



# THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER



NO 55 SEPTEMBER 2021

## THE BECKFORD LECTURE



DR GODFREY EVANS

*Alexander, 10<sup>th</sup> 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.*

THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER 2021  
AT 6.30 PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB  
106 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1

THE BECKFORD SOCIETY  
MINUTES OF TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
HELD ON SATURDAY 24 JULY 2021  
AT PAINSHILL PARK

In opening the meeting, Chairman Stephen Clarke said that this was the third occasion the Society has been at Painshill. We paid a visit in 1998 and held our AGM here in 2005. On those occasions we were guided around the landscape by Bill Tomlins, a long-time member, who was devoted to Painshill and acted as a guide for many years. Sadly, he died in December 2019.

1. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies have been received from: Richard Allen, Dr Brian and Margaret Baird, Kirsten Elliott, Prof Mike Fraser, Dr Stephen Lloyd, Dr Bet McLeod, David Mason, Benetta and Stephen Morant, Edward Pope, Angela Probyn, Kevin Rogers, and Dr Kim Sloan.

2. Minutes of last Meeting.

The Minutes of the last meeting held at the Holburne Museum in Bath on Saturday 15 June 2019 were approved.

3. Chairman's Report.

Who would have thought that a pandemic would sweep through the world some eight months after our last AGM? It meant that we were not able to meet last year. Our plans for a meeting here at Painshill, on 4 June, had to be cancelled. Also, our long-anticipated visit to Powderham and the annual Beckford Lecture had to be postponed rather than cancelled.

Our membership, despite some losses and additions, remains at 200.

Since the last meeting the death occurred on 25 March last year of the publisher Michael Russell who brought out several works of interest to Beckfordians. The first was James Lees-Milne's *William Beckford* (1976), He published Beckford's correspondence with his bookseller George Clarke under the title *The Consummate Collector* (2000) in an edition of 450 copies, and Robert

Gemmett's *Beckford's Fonthill; The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (2003). There was also Virginia Surtees' *A Beckford Inheritance. The Lady Lincoln Scandal* (1977) which told the story of Beckford's granddaughter Susan. Volumes under his imprint were well produced, elegantly laid out, and often designed by Humphrey Stone. He was very helpful to the Society in seeing Jon Millington's *William Beckford; A Bibliography* through the press and even dispatched copies of the finished book to subscribers.

The death occurred last November of Dr Marianna Clark a loyal member and a foundation trustee of the Beckford Trust. She continued to serve as a trustee until 1992 when the Bath Preservation Trust became the sole trustee. She participated in our tours to Portugal (1999), Scotland (2000), and Switzerland (2005). She kindly allowed us to use her garden in Lansdown Place for a tea party to celebrate William Beckford's 250th birthday in 2010.

Priscilla Fernado who had been a staunch member since 1998 died on 21 December. She discovered the Beckford Society when visiting the Beckford Tower exhibition at Christie's and thereafter regularly attended the Beckford Lecture and AGMs. Her interest sprang from the fact that her grand and great-grand parents were buried in Lansdown Cemetery. With her family co-trustee Chrissie Reid she supported the Beckford Tower Trust making a significant contribution to the Tower's endowment.

The Black Lives Matter movement following the death of George Floyd in May 2020 has drawn attention to the legacies of slave ownership. This presents a challenge to this Society. People have strong views, but there is clearly a realignment in public opinion which we would ignore at our peril.

The statue to Alderman Beckford in London's Guildhall was one of the monuments identified as posing a problem by a Corporation of London taskforce which recommended that it should be removed. Late last year pupils, parents, and staff at Beckford Primary School, near to the site of Mrs Beckford's house, voted to rename it West Hampstead primary School.

#### 4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer in presenting her report said that the Society's funds were in good shape. Income for the year 2020/21 was £3,152 and expenditure £2,191, giving a surplus of £794, after adjustments for foreign exchange movements.

#### 5. Election of Committee

Amy Frost and Sidney Blackmore, having completed three years, were willing to serve again. Bet McLeod was standing down from the committee. Bet became a member of the committee in 2007 and has edited the Beckford Journal very effectively since 2010. We are very grateful to her for the work she has done.

Dr Kim Sloan who worked at the British Museum until her recent retirement and is an expert on the work of Alexander and John Robert Cozens, has expressed her willingness to join the committee and to take over as editor of the Beckford Journal from next year. She was duly elected to the committee.

#### 6. Future Activities

We were optimistic that, despite being postponed several times, our visit to Powderham Castle would take place on Sunday 19 September.

The Beckford Lecture would be on Thursday 21 October when Dr Godfrey Evans, Principal Curator of Decorative Arts at National Museums Scotland, would lecture on 'Alexander, 10<sup>th</sup> 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'. Members are very welcome to the lecture even if they do not attend the dinner which follows.

We always welcome suggestions for future visits and activities. We last visited Ashridge, Wyatt's great house in 1997, so perhaps a return visit might be welcome by members. Please let the Chairman or Secretary know if you have any ideas.

#### 7. Society Publications and Communications.

Since our last meeting, two volumes of the Beckford Journal have been published. The 2019 volume contained: Charlie Courtenay's Beckford Lecture, Eric Ratcliff on Fonthill and the Gothic Revival, an account of the Society's

Scottish tour, and reviews by Malcolm Jack and Peter Forsaith. The latest issue had Stephen Lloyd's Beckford Lecture, Anne Almond's article on Beckford and the castrati, Malcolm Jack's survey of Beckford's queer life as seen by his biographers, Eric Ratcliff on Beckford's Tower, and a review of Dale Townshend's *Gothic Antiquity*.

There have been four Newsletters since we last met. Still the majority (85%) of members wish to receive the Newsletter in paper format.

#### 8. Any Other Business

Following a suggestion from the Secretary, Shaftesbury Museum will have a 'Fonthill Fever' exhibition next year to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the 1822 and 1823 sales.

Dr Amy Frost reported that Beckford's Tower was currently closed, but visits may be made by appointment. Work on the Our Tower development project was continuing with the aim of submitting the second phase application to the HLF in June next year. The architectural design team had been appointed and work begun on surveying the tower. It was planned to undertake a full survey of the Grotto Tunnel in August.

Work was progressing in transcribing Beckford's letters. Bath Preservation Trust was in partnership with Bath Abbey and Bath Records Office in a project to research the city's links with the transatlantic slave trade. With Professor Robert Beckford work was underway to explore what the Beckford surname means to people of colour.

One of the objects of the Our Tower project was to stabilise environmental conditions in the tower to allow objects and material from collections such as Brodick and Bodleian to be displayed. The project was keen to have the views from Beckford Society members and others on what they might expect to see when visiting the tower.

#### 9. Date of Next Meeting.

On Saturday 4 or 11 June 2022. Possibly in Wiltshire.

## BECKFORD'S TOWER – 'OUR TOWER' PROJECT

Thomas Sheppard, Chairman of the Bath Preservation Trust and Beckford Society member, gave an update on Beckford Tower's 'Our Tower' project.

“Much has been achieved since we reported to you two years ago in Bath. In October that year the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded £422,600 to facilitate further planning. We are now working on the second-stage submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Beckford's Tower is both a wonderful and curious thing in the Preservation Trust's portfolio. It was an extraordinary place for Beckford. The tower was a private space, but the setting and landscape were equally important to him. For decades, the MOD site opposite did little to enhance the setting. Now following the site's sale and development, a new community has arisen ranging from children to residents in retirement homes. It is important to allow this community to feel a sense of ownership of the tower and its surroundings, and to make use of the site. A pedestrian crossing now eases access across a busy road.

Through the generosity of Stephen and Benetta Morant the Tower Trust has been able to acquire the two paddocks (2 acres) adjoining the cemetery. This will enable visitors to approach the tower along part of Beckford's route.

The second-stage application will be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in June next year. The project will be seeking £2.5million, but by March we need to demonstrate that we have raised £450,000. Support is forthcoming from Heritage England and a private donor”.

Thomas explained the Heritage Lottery Fund would look to be satisfied that those most interested in the Tower had shown their support, for if they would not support the project why should the Fund. He hoped that members of the Beckford Society, given their special interest in William Beckford, would all give their support and he suggested that a total of £100,000 coming from the Society would equate to each member contributing £500 (or slightly less with Gift Aid),

He looked forward to reporting good news at the next AGM.

## PAINSHILL LANDSCAPE GARDEN



View from the Turkish Tent

Photo David Allen

PAINSHILL, the landscape garden begun in 1738 by the Hon. Charles Hamilton, William Beckford's great uncle, made the perfect setting for this year's Annual General Meeting.

Over the last forty years the garden has been miraculously restored from a state of dereliction. Despite a gloomy weather forecast, the clouds rolled away, and we were able to stroll through the landscape and be delighted by its visual surprises in the way that Hamilton's own guests would have been.

Beckford Society member Jan Clark and her colleague Graham Dash guided us with enthusiasm and knowledge explaining the history of the garden.

A circuit walk took us from the Amphitheatre, passing the vineyard to the ten-sided Gothic Temple which gives a view over the lake towards the five-arch bridge and in the distance the Turkish Tent.



The Grotto and Serpentine Lake

Photo David Allen

For many, the high spot of the garden is the spectacular grotto, designed by Joseph Lane of Tisbury in the 1760s. The brick-built structure is clad externally with



oolitic limestone, inside the walls are lined with gypsum, calcite, quartz, fluorite and other minerals. Man-made stalactites hang from the ceiling. Re-creation of the grotto begun in the 1980s. Now complete, it is a crystal cave to both amaze and delight.

The latest building to be re-made is the Temple of Bacchus, which was built by Charles Hamilton to house the statue he brought back from his grand tour. The statue was later purchased by William Beckford and is now at Anglesey Abbey.



Grotto Interior

Photo David Allen

We are grateful to Jan Clark and Graham Dash for their tours of Charles Hamilton's landscape, and to the Painshill Garden Trust and its volunteers, who over the last forty years have restored the landscape to its 18<sup>th</sup> century glory.

## BECKFORD LECTURE THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER



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

This year's Beckford Lecture 'Alexander, 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

His research interest are the Dukes of Hamilton and the Hamilton Palace collections. He is currently working on a book on the Dukes of Hamilton and the Hamilton Palace collection between 1799 and 1919.



## KEITH A. HONESS

Keith A. Honess who died last March aged 89, joined the Society in 1998, having discovered our existence through Tim Mowl's biography of Beckford. He described himself as 'a student of Beckford for many years'.

He wrote the entries about Beckford and Fonthill Abbey in *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, 1986.

## A PLAQUE TO JOHN RUTTER

On 7 August, the Lord Lieutenant of Dorset unveiled a plaque to John Rutter (1796-1851) on the building in Shaftesbury in which he ran his printing and publishing business and subscription library. Rutter was a radical and man of many parts who wrote three guidebooks to Fonthill, including the comprehensive and beautifully illustrated *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823.

## FONTHILL FEVER

Next year, Shaftesbury's Gold Hill Museum will hold a small exhibition *Fonthill Fever* commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1822 and 1823 Fonthill sales.

April – October 2022, Gold Hill, Shaftesbury. Dorset, SP7 8JW.

## IN THE SALEROOM

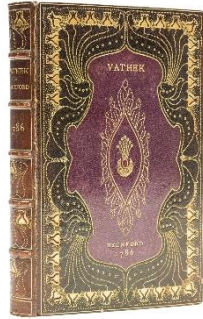
A watercolour by J R Cozens 'In the Gardens of the Villa Negroni, Rome' c.1783, was sold for £337,500 at Christie's, London sale (lot 104) on 6 July. It had been in Beckford's collection and sold at his sale at Christie's on 10 April 1805 for 6gns.

A George III mahogany hall bench, in reasonable 'country house condition', commissioned by Alderman Beckford for Fonthill Splendens, was sold at Christie's 'The Exceptional Sale' on 8 July (lot 34) for £50,000. The settee is one from a set of six which were sold in 1801 Fonthill sale.

An antique wine bottle, late 18th/early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the bottle with a seal of a heron holding a fish (possibly the crest of the Beckford family) 29cms high, was sold for £360 (in a lot of five antique bottles) at Lawrences of Crewkerne on 19 July (lot 184).

A portrait miniature of George Robertson by John Smart appeared in the Wooley & Wallis, Salisbury, sale of Old Masters, British & European Paintings on 11/12 August (lot 7). It sold for £1,900. George Robertson (1747-1788) a landscape painter, travelled with William Beckford of Somerley to Jamaica in

1772. He spent two years on the island, producing views which were subsequently engraved.



*Vathek* bound by Rivière & Son

A copy of the first edition of *Vathek*, London, 1786, in a later grand binding by Rivière & Son of crushed brown leather with inlaid panels of purple Morocco was sold by Forum Auctions on 27 May (lot 233) for £1,300. It contained a card of John I Waterbury inscribed with Christmas good wishes on the front free endpaper. Waterbury (d.1929) was a Wall Street financier, banker, and President of the Manhattan Trust Company. He represented his country at the Wireless Telegraphy Conference in London in the early 1900s.

A copy of Christie's sale catalogue of the *Magnificent Effects of Fonthill Abbey*, 1822, interleaved with a few price annotations, in contemporary roan-backed boards with original printed paper label sold for £1,000 at Forum Auctions on 8 July (lot 205).

## AN IMAGE OF FONTHILL



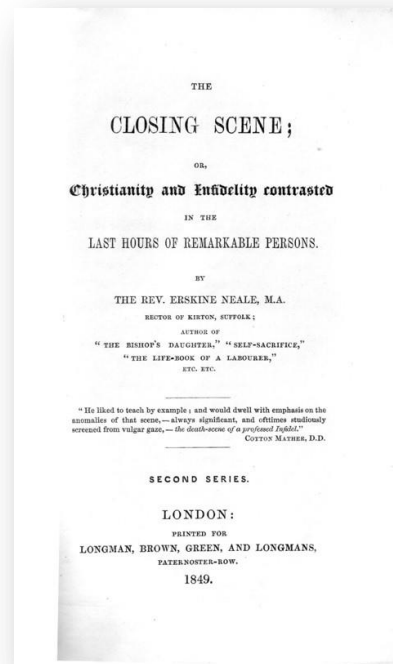
*Member Bryan Welch writes about the bookplate he has commissioned.*

I have recently had a new bookplate made by the distinguished wood engraver, Simon Brett. The image developed out of a number of exchanges with the artist. I wanted to incorporate various facets of my life in a coherent picture. The tomb is drawn from Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* and evokes my interest in funeral architecture; however, my children, the bicycles and the little dog speak of life not death. In the background we see a faint image of Fonthill Abbey as in a dream. Finally, the massive stones recall Ian Hamilton Finlay's monumental inscriptions at Little Sparta. I am very pleased with the way Simon integrated my ideas into a coherent image.

## CHRISTIAN OR INFIDEL?

*The Closing Scene*, Second Series, by Rev Erskine Neale  
London: Longman, etc., 1849. xix, 469 pp.  
18cm.

In the late 1840s the Rev. Erskine Neale (1803-1883), rector of Kirton, Suffolk, published two series of biographical essays under the title *The Closing Scene; or, Christianity and Infidelity contrasted in the last Hours of Remarkable Persons*. After outlining the life of each subject, he ended by judging whether a person was a Christian or Infidel.



Beckford, 'the Man of Taste', was the first of fifteen subjects in the second series with a twenty-page summary of his life based on a number of sources, notably the conversations with Cyrus Redding and others in the *New Monthly Magazine* from June to December 1844, and the 4½-page obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1844.

At the end came 'Closing Scene', an account of Beckford's death, including several questions which left the reader in no doubt that Beckford was to be regarded as an Infidel. The author asked, 'What hospital did he build? What asylum did he endow? What school did he originate? What sanctuary did he raise for worship of The Most High?... What charity did he munificently support during his life?' After Neale's final paragraph, 'Would that in his varied reading the following stanzas had struck him and roused his vigorous mind to the prosecution of some enterprise worthy of his genius, his station, and his wealth!' was an extract beginning 'Wake! Thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers' from 'The Religion of Taste', a long poem of 1824 by the Rev. Carlos Wilcox.

Neale came to the conclusion that about half of those limned were Christian. By contrast, in William Haig Miller's *The Mirage of Life* (1850) all twelve, including Beckford, were found wanting. This shorter work on similar lines is better known, being reprinted many times by the Religious Tract Society (see a review in the *Beckford Tower Newsletter* 1982. p.8).

The review of the second series in the *Morning Post* of 6 April 1849 noted that: ‘He was a wise man who said, “Tell me not how a man died, but how he lived;” and, indeed, the work before us illustrates this, for in the first instance of the present series we have the case of Mr. Beckford, of Fonthill, who died in apparent peace, although he had made no very distinct profession of religion, and certainly had shown little of its influence in his life...’ On 4 June *The Times* said the work ‘has brought together truthful, short and neatly written narratives of the “last hours of remarkable persons”, his object being to contrast Christianity and Infidelity...’

A second edition appeared in 1850, and in the same year there was a Dutch translation culled from both the first and second series, but Beckford was not among those present. There was also an American edition of the second series, published in Philadelphia by Leary, Getz in 1860.

The Bodleian Library’s copy of the Second Series is available online at: [The closing scene; or, Christianity and infidelity contrasted in the last hours of remarkable persons, by the author of ‘The bishop’s daughter’ \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

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