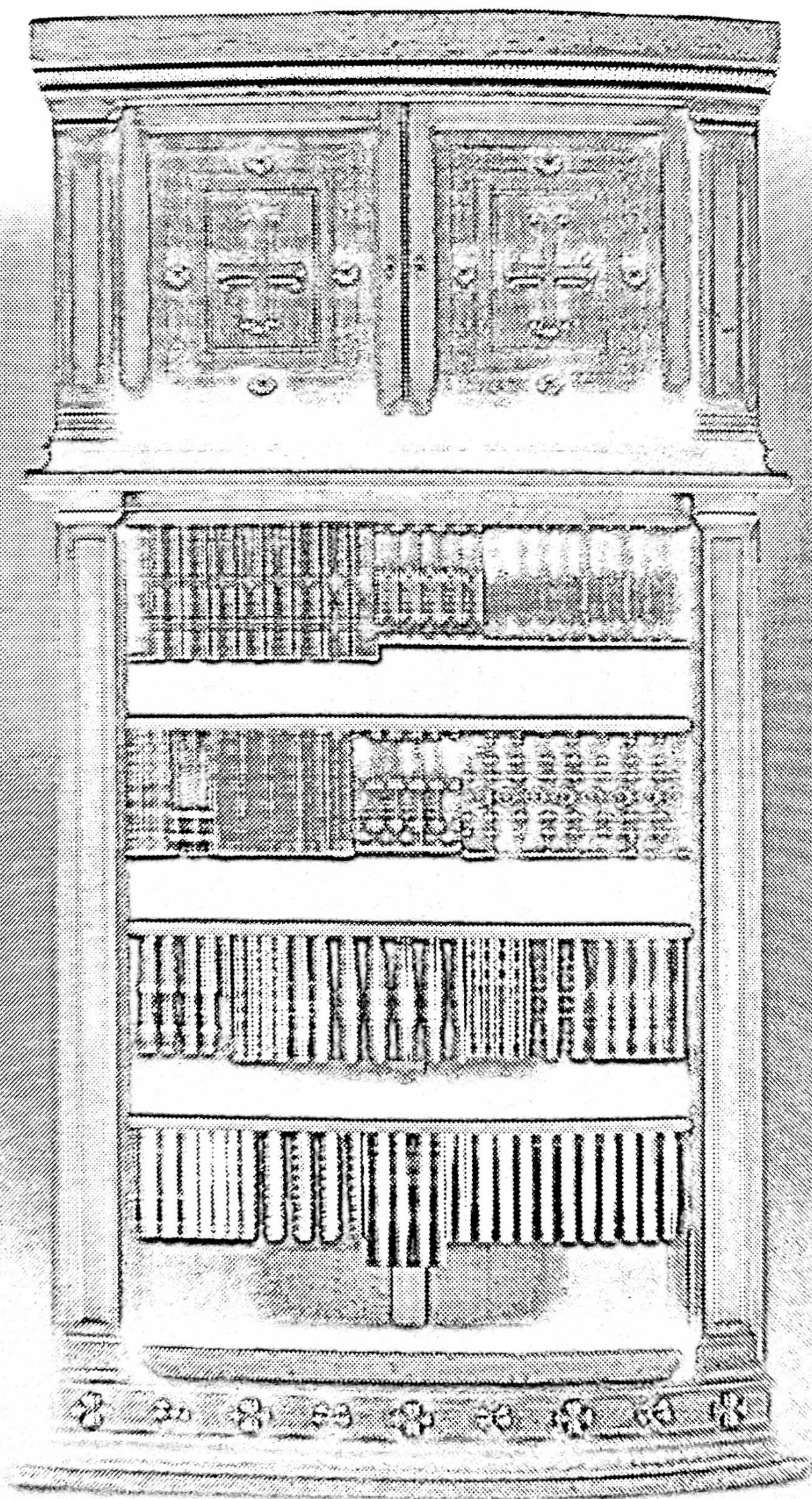
A Beckford Bookcase

JOHN HARDY

This splendid oak bookcase¹ is thought to have been designed under the direction of William Beckford (d.1844) and executed by Edward Foxhall (d.1815) for the Oak Library at Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire. Furnished with a rich collection of books on art and architecture, the room became known as the 'Board of Works' during the period that Beckford and James Wyatt (d.1813), architect of King George III's Board of Ordnance, planned the Abbey's building and enrichment. And it was perhaps here that Wyatt's son Jeffry (later Sir Jeffry Wyatville) gained inspiration that led to his grandiose schemes for King George IV's Windsor Castle.

Conceived in the French Renaissance manner, the bookcase reflects Beckford's family pride. Accompanied by the triumphal palm-wrapped cornice and pilasters, the bookcase frieze celebrates his descent from the Beckford and Hamilton families, with its ribbon-band displaying the Beckford cross fleury conjoined with his Hamilton cinquefoil rose. Likewise its 'commode' doors are carved with the cross fleury badge or device inherited from Archbishop Latimer, who had been martyred in 1555 by Queen Mary 1, while their incised ribbon frames are flowered at the centres with the cinquefoil rose inherited from the Hamiltons on his maternal side. And their corners display arabesque-scrolled tendrils emerging from fleur-de-lys, the arms of France added to those of England by Edward III. Indeed, Beckford's Lancastrian Library/Gallery at Fonthill was named after King Edward III (d.1377), founder of the Chivalric Order of the Garter, and its heraldic embellishment corresponded to that of the bookcase.

¹ Christie's *Important English Furniture*, 16 November 1995, Lot 336.



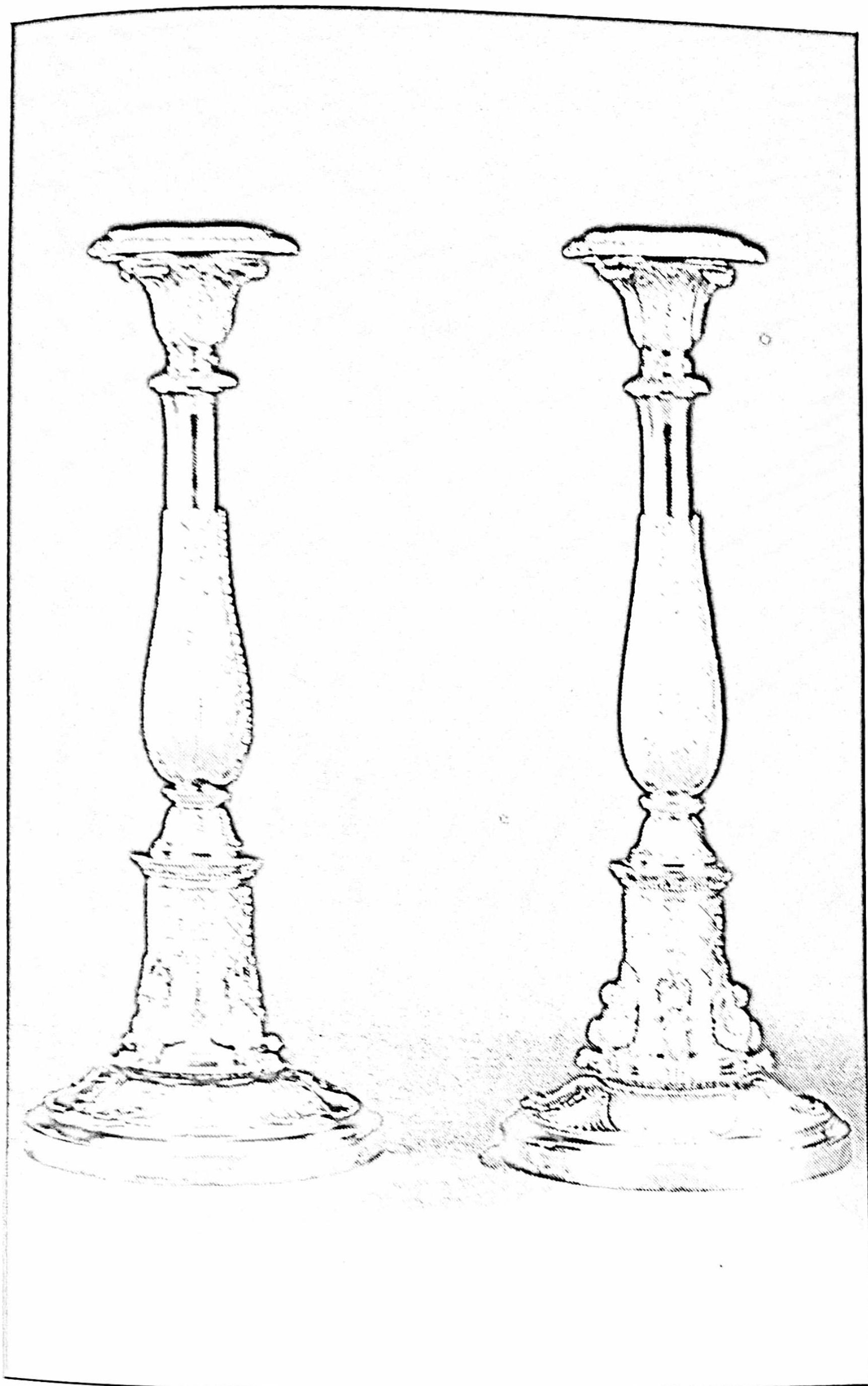
Candlesticks from Fonthill Abbey

JOHN HARDY

The sale featuring the Beckford bookcase also contained a pair of ormolu candlesticks,¹ which are likely to have been executed under Beckford's direction by Benjamin Vulliamy (d.1820) of Pall Mall, 'Ormolu Manufacturer in Ordinary' to George, Prince of Wales, later George IV. They are conceived in the antique manner promoted by C. Percier and P. Fontaine's *Receuil de decorations interieurs* (1801), and their baluster-pedestals, which are flowered with the Beckford cross fleury and cinquefoil rose within lozenge-trellised bands, are guarded by addorsed griffin.

These poetic half lion/half eagle chimerae, which are sacred to Apollo, the sun god and leader of the Muses of artistic inspiration, serve like the monopodiae of Roman candelabra. They are perched above moulded plinths that are wrapped by Grecian palms amongst Roman foliage, and this also embellishes the balusters, while the feet of the vase-shaped nozzles are wreathed by Beckford cinquefoils.

¹ Writing about St Michael's Gallery, John Rutter noted in his *Description of Fonthill Abbey...* 2nd edn., 1822, p. 60, 'Each cabinet supports a pair of beautiful silver-gilt candlesticks, several of them executed by *Vulliamy...*' Six of the twelve candlesticks have now appeared, and were sold at Christie's on 15 April 1982, Lot 2. A set of four were sold at Christie's New York on 16 April 1994, Lot 15, from the estate of Beatrice Lagrave Maltby. It was two of this set that were re-sold at Christie's on 16 November 1995, Lot 111 (the Beckford bookcase was Lot 336).



The Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter:

Contents 1980 - 1994

During its fifteen years existence the *Newsletter*, the forerunner of the present *Beckford Journal*, was published annually in the Spring in A4 format. The number of pages varied from six to eighteen and it was edited by Jon Millington who was also the author of any unattributed articles.

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BECKFORD'S TOMB AND TOWER.

It is not meet that Beckford's brilliant dust,
 Instinct long since with such urbanity,
 Yet shy aloofness, should be meanly thrust
 Down in the hollow where earth's myriads lie,
 Unknown, unsung, but seeing he was uplift
 In wealth and wit, oh, better far for bed
 This hill-top where the sun and shadow shift
 Athwart his tower, clean winds about his head.
 Vain fancy! For here, too, doth death crase,
 Even here, our pride; that mind, in every art
 So steeped, so skilled in oriental ways,
 In ways of Spain and Italy, that heart
 Which thrilled to beatings of Atlantic surf,
 Alike, with these, are quenched 'neath English turf.

—E. W. CHAPPELOW

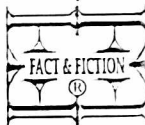
William Beckford (b. 1761), art connoisseur, novelist, and travel-writer, after selling his mansion at Fonthill and most of his collections there, in 1822 retired to Bath, where he built on Lansdowne Hill a tower, which is still a conspicuous landmark. He died there in 1844. In earlier life he had travelled much in Latin lands and had lived for some time near Cintra, Portugal. His "History of the Caliph Vathek" has been described as "one of the finest productions of richly luxuriant imagination." He is buried almost in the shadow of his tower.

Few poems on Fonthill Abbey or Beckford's Tower are known, and unfortunately this one did not come to light in time to be included in Devendra Varma's *The Transient Gleam*.

E. W. Chappelow was an education officer with London County Council where he specialised in archaeology, literature and history. He contributed to many periodicals, and between 1916 and 1938 published three volumes of poems.

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