



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 54 APRIL 2021

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 24 JULY



**AT PAINSHILL PARK
BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 24 JULY 2021

Sadly, because of Covid-19 restrictions we were unable to visit Painshill for our AGM last year.

We hope that circumstances will be more favourable this Summer, and that we will be able to hold this year's meeting at Painshill Park, near Cobham, Surrey on Saturday 24 July.



Painshill: Ruined Abbey

We first visited Painshill in 1998, and last held our AGM here in 2005.

Painshill was created by Hon. Charles Hamilton (1704-1785) uncle of William Beckford's mother and youngest son of James, the sixth Earl of Abercorn. In 1738, he purchased some 300 acres of land and began creating his own 'pleasure garden', with a serpentine lake, grotto and other architectural features. He was forced to sell the estate in 1774 and moved to Bath where he continued to plant and create gardens.

Since the creation of the Painshill Park Trust in 1981, an extensive programme of restoration has returned the garden to its eighteenth-century scheme. The grotto has been recreated, and visitors can follow Hamilton's walk around the landscape passing other extraordinary buildings including the Turkish Tent, Ruined Abbey, Gothic Tower and Hermitage. The Temple of Bacchus is the latest building to be restored.

In the afternoon, after the formal business of the AGM and lunch, we will have a guided tour of the Painshill landscape.

FONTHILL OLD ABBEY

A visit to the grounds of Fonthill Old Abbey has been a welcome and anticipated event in recent years.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, there will be no public openings this May.

However, we can look forward to visiting on Sunday 1 and 15 May next year when visitors will be able to see work - including new planting and pathways - which has been undertaken during the last twelve months.

Cover photo: Gothic Temple, Painshill

POWDERHAM CASTLE
SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER



Powderham Castle

Covid-19 restrictions have caused our visit to Powderham Castle, seat of the Earl of Devon, to be cancelled twice. We originally planned to go on 4 April last year and when this was cancelled made new plans to visit on 17 April this year. Sadly, this latter date has also had to be cancelled.

Undeterred, we have made arrangements to visit on Sunday 19th September 2021.

Members' speedy response to our first announcement, made in November 2019, meant that we soon reached the maximum number. For this September's visit, places will be offered first to those members who booked then. However, if you would like to be added to the waiting list in the event of any cancellations, please let the Secretary know.

WHEN BECKFORD CAME TO STAY

Charlie Courtenay, Earl of Devon's Beckford Lecture 'When Beckford came to stay' (*Beckford Journal*, 25, 2019) has been reprinted in *The Georgian*;

The Magazine of the Georgian Group. Issue 2 (2020) pp. 46-51. In addition, there is an account of the Belvedere Tower made in 1776 by Samuel Curwen, an American who spent 9 years of exile in England (p. 52)

BECKFORD LECTURE
THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER



James Gillray, 'Equestrian Elegance – or – a Noble Scot, metamorphosed', 1803

This year's Beckford Lecture 'Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton and Hamilton Palace: the awe-inspiring demonstration of exalted status of the premier peer of Scotland, and some final additions from the Beckford bequest' will be given by Dr Godfrey Evans.

Dr Evans is Principal Curator of Decorative Arts, National Museums Scotland.

The lecture will be on Thursday 21 October at the Travellers Club, London SW1.

ALDERMAN BECKFORD'S STATUE

In response to Black Lives Matter, the Corporation of London set up, in June 2020, a Tackling Racism taskforce to look at many aspects of the City, including staffing, governance, police, education and culture.

In September, a three month consultation was launched to identify landmarks and monuments which pose a problem in relation to black lives. The report recommended that the statue of Alderman Beckford in the Great Hall should be removed. This was accepted by the Policy & Resources Committee who agreed that a working group should recommend a way forward by the end of April 2021.

The monument to Alderman Beckford, twice Lord Mayor and an MP for the City, was erected in 1772 by the City to honour his memory as a bold defender of constitutional liberty. The statue by G F Moore shows Beckford in the act of delivering his celebrated speech to George III.

INVENTORY OF BECKFORD'S WINE CELLAR

Luke Schrager and George Gillham explore William Beckford's wine cellar at Lansdown Crescent in an article in

the *Journal of the Wine Label Circle*.

Based on the inventory made at the time of Beckford's death, there are 136 entries for 48 wines with 39 associated names and places.

Among the wines are 9 bottles of Longleat Claret, presumably from the cellar of the Marquess of Bath; and 6 pints of Lansdowne's Constantia, probably from the Marquess of Lansdowne at Bowood. The name Franchi (probably Gregorio Franchi) is associated with four entries: Pints Sweet Wine, 2 doz & 6 pints Malmsey, 5 doz Bucellas, and 2 doz & 6 Sherry.

At that time, many wines were bottled in an owner's cellar and passed on as gifts, exchanged or sold at auction. A significant portion of the wines refer to pint bottles, which is why many old decanters will overflow if a 750 ml bottle is decanted into them. Similarly, wine labels now seem a little lost if the decanter is large enough for a full 750 ml bottle with room to breathe.

The inventory used by the authors is that compiled by Edmund English and Son and Robert Hume, which is now in the Beckford Papers in the Bodleian Library: MS Beckford c. 58, pp. 103a -112.

'William Beckford's 19th Century Wine List', *Journal of Wine Label Circle*, Vol. 14 No.6, 2020. 362 -368.

DR MARIANNA CLARK
(1922 - 2020)



Marianna Clark who died in November was a loyal member of the Beckford Society and foundation trustee of the Beckford Tower Trust.

She lived in Bath for over 60 years, being a councillor, Lady Mayoress, and magistrate. She was one of the founders of the Museum of Bath at Work which she tirelessly supported. She was an early campaigner against traffic pollution in the city. One of many projects she helped was the replacement of more than 1000 finials on the railings in Lansdown Crescent which had been missing since WWII. She was also a trustee of St John's Hospital.

Marianna was born in Stolberg to a Polish father and German mother. In 1939 the family fled to England from the Nazis. She studied at the Polish School of Medicine, Edinburgh, and married Stephen Clark, great-grand son of the founder of the family's shoe company. She completed her medical studies at Edinburgh University graduating in 1947. After moving to Bath in 1952, she

was a locum for practices in Bath on a regular basis.

Marianna was one of the trustees when Leslie and Elizabeth Hilliard established the Beckford Tower Trust in 1977 and continued to serve as a trustee until April 1992, when the Bath Preservation Trust became the sole trustee. She participated in our tours to Portugal (1999), Scotland (2000), and Switzerland (2005). She very kindly allowed us to use her garden in Lansdown Place for a tea party to celebrate William Beckford's 250th birthday in 2010. Her interest, enthusiasm and good sense enhanced any occasion.

BRENDAN LEHANE

Brendan Lehane a member of the Beckford Society died on 6 November.

He was a journalist and author who wrote about the history and natural history of Ireland. Among his books were *The Companion Guide to Ireland* (1973), *The Power of Plants* (1977), *Early Celtic Christianity* (1994) and *Wild Ireland* (1995).

He was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

PRISCILLA FERNANDO
(1931 – 2020)

Priscilla Fernando a member of the Beckford Society and a staunch supporter of the Beckford Tower Trust died on 21 December.



Her father Air Commodore Charles Rummey Samson, was a naval aviation pioneer, who sadly died six weeks before she was born. He was one of the first four officers selected for pilot training by the Royal Navy and the first person to fly an aircraft from a moving ship. He transferred to the RAF on its creation in 1918.

In World War II, Priscilla was evacuated to stay with her father's family in America. On return, following boarding school, and marriage in 1953, she worked for the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) until 1978.

On retirement, with her great energy, she threw herself into working for various charities, her special ones being the British Legion and Brompton Hospital, where she ran the shop and trolley which visited the wards. Patients were fond of her and she took much interest in them.

She visited the Beckford Tower exhibition at Christie's one morning in January 1998 and explained that her grandparents, who had played an important part in her childhood, and great-grandparents were buried in Lansdown Cemetery, hence her interest in the Tower and Cemetery. With her family co-trustee Chrissie Reid she supported the work of the Beckford Tower Trust. This generosity made a significant contribution to the tower's endowment.

Priscilla was a member of the Tower's Council of Management, always keeping a watchful eye on the state of the Cemetery. She attended Beckford Society AGMs and Lectures. We shall miss her friendship, enthusiasm, great interest in the world around her, and her championing of various causes in her determined fashion.

BECKFORD'S TOWER

THE BECKFORD TOWER PROJECT WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The *Our Tower* project continues to move forward at Beckford's Tower. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the development phase of the project is working to put in place the information and ideas needed to make the Phase 2/Development Phase funding application, which we aim to submit in June 2022.

The events of the last year caused the project to slow down slightly, but we managed to adapt to Covid restrictions and still held some public consultations and guided tours of the museum. The pace is now picking up and our project staff team is growing as we recruit for specific roles.

The interpretation consultants we will be working with are now in place and the process of appointing architects to lead the design team is also underway.

We recently installed some people-counters in Lansdown Cemetery to help us gather information about how many people are currently visiting the landscape around the Tower. The number of visitors has gone up in the past year as people looked for new routes to walk in the landscape surrounding Bath.



Beckford's Tower, January 2021
Photo: Amy Frost

We would really like to hear from Beckford Society Members to help us build up an idea of what the museum and landscape could offer visitors in the future. If you would be happy to complete a short survey to help inform some of our ideas, please get in touch at beckford@bptrust.org.uk

AMY FROST

IN THE SALEROOM

A blue & white platter with a view of Fonthill sold for £100 (lot 40) at Duke's Winter Auction, in Dorchester on 25 February.

William Beckford's copy of Alexander Dalrymple, *An Historical Collection of Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific*, London, [1700]-1771, in two volumes, sold for £4,410 (lot 266) at Sotheby's, London on 17 November 2020.

A copy of Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower*, Bath, 1844 from the library of Mr and Mrs John Gutfreud was sold (lot 14) by Christie's New York on 29 January. The book fetched \$4,375 against a pre-sale estimate of \$1,200 – 1,800.

DORA CARRINGTON'S *VATHEK*

Dora Carrington's copy of the second English edition of *Vathek*, 1809, is offered for sale by the German bookseller Books and Beaches/Anna Bechteler, Icking. Described as fragile but complete, it is inscribed on the front free endpaper 'for D[ora] C[arrington] from Lytton'. It has the shelf-mark of Lytton Strachey's Ham Spray House library, and initialled 'R[alph] P[artridge]' on the front pastedown, being ultimately in the library of Frances Partridge. €3,900.

RIESENER: *ÉBÉNISTE DU ROI*

Jean-Henri Riesener was Marie-Antionette's favourite cabinetmaker. Pieces made by the official cabinetmaker to the king were later among furniture in William Beckford's collection.

At the time of the Fonthill sale in 1823, a splendid roll-top desk, now in the Wallace Collection, was in the Grand Drawing Room. This is one of the pieces illustrated in Rufus Bird's 'Let them make furniture' (*Country Life*, 10 March, 80-81, 83) which considers Riesener's career and surveys pieces in British collections.

Since 2016 curators and conservators at the Wallace Collection, Waddesdon Manor and the Royal Collection have worked on a joint research project to study the furniture by Riesener in their three collections. The result of their work was published in a book in December 2020.

The Wallace Collection's website has a Riesener Microsite which provides information on Riesener's life, work for the French Court and his other patrons. It examines furniture in the Wallace Collection revealing his methods, materials used, and techniques employed.

THE FONTHILL PAVILION IN 1823



Fonthill Pavilion from Ackermann's *Repository of Arts*, 1823

At the time of the Phillips sale at Fonthill Abbey in 1823 accommodation was in short supply, and the remaining wing of Fonthill Splendens helped to satisfy the demand. The building will be familiar from the beautiful hand-coloured lithograph published that August with the caption 'FONTHILL ABBEY. THE PAVILION (now used as a Dormitory for the Visitors) AND THE LAKE, IN THE OLD PARK.' It appeared in Ackermann's *Repository of Arts*, and the accompanying account (v.2: 103–105, 1½ pp) is less well known and was not copied from elsewhere. It ended with these remarks:

This interesting place has at length received the attention which it deserved, and... the Fountain-Court has been fitted up as an elegant refectory, where refreshments of the most simple or of the most luxurious kind may be reasonably purchased at all times; and to prevent the fatigue of a considerable journey every night and morning, the Pavilion is fitted up with beds, and the greatest attention has been paid in its arrangement to propriety and comfort. Public breakfasts are given here every morning; and with such heightened attractions, and such accommodations not previously provided, it is natural to anticipate a greater influx of visitors than at the former exhibition, curious to obtain a sight of the glories of this celebrated place before the hammer of the auctioneer, not less potent than the wand of fairy enchantress, bids them disappear for ever.

Part of Ackermann's description was reprinted in a long article in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* a few days later on the 4th of August, including most of the above passage.

Incidentally there is a plan of the ground and first floors of the Pavilion prepared for George Mortimer after 1824 now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Accession No. 60.724.85a).

Apart from advertisements (1822, v.14: 368 & 1823, v.1: 245–246) for the major works by Britton and Rutter to publicise the Phillips sale, the only other mention of Beckford or Fonthill in Ackermann's *Repository* occurs in a poem signed 'B' (1823, v.2: 295). Under the title 'Verses on an Antique Snuff-box', the author praised his snuff-box in fourteen 4-line stanzas of which these are the final two:

Nor would I change with peer or king
Mine antique *tabatière*,
Or barter for a costlier thing
The beauties speaking there.

Beckford a richer one might have,
They yet at Fonthill shew it;
But never need the Muses crave
A nobler for a poet.

Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834) was a lithographer and publisher born in Saxony. He moved to London at the age of 23 and established various businesses, including a lithographic press. He is perhaps best known today for his fine colour plate books, notably *The Microcosm of London* (1808–1810), and the histories of the universities of Oxford (1814) and Cambridge (1815).

Beginning in January 1809 his press published his *Repository of Arts, Literature, Fashions*, an illustrated monthly magazine which ran for twenty years until December 1828. As well as depicting country houses, it chronicled the changing fashions in dress, furniture, music and the theatre during the Regency.

JON MILLINGTON

THE STARLIGHT YEARS

The writers and artists Edward and Stephani Scott-Snell made a pilgrimage to Fonthill in Feb 1939.

‘Then under a great classical archway of cyclopean stone, into the Beckford estate. Here, we descended to contemplate for a moment our first vision of the lake and sloping lawns in twilight ...’, Stephanie recorded in her diary. ‘Then between the gentle rising pastures and closely wooded hills to arrive under the first stars before the Beckford Arms. After late tea by lamplight, beside a blazing fire, in a lofty panelled room, whose furniture must have known the touch of Mr Lansdown, when he visited the inn on a similar pilgrimage 80 years ago, we sat and talked of Beckford and his fabulous world...’

After dinner they walked beneath enormous winter stars up the long avenue to see the remains of the Abbey. ‘Looking up at all the stars, I heard again the angelic voice of Pachierotti singing as in my dreams’. She saw visions of Beckford, Louisa and Kitty Courtenay. ‘I heard the tower singing a fine tune through some ancient storm, and saw its pinnacles far above me against the stars’.

Edwards’s antennae for the strange and beautiful had led him to William Beckford. He made him a citizen of Thessyras, the fantasy world he invented which became the subject of stories, poems and art works. Stephani, or possibly both of them, compiled a life of Beckford which she wrote out in a fine miniscule, lacking only the illuminated letters.

Soon after the Fonthill visit they became tenants of William Morris’s Kelmscott Manor and remained there throughout the war. Here they produced figurative paintings, sometimes working on the same picture, and wrote alternate chapters of a biography of Morris.

Selections of their letters and journal are included in *The Starlight Years: Love & War at Kelmscott Manor 1940 – 1948*. (The Dovecote Press, Wimborne, 2015). Edited by their younger son Joselyn Godwin, it tells the story of two artists, their lives at Kelmscott and their attempt at creating an alternative world.

See illustration on back cover.

THE FONTHILL ARCHWAY



Stephani Godwin (1917-2006) 'The Fonthill Archway'.

'... under a great classical archway of cyclopean stones'. Stephani Godwin's painting of the Fonthill Archway following the pilgrimage made in February 1938.

In 1945, Stephani and Edward Scott-Snell changed their surname by deed poll from Scott-Snell to Godwin (Stephani's mother's maiden name), using the latter on all their subsequent writings and artistic work.

See article: 'The Starlight Years' within.

THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER
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