



THE BECKFORD NEWSLETTER

NO. 61 SEPTEMBER 2024



THE BECKFORD LECTURE



PROF DANIELE NIEDDA

William Beckford's Use of the Ancients
in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER

6.30 PM

THE TRAVELLERS CLUB, LONDON SW1

BOOKING FORM ENCLOSED

Image: Head of Medusa. Flemish late 16th/early 17th century. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thirty-four members attended this year's Annual General Meeting held in Kingswood School's Sports Pavilion, Lansdown, Bath.

After lunch, Dr Amy Frost, Senior Curator, Bath Preservation Trust described the recent restoration of Beckford's Tower and discoveries made during the course of the work.

Members then had the opportunity to visit the Tower and the grotto tunnel.

We are grateful to Amy and the Beckford Tower Trust for a memorable day.



AGM Faces. Dr Kim Sloan, Editor; Sir Malcolm Jack, President; Dr Amy Frost; and Sidney Blackmore, Secretary. Photo: Laurent Chatel.

THE BECKFORD SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD ON SATURDAY 27 JULY 2024

AT KINGSDOWN SCHOOL SPORTS PAVILION, LANSDOWN, BATH

The Secretary explained that due to the absence of the Stephen Clarke, the Society's Chairman, our President, Sir Malcolm Jack, had kindly agreed to take the chair.

In opening the meeting, the President welcomed members and guests. Yet again, it was good to see many familiar faces, including those of Laurent Châtel, and Gregors Türk from France.

Item 1 – Apologies for Absence.

Apologies had been received from Anne-Marie Bannister, Robert Borsje, Stephen Clarke, David Foston, Prof Mike Fraser, Dawn Hodgson, Jon and Pat Millington, Dr Eric Ratcliff, Dr Patricia Reynolds, Marco da Silva, Roger and Sue Southgate, Prof Richard Wendorf and Elizabeth Hilliar, and Jane Wainwright.

Item 2 – Minutes of Twenty-Seventh AGM.

Minutes of the last AGM held at the Georgian Group, 6 Fitzroy Square, London on 24 June 2024 were approved.

Item 3 – Chairman’s Report.

Twenty-eight years ago we held our first AGM here in Bath. We have met in the city on nine subsequent occasions, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute or the Holburne Museum. We have never met before so close to Lansdown Tower, so this is a special occasion as we celebrate the re-opening of the Tower after its extensive restoration.

Our membership hovers just below 200: the majority from the UK, with 17 from Europe and 24 from other parts of the world. Members were encouraged to suggest the names of anyone who might be interested in joining the Society especially younger people for the future continuation of the Society..

Sadly we have lost a number of long-standing members through death in the last twelve months.

David Machin joined the Society in 1995 shortly after buying an apartment in Beckford's house, 20 Lansdown Crescent. David spent much of his life in publishing, working as both an editor and literary agent. He was a director of Jonathan Cape, Chatto and Bodey Head. Then served for several years as General Secretary of the Society of Authors. He returned to publishing as Managing Director of Bodley Head. Then from 1989 – 2000, was Under Treasurer at Gray's Inn.

The death has also occurred of an Australian member, Stephanie Mikes who joined in 2002. A Beckford enthusiast, she created a William Beckford discussion list at Yahoo Groups.

We must also note the passing of Dr Robert Longbourne a Wiltshire local historian and GP. He joined the Society in 1995 and contributed an article to the Beckford Journal on William Turner of Oxford's watercolour of Fonthill which had just been acquired by Salisbury Museum.

Dr Alicia Weisberg-Roberts gave last year's Beckford Lecture on 30 November, when she spoke on 'Transport, Translation, Transition: William Beckford's Orientalism in Context.' which examined Beckford as both collector and author in the light of Orientalism. Forty-one members and guests attended the lecture which was followed by dinner, in the splendid setting of the library of the Travellers Club, to provide a thoroughly enjoyable evening. I do hope any members who have not attended one of these events will be tempted to come along on another occasion.

Last July, in the heat of Rome, a revival of the Beckford Roundtable at the International Conference of 18th Century Studies took place at the campus of Sapienza University. Under the chairmanship of Daniele Niedda, papers were given by Marion Harney on Beckford's architectural taste; Peter Lindfield concentrated on continental architectural influences. Laurent Châtel talked

about Beckford's Orientalist collecting of pictures and *objects d'art*; while our Chairman Stephen Clarke described the forty books from Beckford's collection which had been recently discovered in the Honresfield library. I took the opportunity to consider to what extent Beckford's three works on Portugal bear any relation to his actual experience there.

In February, we were reminded of Philip Hewat-Jaboor our late Vice-President when furniture and objects from his collection - including a marvellous group which had belonged to William Beckford - were sold at Christie's in London. It gave a wider audience the opportunity to see these Beckfordian items, as well as works commissioned by Thomas Hope and Philip's passion for imperial porphyry. Christie's title for the sale 'Philip Hewat-Jaboor: An Eye for the Magnificent' echoed that of the landmark Beckford exhibition inspired by Philip which was held in New York and London in 2001-2002.

Those who attended our lecture in 2001 will have heard Dr Godfrey Evans, of National Museums Scotland, talking about Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton and Hamilton Palace. We have just heard the good news that Godfrey's *magnus opus Hamilton Palace: The Dukes of Hamilton and their collections* will appear in October.

Item 4 – Treasurer's Report.

In the absence of the Treasurer, the Secretary presented the Accounts for 2023/2024. These showed an income of £8,158 and expenditure of £7,767. Net assets stood at £9,053. The dinner showed a loss which the committee is concerned about and will keep under review.

Item 5 – Appointment of President and Election of Committee.

The meeting endorsed Sir Malcolm Jack's appointment as President for a further three years.

Dr Kim Sloan, Dr Amy Frost and Sidney Blackmore having completed three years were willing to serve again, and were re-elected.

Item 6 – To Formally Ratify Prof Daniele Niedda as Vice-President.

The Committee approached Professor Daniele Niedda to see whether he would be willing to accept the role of Vice-President. We are delighted that he has agreed.

Daniele has been a member of the Society since 1999. He gave the Beckford Lecture in 2002 on 'Beckford's narrating as collecting'. He is Professor of English at the University of International Studies, Rome. His main fields of research are British culture in the long Eighteenth Century and its reception in Italy, in particular William Beckford and Edmund Burke, and more recently with Victorian studies with special focus on Benjamin Disraeli. Recently he has spent time researching the Beckford Papers in the Bodleian Library whilst a Visiting Fellow at St Catherine's College, Oxford. He is working on an Italian edition of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*. He sent his apologies for not being able to attend the AGM.

The meeting ratified Prof Niedda's appointment as Vice-President.

Item 7 – Future Activities.

This year's Beckford Lecture would be held on Tuesday 26th November at the Traveller's Club in London, when our new Vice-President Daniele Niedda will lecture on 'William Beckford's Use of the Ancients in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*'

The Secretary reported that for some time the Society had been attempting to arrange another visit to Ashridge, the mansion in Hertfordshire designed by James Wyatt. The house had organised public events in recent months, so we would endeavour to see whether a visit by the Society might be possible.

Item 8 – Publications and Communications.

The 29th volume of the Beckford Journal appeared last November, presenting an interesting compendium of articles including: Timothy Wilcox's Beckford Lecture on Beckford and John Robert Cozens; Robert Gemmett on the 1823 Fonthill sale; our Chairman Stephen Clarke's article on books from Beckford's collection now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge; and Amy Frost's contribution on Beckford's doodles. There is also the first part of Diana Berry's account of organising the 1976 Beckford exhibition held in Salisbury and Bath, and my own paper given at the Rome Beckford Roundtable on Beckford's recollections of Portugal.

Kim Sloan said that the 2024 Journal would be about the size of the previous issue and it would be ready in time for the Annual Lecture. She wondered whether any members had any photographs of the 1976 Beckford exhibition. She welcomed suggestions for articles in next year's issue. Veronica Watts suggested that the speakers at the Rome Beckford Roundtable should be approached.

The Editor was thanked for her work on the Journal, which as well as encouraging Beckford studies was a vital link with our membership.

Mike Fraser has done some significant behind the scenes work on the security of the website to make the cybersecurity more robust. He has also loaded some more back numbers (Vols 12 – 14) of the Beckford Journal to the website. He was thanked for his contribution.

The President proposed that the meeting acknowledge the tireless work of Sidney Blackmore as Secretary. A round of applause was given.

Item 9. Any Other Business.

Marion Harney mentioned that she had written ‘Theatres of the Imagination: Strawberry Hill and Fonthill Abbey’ which will appear in *Horace Walpole’s Styles*, to be published by Liverpool University Press later this year.

Laurent Châtel noticed in a recent visit to the V&A that whilst there is an attractive cabinet display of prints and objects about Beckford, later acquisitions, including the coffer from Lansdown Tower, were confined to a dark corner.

Item 10 – Date Of Next Meeting.

On a Saturday in early June. Probably in London.

LETTER FROM DANIELE NIEDDA

Dear Members of the Beckford Society,

Let me take a brief moment of your time to express my sincere gratitude for having been appointed Vice-President of your Society. I am honoured to follow in the steps of two distinguished friends, Gerlof Janzen and Philip Hewat-Jaboor, whom I am surely not alone in missing.

At the Bilateral Meeting of the Italian and British Societies of Eighteenth Century Studies, which was held in Oxford on 18 – 21 July, William Beckford was the sole author to be the subject of two papers (including mine). Moreover, it was heartening to see a growing number of new and early-career scholars committed to researching and studying Beckford’s period.

So let me close with the wish that this trend of interest by the younger generation will continue and consolidate, offering us new perspectives and insights for many years to come.

With very best wishes, Daniele Niedda.

BECKFORD LECTURE 2024

This year's Beckford Lecture will be held on Tuesday 26 November when Prof Daniele Niedda, our new Vice President, will lecture on "William Beckford's Use of the Ancients in 'Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents'".

The lecture will be at the Travellers Club, London SW1, followed by dinner.

A booking form is enclosed.

PROF KENNETH GRAHAM'S LIBRARY

Kenneth Graham, Professor Emeritus at the University of Guelph, has written extensively on Beckford and William Godwin. He edited *Vathek & The Escape from Time* (1990) and his edition of *Vathek and the Episodes of Vathek* was published in 2019.

He is now seeking to dispose of his library, which is rich in Beckford and Godwin material. Ideally, he would like to find a buyer for the whole.

For further information: contact Eric Haugen: (email. eric.haugen@live.ca)

BECKFORD'S TOWER – OPENING TIMES 2024 AND LANTERN TOURS

Beckford's Tower is open at weekends until 15 December 2024.

Until October: open 10.30am – 4pm (last admission 3.30pm).

November – December: Open at 10.30am – 3pm (last admission 2.30).

Visitors are usually only able to climb up as high as the Belvedere, but an additional 45 minute tour, for just an extra £5 per person, enables a limited number of visitors to climb inside the golden Lantern.

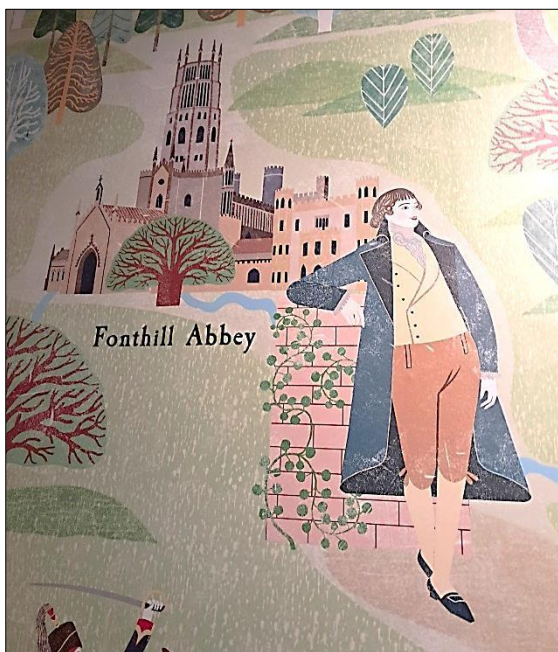
Due to the small nature of the Lantern space, this tour is limited to a maximum of 6 people and unfortunately is not suitable for children under the age of 8 years.

There are 154 steps to the Belvedere and over 50 steps within the Lantern.

Tickets should be booked via the Beckford's Tower website, beckfordstower.org.uk

SALISBURY MUSEUM

This summer Salisbury Museum opened a series of new galleries, including the Devenish Bradshaw Salisbury History Gallery which tells the story of Salisbury and South West Wiltshire from 1220 to the present day.



The Salisbury Museum Mural: Fonthill and William Beckford

William Beckford and Fonthill are included in the display. Among items shown is William Turner of Oxford's watercolour of Fonthill Abbey. A mural of South West Wiltshire, at the entrance to the gallery, includes depictions of Beckford and Fonthill.

ANNIVERSARY OF BYRON'S DEATH

Byron, who died two hundred years ago, was one of those captivated by *Vathek*, and confessed to Beckford's daughter that it was 'his gospel' which he carried in his pocket..

Ronald de Leeuw commemorates the anniversary of Byron's death by looking at the influence of the poet's death on the arts and provides a comprehensive overview of the many resulting works.

There were musical compositions by Berlioz, Rossini and Verdi as well as paintings by Turner, Martin, Delacroix and others.

He also considers how deathbeds have been depicted in a variety of thematic ways, including that of William Beckford, in Willes Maddox's painting.

With 100 illustrations, and a summary in English, this is a fitting tribute to mark Byron's anniversary and also to commemorate Gerlof Janzen, Ronald's late partner and a former Beckford Society Vice President.

Ronald de Leeuw, *Wat ik ooit ook ben geweest, nu ben ik klassiek*. ('Whatever I was, I'm classic now'), Tilburg: Stichting Desiderata, 2024. (ISBN: 978-90-833402-2-7).

THE HAMILTON PALACE BOOK

Godfrey Evans's long-awaited book, *Hamilton Palace: The Dukes of Hamilton and their collections*, will be published by National Museums Scotland in October. Divided into two large volumes, the nineteen chapters examine the leading members of the Hamilton family and their building activities, patronage and collecting from about 1450 to 1970, in Scotland, England and Europe.

The first four chapters focus on the stupendous collection of Italian paintings acquired by the 1st Duke of Hamilton in the 1630s (now mainly in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna); the building and fitting out of the south-facing Baroque palace by the 3rd Duke and Duchess Anne (the daughter of the 1st Duke) between 1690 and 1705; the Jacobite 4th, 5th and 6th Dukes; and the 8th Duke's famous long 'grand tour' in the 1770s.

Chapters 5-11 concentrate on Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton's construction of the enormous north-facing addition to the Baroque palace and his purchases of outstanding Italian paintings, French eighteenth-century furniture, and works associated with the Emperor Napoleon. Chapter 11 will be of particular interest to members of the Beckford Society because it will reveal how the 10th Duke displayed works from Beckford's huge bequest. Moreover, it will also show how the Duke sought to 'better Beckford' in the last eight years of his life, by going on to buy and to prominently display important items that Beckford had been obliged to sell, and others that were superior to directly comparable pieces in the Beckford bequest.

The final chapters explore the collecting of old and modern paintings, sculpture and decorative art by the 11th Duke and his wife, Princess Marie of Baden; the 1882 and 1919 Hamilton Palace sales; the demolition of Hamilton Palace; the American and other beneficiaries; and the main Hamilton-related buildings and items still in Scotland (which include the major collections of Beckford material now in National Museums Scotland and Brodick Castle).

THE HAMILTON MAUSOLEUM

The writer of the Folly Flâneuse blogs has been obsessed with follies since childhood. Each week she posts a well-researched and illustrated blog about follies and landscape buildings. A recent post was devoted to the Hamilton Mausoleum, the huge monument created by Beckford's son-in-law the 10th Duke.

<https://thefollyflaneuse.com/the-pleasure-dome-hamilton-mausoleum-south-lanarkshire/>



JOHN THELWALL
Engraving, 1794
National Portrait Gallery

JOHN THELWALL'S VISIT TO FONTHILL PARK JULY 1797

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century there was a rapid rise in the popularity of recreational walking, with many recording their travels. One of these was John Thelwall (1764–1834) who is remembered today as a radical political writer, orator and poet. He died aged 69 at Bath, where he had been delivering a series of lectures at the Royal Institution on North Parade. His grave in Walcot Burial Ground, Bath was restored in 2006 by the Regional History Centre at the University of the West of England.

The *York Herald's* report of 4 Oct 1834 stated: 'THE LATE MR THELWALL.—A large flat stone, bearing the following inscription, has been placed over the grave of the late Mr. Thelwall, in Walcot churchyard, by Mr. Harris, sculptor, of Bath, at the desire of his afflicted widow:—

To the memory of JOHN THELWALL, of London, born July 27th, 1764. Died Feb. 17th 1834. He brought to its highest perfection the science which distinguishes mankind from the brute. In his utterance Englishmen experienced the full beauty and energy of their native speech. His oratorical powers were only surpassed by his devoted zeal and unflinching efforts to promote the best liberties of his fellow men.'

Although Thelwall had corresponded with Coleridge they had never met and so, wanting to cement their friendship, he was joined by a friend on a pedestrian tour to Nether Stowey from his home in London. His anonymous account, 'A Pedestrian Excursion through several parts of England and Wales during the Summer of 1797' was published in the *Monthly Magazine* between August 1799 and November 1801.

Walkers undertaking these tours often met hostility on their travels, and one writer who was aware of this was Richard Warner. In his *A Walk Through Some of the Western Counties of England*, (1800), he pointed out that in England, in contrast to Wales, a pedestrian: 'has to encounter many little slights and many petty affronts, much inattention and much impertinence' (p. 53). This was also to be Thelwall's experience, notably at the Beckford Arms, as is evident from the following extract from his 'A Pedestrian Excursion'.

Fonthill and Wardour Castle being the next objects of our curiosity [after Stonehenge], we proceeded across the plain to *Winterton Stoke*; where we stopped at about two o'clock, to take some refreshment, and to make our usual inquiries'. [Vol. 9, April 1800, 231.]

Having collected what little information we could in the village of Willy, we pursued our way in a direction almost due south, up the hill before us. From hence we commanded a pleasing view of the valley and scattered villages before described'.

The general face of the country now became at once more hilly and more fertile. Large flocks of sheep animated the downs, and bleated along the plain below; and, after we had proceeded some few miles, coppices become frequent, not only upon the sides, but even the tops, of the hills: but not a house was to be seen all the way, till we came in sight of *Fonthill*. The noble appearance of this mansion, its grounds, and surrounding plantations, as viewed from the bleak and sterile downs, made a very forcible impression upon us. It was a palace and an Arcadia, rising by enchantment amidst the dreary waste, and we promised ourselves a spectacle of united taste and splendour.

Two tracks, marked both by wheels and footsteps, across the greensward, branched off from the road, and seemed to point towards this celebrated residence of the most opulent of British subjects. But these we declined, from the supposition that the high road would conduct us to it by a more circuitous perhaps, but probably a more favourable, approach. But we soon found that we were mistaken in our calculations, and were deviating considerably from our way. Some work-people in a hay field, to whom we now turned aside, corrected our mistake, and a small foot-path led us to the village, the pleasant approach to which is through a short winding path of fine trees.

The cottages of this populous but scattered village are mostly of stone, the roofs being thatched, and exhibit an appearance of some comfort, in comparison with others that we had seen. The inhabitants, however, appeared to be immersed in the most stupid ignorance, and scarcely competent either to the answering or the comprehending of the most simple question. All the information of any sort or description we were able to collect from them was, that in our route from Amesbury hither we had pursued altogether the wrong road.

We had no sooner entered the park than we were struck with the vast extent, the majesty, the beauty, the taste of the surrounding grounds and plantations. Every thing is in a style of greatness, and corresponding elegance; and, fastidious as I confess myself to be upon the subject of ornamental pieces of water, &c. I could not refuse my admiration to that which spread its sinuous course before us. It was not a little smirked-up pond, surrounded with meretricious ornaments, and nick-named a lak; enor [sic] a petty canal pounded up with dams and grotto work, with a clump of trees at one end, and a bridge at the other to conceal its terminations. It is the river Nadder itself that is conducted through these grounds; and though naturally but a petty stream, its bed, through the coarse grounds (as far at least as we traced them) is so spread and deepened, and its sinuous windings preserved in a stile of such irregular simplicity, that it assumes, in some degree, the character of a considerable river. In short, it has breadth and continuity, and art has worked upon so large a scale, that, notwithstanding the appearances of neatness, and consequent tameness, about the margin of the stream, one is almost disposed to consider it as the mere work of nature. The great number of majestic swans that singly, and in groups, curve their

long necks, and spread their ruffled plumage before the breeze, enhance the beauty of this fine piece of water.

When our attention was sufficiently released from the contemplation of these objects, to consider whither we were going, we perceived that we were on the wrong side of the river to arrive at the house; and after in vain endeavouring to obtain any intelligible direction or information from a blundering clown who happened to come up to us, we turned back to the village in quest of lodgings, meaning to suspend our further observation till the morning. At the King's Arms, however (the first house in this village [Fonthill Bishop] we should have come to, if we had come by the right road), no bed was to be had; but we were informed that there was another inn (the Beckford Arms) at the other end of the grounds, in the way to Wardour Castle.

We now entered the superb pleasure-grounds, through a magnificent arch of stone that separates the two wings of the porter's lodge, and were as much struck with the grandeur and elegance of the house as we had been with the water and the plantations.

When we had passed to the other extremity of the road, through the grounds of Fonthill, we soon found that the Beckford Arms was not an inn for foot-travellers. The landlady, indeed, would have *condescended* to have dressed us some supper, and to have furnished us a bed; but there was a sort of contemptuous arrogance in her manner, that seemed so strongly to express the sense she had of the obligation she should confer; that, finding that the man who shewed the walks and plantations (which were our principal object) was ill of the small-pox, and that the house (whose golden trees and splendid decorations excited only a secondary curiosity) could not be seen till eleven or twelve o'clock the ensuing day, we yielded to the impression of disgust our reception was calculated to inspire, and, declining the important favour, proceeded onwards as far as

Tisbury. Here we arrived at about 9 o'clock; and, taking up our quarters at a more humble, but very comfortable, inn, were sumptuously regaled with ham, and eggs and sallad, and gooseberry pies, and good wholesome ale; —blessing ourselves that we had escaped the insolent extortion of the Beckford Arms. [Vol. 11, March 1801, 124-125.]

JON MILLINGTON

MRS BECKFORD'S CHRISTENING GIFT



A London dealer has for sale the silver christening gift that Mrs Beckford presented to Thomas Wildman in 1788. This is a Neo Classical christening/baptismal bowl, cover and stand by Henry Green, London 1788. The interior of the cover is engraved: 'Nov the 20th, The Gift of Mrs Beckford to Thomas Wildman Aged 15 Months 1788'.

The infant Thomas (1787 – 1859) was the son of the lawyer Thomas Wildman who with his brother James managed Beckford's legal affairs and West Indian plantations. The younger Thomas later joined the army and served in the Peninsular and Napoleonic Wars, including Waterloo. He bought Newstead Abbey from Lord Byron in 1817. The bowl and also a silver spoon of Beckford provenance are for sale by Mary Cooke Antiques Ltd. Website: www.marycooke.co.uk

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