

FONTHILL RECOVERED

A Cultural History

Edited by Caroline Dakers



 UCLPRESS

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First published in 2018 by
UCL Press
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT

Available to download free: www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press

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Dakers, C. (ed.). 2018. *Fonthill Recovered: A Cultural History*. London: UCL Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787350458>.

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ISBN: 978-1-78735-046-5 (Hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-78735-047-2 (Pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-78735-045-8 (PDF)
ISBN: 978-1-78735-044-1 (epub)
ISBN: 978-1-78735-043-4 (mobi)
ISBN: 978-1-78735-042-7 (html)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787350458>

Acknowledgements

First, we must thank all the owners of the Fonthill estates and many of their families, their staff, tenants and employees. These include: Alastair, Lord Margadale; Clare, Lady Margadale; Stephen and Benetta Morant; the Hon. Mary Morrison; Charles and Tineke Pugh; John D'Arcy; Simon Fowler; Vicky Macaskie and all the staff in the Fonthill Estate Office.

We have received much help from the descendants of the previous owners of the Fonthill estates and also the owners of neighbouring estates. These include: Richard Arundell, Baron Talbot of Malahide; Lady Ashcombe; Cindy Chetwode; Gillian Makoui; the late Professor Bernard Nevill; Count Richard and Isabel de Pelet; Sir Ludovic Shaw Stewart; Humphrey and Solveig Stone; Soraya Smithson; Lucas Wilson; Hugo Target.

Special thanks go to David Roberts who organised the geophysical survey and his team led by Paul Durdin, Rachel Wood, Mike McQueen and Jim Gunter, and undertaken with the very considerable help of Helen Baker, Alan Dedden, Paul Derwent, Clare Goodey, Caitlin Kitchener, Jane Hanbridge, John Oswin, Alyson Tanner and Roy Wilde. Equipment was kindly provided by the Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society through the good offices of John Oswin, and by the Department of Archaeology, University of York. Access to the land was given by Lord Margadale and the Marc Fitch Fund generously funded the research.

Many private and public institutions (and archivists) have provided help: the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Trustees of the Bowood Collection; the British Library; the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester; Christie's, London; the Dean and Chapter of Westminster; Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter; Dorset History Centre, Dorchester; Fonthill Estate Archives (John D'Arcy); the Government Art Collection; Grosvenor Estate Archives, Eaton (with thanks to the Trustees of the 4th Duke of Westminster's 1964 Settlement, the Duke of Westminster and Louise Benson); Hamilton District Library; Huntington Library, San Marino; London Metropolitan Archives; London School of Economics; Longleat Estate Archives (the Marquess of Bath and Dr Kate Harris); National Archives, Kew; Natural History Museum, London; New Register House, Edinburgh; RIBA, Prints and Drawings, Victoria and Albert Museum; the University of Sheffield; Sir John Soane Museum, London; the Smithson Family Collection; the Society of Antiquaries of London; Victoria and Albert Museum, Dept of Prints

and Drawings; the Weinstock family; Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham; Wiltshire Museum, Devizes; Worcester Archive and Archaeological Service.

And individuals: Charles Avery; Charles Beddington; Captain William Chatterton Dickson; Lawrence Clark; John Cleare; Michael Coote; Robert Copley; Elizabeth Einberg; Margot Finn; Jim Flower; James Ford; Charlotte Gere; John Harris; Philip Hewat-Jaboor; Rosemary Hill; Claude Hitchen; Frank Kelsall; Jonathan King; Bet McLeod; Derek Maddock; Diana Mathews-Duncan; Tessa Murdoch; Heather Norville-Day; Viola Pemberton-Pigott; Tim Reeve; Abbot Geoffrey Scott OSB, Douai Abbey; Charles Sebag-Montefiore; Jonathan Stone; Patricia Wengraf; Lucy Whitaker.

Thanks to the publishers, UCL Press: to Lara Speicher and Chris Penfold, and to the production team, including Jaimee Biggins and Laura Morley.

Finally, this research and the final publication would not have been possible without the award of a number of grants and individual offers of financial support; also references provided by Professor Margot Finn, Professor Rosemary Hill, Frank Kelsall and Chris Penfold.

The research was supported financially by grants from the Marc Fitch Fund for the geophysical survey, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (grants for the symposium and for research costs) and the University of the Arts London (a grant towards the costs of images and travel). The small profit from the symposium was also used for the costs of images.

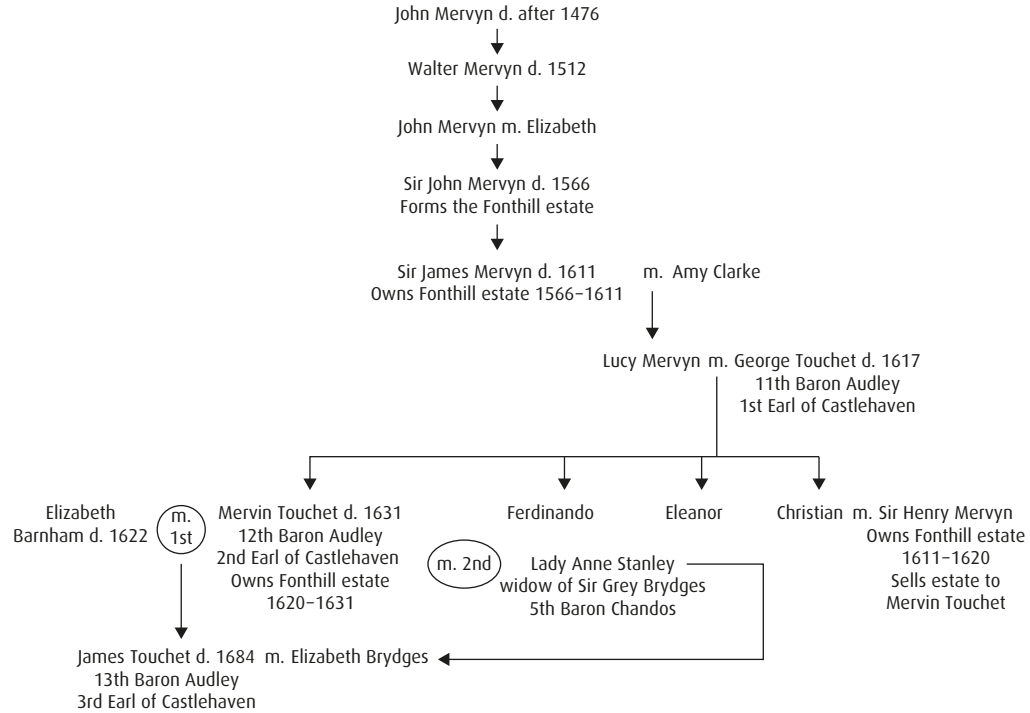
The publication by UCL Press was made possible with the generous financial support of Stephen and Benetta Morant, combined with publication grants from the Scouloudi Foundation in association with the Institute of Historical Research, and from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Fonthill Recovered Illustrations

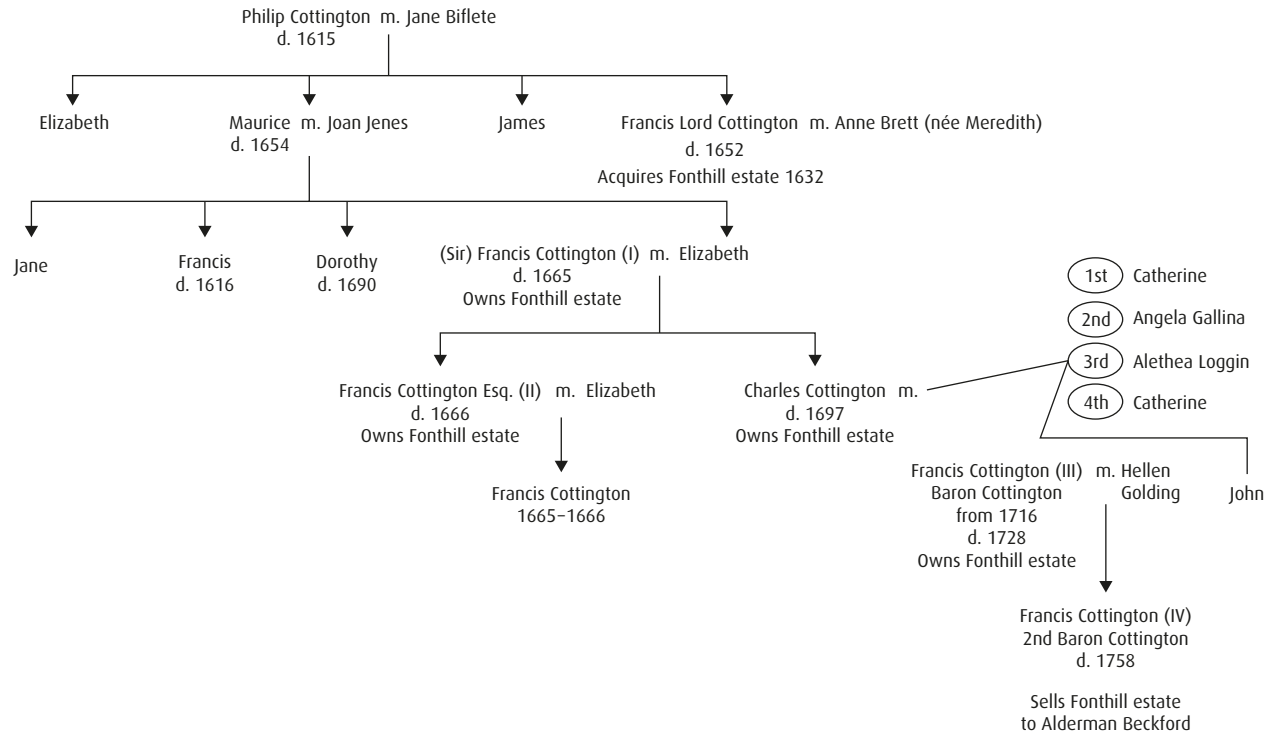
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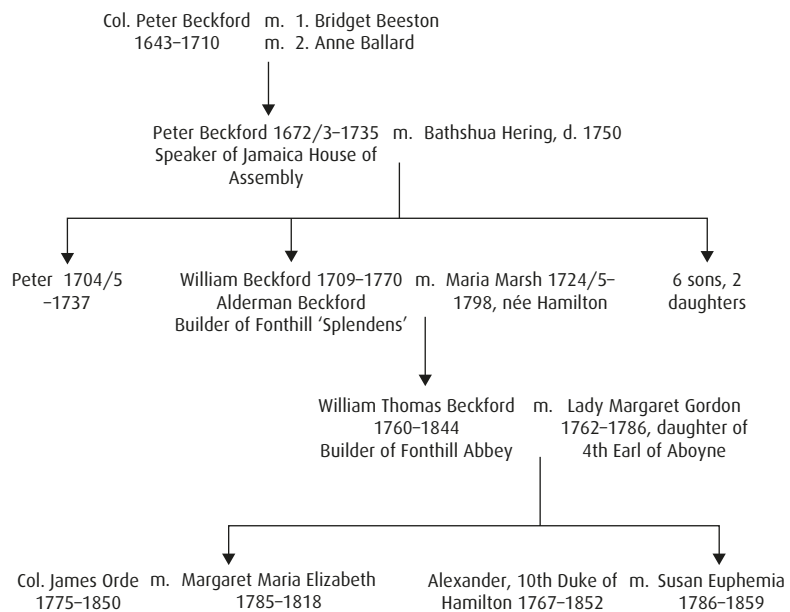
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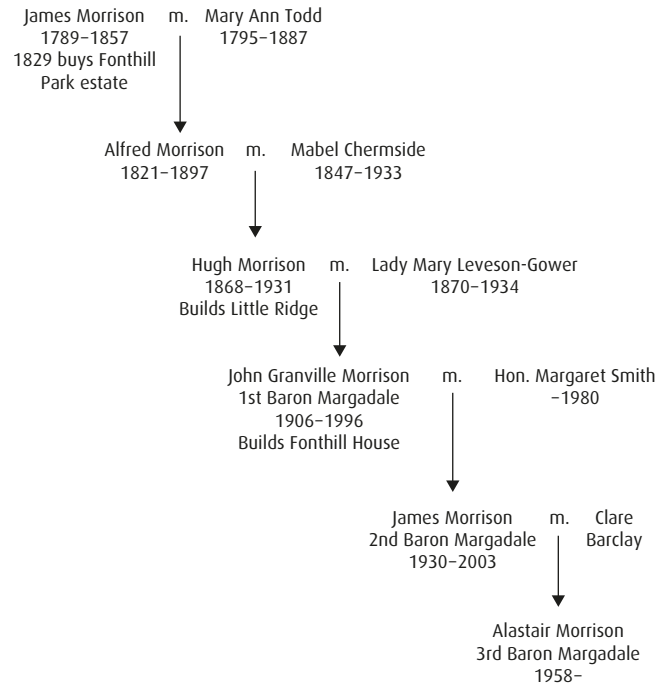
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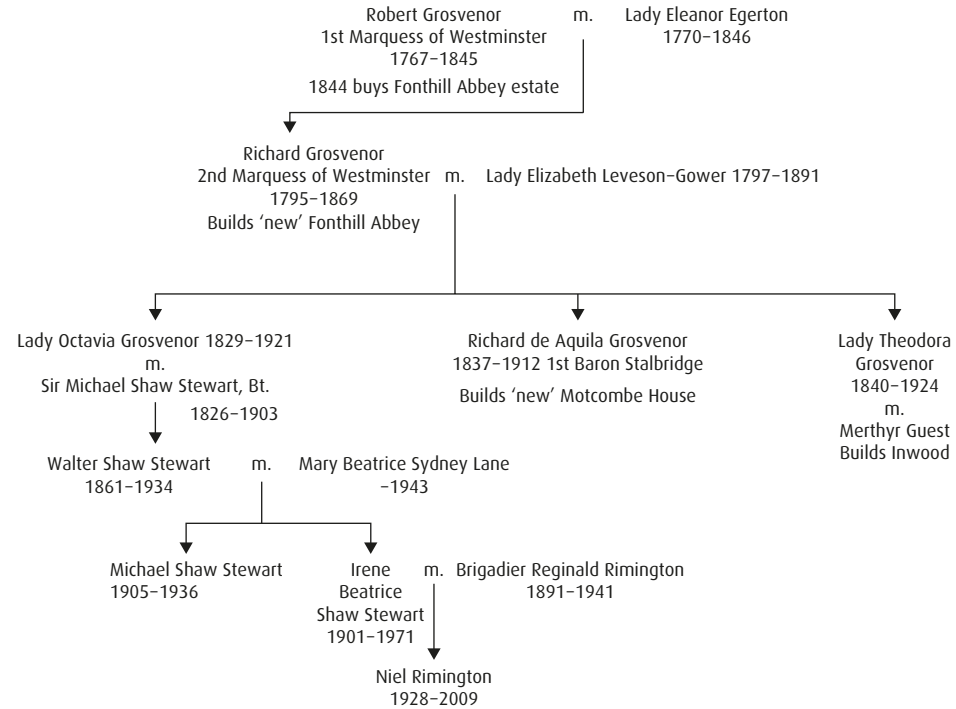
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Morrison Family Tree



Grosvenor Family Tree



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David Roberts is an archaeologist at Historic England, specialising in Roman and later prehistoric landscape archaeology and excavation. His Ph.D. was on human–landscape interaction in Wessex and Provence during the Roman period. David’s current projects include writing up recent Historic England excavations in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site and completing post-excavation work on two Roman shrine complexes in south Wiltshire. He was recently Field Archaeologist in Residence at the McDonald Institute, University of Cambridge, where he developed the first synthesis of Neolithic pit deposition in Wiltshire.

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Min Wood is a place maker and garden writer, and has extensive experience of gardening and landscape management. From 2001–2 he took on Spring Wood, the ca. 1725 design by Charles Bridgeman, part of the Grade I gardens at Hackwood, when it had become separated from Hackwood House. His Master’s degree from Bristol University was for a study of the picturesque as it applies to made landscapes.

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1

Introduction

Caroline Dakers

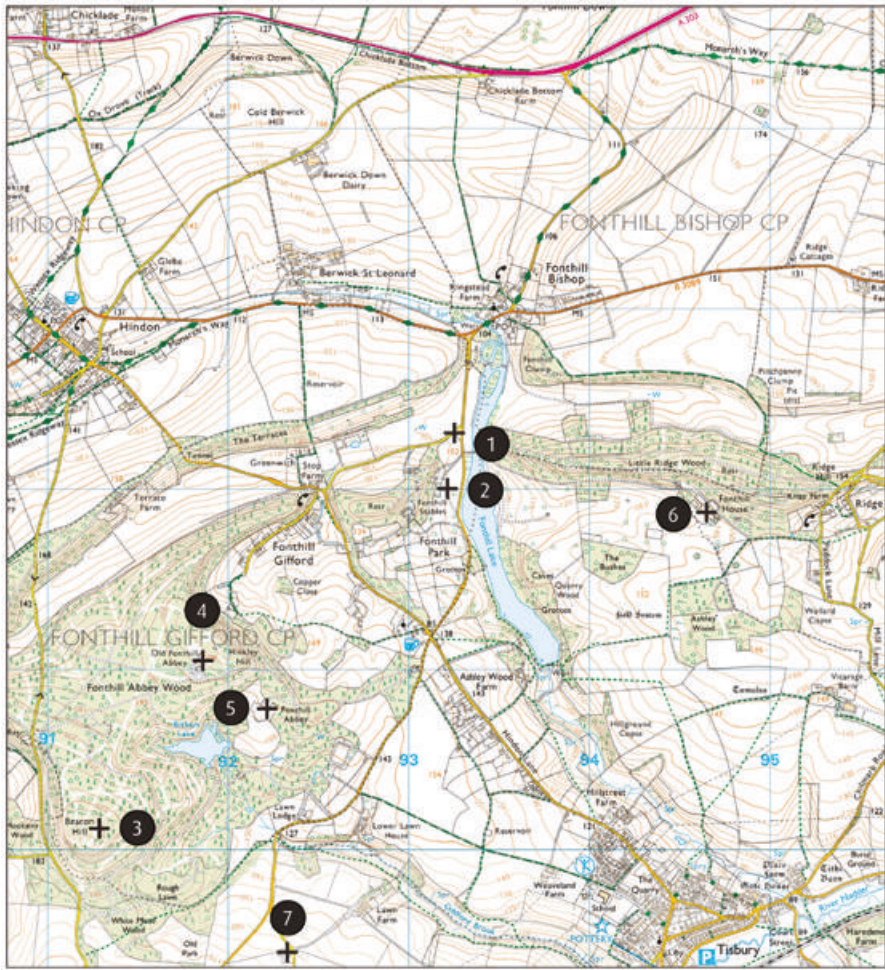
Stories fill in the gaps left by a ruin's material remains, to tell the tale of the splendour that once was and the catastrophe or slow decline that led to its downfall. Ruins are not themselves immediately legible: they have to be spoken for, interpreted and supplemented by a guided tour, a cautionary inscription, an informative notice, a historical re-enactment. These narratives restore the ruins before our very eyes, allowing us to imagine them, once again, complete, and to understand and learn from the process that led to their current dilapidated state.¹

Architecture at Fonthill is catastrophic, and houses there live adventurous lives.²

Fonthill, in Wiltshire, is usually associated with the writer and collector William Beckford, who built his Gothic fantasy house Fonthill Abbey at the end of the eighteenth century. The collapse of the Abbey's tower in 1825 transformed the name Fonthill into a symbol for over-arching ambition and folly, a sublime ruin. Fonthill is, however, much more than the story of one man's excesses. Beckford's Abbey is only one of several important houses to be built on the estate since the early sixteenth century, all of them eventually consumed by fire or deliberately demolished and all of them oddly forgotten by historians. Little now remains: a tower, a stable block, a kitchen range, some dressed stone, an indentation in a field.

Fonthill Recovered draws on histories of art and architecture, politics and economics to explore all of the rich cultural history of this famous estate. Some of the men and women who built the houses and lived at Fonthill surpassed Beckford in terms of their wealth, their collections and their political power. Some were players on the national and world stage as well as major patrons of the arts. Their political and religious allegiances, their sources of wealth and social positions reflected and were affected by the shifts and changes in five hundred years of British history.

The book is divided into two sections: the first is largely narrative, the second consists of essays exploring themes, topics and objects which enhance and cannot be comfortably included in the main narrative. There is inevitably some repetition and some difference of opinion, but we have tried to avoid speculation.



Key

- 1 Fonthill House
- 2 Fonthill Splendens
- 3 Stop Beacon
- 4 Fonthill Abbey
- 5 New Fonthill Abbey
- 6 Little Ridge / Fonthill House
- 7 Upper Lawn Pavilion



Fig. 1.1 Ordnance Survey map, scale Explorer 1:25000, showing location of Fonthill Houses.

Crown copyright 2017; licence 100059352.

The main narrative traces the occupation of Fonthill from the Bronze Age through to the twenty-first century; it can be read as a separate book. The first house of any note (see marker 1 on [Figure 1.1](#), the Ordnance Survey (OS) map) was a Tudor mansion, built for Sir John Mervyn who died in 1566. The last of his family to own Fonthill was his great-grandson Mervin Touchet, 12th Baron Audley and 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, who was tried for rape and sodomy in the House of Lords and beheaded on Tower Hill in 1631.

The estate was acquired by Francis Cottington, Baron of Hanworth and King Charles I's Chancellor of the Exchequer, who extended and improved the house and grounds. After the Civil War, during which Cottington left the country and died in Spain in 1652, John Bradshaw, Cromwell's President of the Council of State, was given Fonthill. After his death and the restoration of King Charles II, the Cottingtons were again the owners, but as Roman Catholics they were outside court circles. In 1744–5 Francis Cottington, 2nd Baron of Fonthill sold Fonthill to Alderman Beckford, whose fortune had been acquired from his sugar plantations in Jamaica.

In 1755 a fire damaged part of the old house, so the Alderman demolished the rest and built a new mansion called 'Splendens' on a new site (see marker 2 on [Figure 1.1](#)). This enormous house was inherited in 1770 by his son William Beckford and extensively embellished by him before being abandoned and demolished, apart from one small service pavilion. The younger Beckford's extraordinary Gothic abbey was built on a hill close by, but its tower collapsed in 1825 (see marker 4 on [Figure 1.1](#)): with sugar prices falling, Beckford had by then sold up and moved to Bath, and it was the new owner, John Farquhar, who was inside the Abbey when the tower fell. He was unhurt but sold up soon after and the estate was divided.

From this point, the narrative becomes less straightforward.

James Morrison, a millionaire textile merchant, bought the 'Park' estate with the surviving service pavilion of 'Splendens', employing John Buonarotti Papworth to turn this into a comfortable country house. Richard Grosvenor, 2nd Marquess of Westminster bought the 'Abbey' estate and commissioned William Burn to design a brand new mansion close to the abbey ruins (see marker 5 on [Figure 1.1](#)). At the beginning of the twentieth century, descendants of James Morrison and the Marquess of Westminster (the Shaw Stewarts) continued to occupy these houses, which were called, respectively 'Fonthill House' and 'New Fonthill Abbey'. Alfred Morrison was an important collector and engaged Owen Jones to create exotic interiors for his Fonthill House.

Just before the First World War, Hugh Morrison commissioned Detmar Blow to design a new house, 'Little Ridge', on a different site (see marker 6 on [Figure 1.1](#)), leaving his widowed mother in Fonthill House. After she moved away, he demolished the old house, removing the last remnants of Alderman Beckford's 'Splendens'. He filled 'Little Ridge' with Alfred Morrison's priceless collection of Chinese porcelain and paintings and, after the war, renamed it (confusingly) Fonthill House. William Burn's 'New Fonthill Abbey' fared less well. It was occupied by the army during the Second World War and sold in 1947 to the Morrisons. By this time there was little demand for large remote Victorian country houses. Everything, apart from the

stable block, was demolished in 1952, and the building materials were pushed down into the cellars. Niel Rimington, a descendant of the Marquess of Westminster, continued to own the surviving part of Beckford's Gothic Abbey.

By the end of the twentieth century, Blow's 'Little Ridge' had also been demolished (in 1972) by John Granville Morrison, 1st Baron Margadale because it was too expensive to maintain; a smaller Neo-Georgian house was built on the site. Meanwhile Lord Margadale's eldest son and heir James Morrison had sold the stable block (attached to 'New Fonthill Abbey') and some land to the successful textiles and fashion designer Bernard Nevill. Nevill partly restored the stable block as a weekend retreat, but ill health forced him to sell the property in 2012. Shortly before, in 2009, Niel Rimington had died, triggering the sale of his part of Fonthill.

Now, in 2018, the Fonthill estate is divided into three separate and privately owned parts. The largest, still owned by the Morrison family, includes the sites



Fig. 1.2 Photograph of boundary wall of the first Fonthill House, revealed during dredging of Fonthill Lake.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

of the first Fonthill House, dating from the mid-sixteenth century, of Alderman Beckford's 'Splendens' and Detmar Blow's 'Little Ridge'. The other two parts are centred on the surviving fragment of William Beckford's Abbey and on the site of the mansion designed by William Burn for the Marquess of Westminster.

The recent purchases of these two smaller parts of the estate have been fortuitous; the owners are restoring the surviving parts of their 'old' and 'new' abbeys, clearing the undergrowth, re-planting and bringing in light. They are also interested in the stories attached to their Fonthills. A new house, called 'Old Fonthill Abbey', has just been built immediately next to Beckford's Abbey and another house, 'Fonthill Abbey', is being planned, incorporating the stable block and building materials from Burn's mansion.

The involvement in the project of all these owners has been essential; without their engagement and support this research could not have taken place. These are still private estates and there are very few public footpaths across Fonthill, so the granting of physical access has been a vital foundation for the research. The geophysical survey to locate the site of the first house was only possible through access to the land granted by Alastair Morrison, 3rd Lord Margadale, together with a grant from the Marc Fitch Fund. Lord Margadale is the direct descendant of James Morrison, who bought part of the estate in the early nineteenth century; his decision to engage a professional archivist to catalogue the Morrison papers has proved invaluable. By coincidence, Lord Margadale's decision to begin dredging the lake at Fonthill (Figure 1.2) has also provided evidence for our project. The boundary wall of the grounds of the first Fonthill House was revealed during the first stage. When the second half is dredged we may find the foundations of Alderman Beckford's much derided five-arched bridge, or the equestrian statue which he apparently commissioned to stand facing his house. Could it be buried in the mud?

This project was kick-started with a symposium, *Recovering Fonthill*, which was held in September 2014 at Central Saint Martins in London and on the Fonthill estate. The symposium was supported by the Paul Mellon Centre, the University of the Arts London, Lord Margadale and Mr and Mrs Stephen Morant. The complexity of the undertaking was immediately apparent. How could we convey with clarity a narrative stretching from the sixteenth century (if not before) to the twenty-first century, covering different houses on different sites owned by different dynasties? How could we balance the well-known stories (William Beckford and his Abbey) with less familiar material, and do justice to the houses and owners who had left little trace, either on the ground or in archives?

The decision was taken to focus on new materials and new interpretations, to recover, if possible, aspects of all the Fonthills. Beckford's ruined Abbey is of course pivotal to the narrative; the 'frail creation of the world of enchantment' that 'achieved the status of the monumental sublime'.³ However, in this account equal attention is paid to the other houses, their landscapes and their owners. Bizarrely, Beckford traced his lineage back to the Mervyns who built the first large house at Fonthill, while objects which had been in his collection at the Abbey were

later acquired by members of the Morrison and Grosvenor families for their own Fonthills. There is a circularity to the narrative.

One of our first major questions was where exactly was the location of the first house, built by the Mervyns in the mid-sixteenth century? By the time it was partly burnt and then demolished in 1755 this Fonthill House was an impressive and very large building, with a significant stable block. With the aid of a few paintings and an estate map from the 1660s, we began our search below ground – in fact below the Fonthill Gifford cricket field and an adjoining field (see Figure 1.3).

While the location of the house was roughly identified (see the findings of our archaeologist David Roberts in Chapter 2) the parish church proved elusive. St Nicholas was, apparently, close to the house, and a church tower can be made out in Figure 1.4, a sketch made between 1800 and 1810 and based on a painting by George Lambert dated 1740. Sir Richard Colt Hoare, in his *Modern History of Wiltshire*, commented that the old parish church stood at a short distance north of the last mansion-house, but Alderman Beckford, ‘thinking it too near and unseemly, took it down, and according to reports buried all the memorials of the Mervyn and Cottington family: but perhaps some future antiquary may hit upon the place of their deposit, and bring them again to light’.⁴

We did discover underground a mysterious rectangular plot clearly delineated by a metal surround, possibly some sort of railing, close to the site of the house. Could the Alderman have ‘re-buried’ the tombs of the earlier owners of Fonthill within such a structure?



Fig. 1.3 Photograph of the emptied landscape, the original site of the first Fonthill House.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.



Fig. 1.4 Detail from *Old House at Fonthill, Wiltshire*, ca.1800–10. Inscribed ‘Old House. Fonthill. Wilts. Copied from a painting at the Abbey.’

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.2.25.

Objects without dates, or clear provenance, had to be approached with caution, more especially because there is no supporting archive of documents. Paintings or maps were on occasion the *only* material from which to form a narrative. We know that Baron Cottington amassed a collection of paintings and furnishings while in the service of King Charles I, but everything appears to have been dispersed or hidden during the Civil War and may never have returned to Fonthill. A century later the Cottingtons themselves disappear from records. Fortunately we are able to construct the private life of the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven at Fonthill because his trial for sodomy was meticulously recorded. There is, however, no memorial in the Tower of London marking where his body and decapitated head were buried.

Even the more recent history has surprising gaps. It appears that no photographs were taken or none survive of the interiors of William Burn’s ‘New Abbey’, built for the Marquess of Westminster. The Marquess famously demolished the parish church of Fonthill Gifford, which had been built on a new site by Alderman Beckford. But in so doing, the Marquess’s new church obliterated the tombs of the Alderman, his wife, brother and daughter-in-law, the wife of William Beckford.

Fonthill Recovered takes the story into the second decade of the twenty-first century, to the most recent building projects by the new owners of the estate, one completed, one (in 2018) still in the planning stages. Their decisions to acquire parts of Fonthill have been inspired both by a continuing fascination for Beckford’s Abbey in its completed and ruined state and by the beauty of the landscape.

The final essay in this book, by Greg Buzwell, documents an exhibition held at the British Library on the ‘Gothic Imagination’, which featured perhaps the most bizarre appearance of the Abbey: in the ethereal and haunting underwater world of a videogame. There would appear to be no limit to recovering Fonthill.

Part One

The narrative

2

The early history of Fonthill

David Roberts

The extraordinary personalities and fascinating architecture of the Fonthill estate continue to draw considerable academic and public attention. These houses and those who lived and worked in them are, however, only the latest and most famous in a lengthy succession of settlements and inhabitants of the Fonthill landscape. As with the majority of the post-medieval houses at Fonthill, these earlier places now lie hidden beneath the rolling fields, woods and parkland of the estate. Relatively little archaeology has been conducted on the estate until the last decade, when two projects have undertaken work on the southern parts of the estate.¹ This first chapter will discuss the prehistory and early history of Fonthill with the aim of providing some context for the later history of the estate, with particular emphasis on the Roman period, as this has seen the bulk of archaeological research.

The key to understanding the long-term history of the Fonthill area is its location adjacent to the Jurassic inlier that intervenes in the mass of Wessex chalk from the west, running from Blackmoor Vale towards Wilton (see [Figure 2.1](#)). Most of the estate itself sits on Cretaceous chalk, but Jurassic limestone, sandstone and mudstone immediately to the south and west provide geological and ecological variation, allowing a more diverse set of agricultural and economic opportunities than across much of the county.² The Jurassic inlier provides the area with seams of high-quality building stone,³ areas of iron ore and heavier, richer soils than the chalk, which are excellent for woodland growth. A similar diversity of activity can still be seen in land use on the estate today.

Prehistoric Fonthill

The Fonthill area is unlikely to have been ice-bound in the last glaciation, but its first Holocene inhabitants would have entered a very different landscape to the well-managed parks and woodlands of the present day. These Mesolithic communities would have moved around the landscape in small groups, travelling between

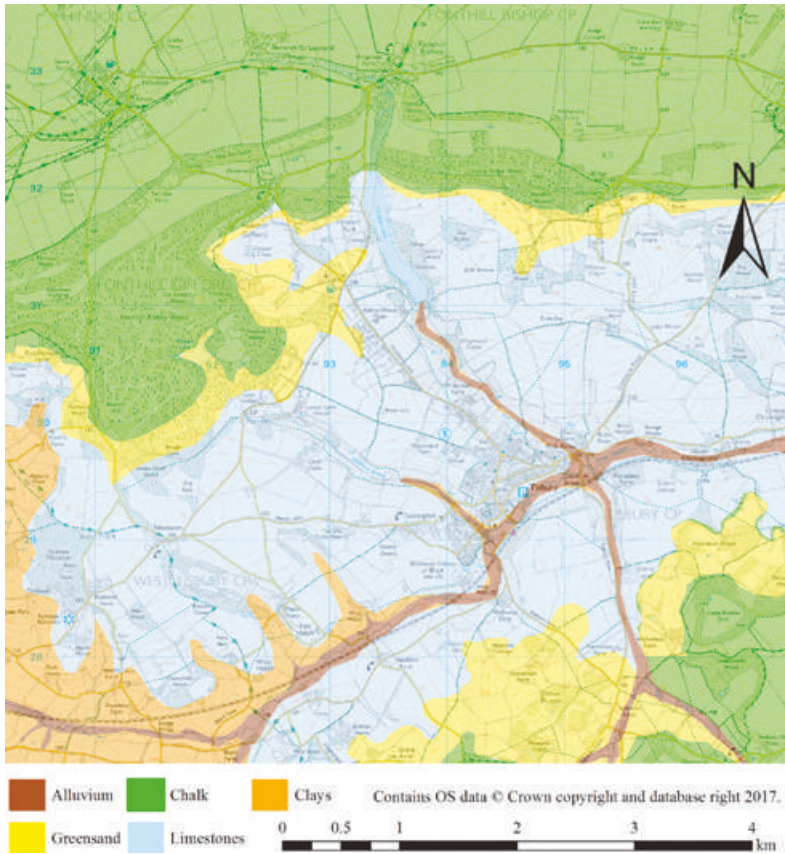


Fig. 2.1 Simplified geological map of the Fonthill area by David Roberts, with Ordnance Survey data overlain.

the probably heavily wooded area of the Nadder valley, and more open woodland covering much of the chalk.⁴ While there are only three finds of Mesolithic date from the Fonthill estate (all flint tools, reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme), people would certainly have used the area at this time; just 6 km to the east at Teffont Evias, a fieldwalking survey discovered a late Mesolithic flint industry that had left behind hundreds of carefully knapped blades.⁵ The population of the Fonthill area at this time would have been highly mobile, exploiting wild plant and animal resources. Little is known of the social or ritual aspects of life in Mesolithic south Wiltshire, but it is clear that certain places held great significance. A spring at Blick Mead, near Amesbury, has recently produced evidence of Mesolithic communities apparently returning to the site over several thousand years, leaving behind enormous quantities of tools and consumption debris.⁶

In the fourth millennium BC, communities began to adopt farming, adjusting their mobile lifestyles to include the production of crops providing storable

surpluses of food; the light soils of the chalk provided ideal conditions for these innovations.⁷ Perhaps even more importantly, it was in this period that domesticated animals were introduced, providing a range of resources and new lifeways. Around the end of the fourth millennium BC, however, communities in Wiltshire appear to have abandoned arable cultivation, and focused on a pastoral lifestyle, using a combination of domesticated animals and wild resources.⁸ These lifeways allowed time and labour to be invested in the building of substantial monuments such as Stonehenge, Avebury and Silbury Hill to mark important places in the landscape and provide places for gatherings and ceremonies of social and ritual importance.⁹ One of these major monuments, Tisbury Henge, was close to Fonthill – although its precise location remains elusive, and the subject of ongoing research – and is known to have stood at least in part until 1782, when it was fully dismantled and several of the megaliths reused in an ornamental grotto at Old Wardour Castle.¹⁰ Finds of Neolithic flint tools have been made across the Fonthill area,¹¹ but no monuments of this date are known on the estate. This may be because the area is likely to have still been forested; clearance for agriculture is unlikely to have been prioritised due to the unsuitability of heavier soils for the ploughing technology available at the time, although this remains an assumption until the palaeoenvironmental dataset for the Nadder valley is developed from its current lamentably minimal state.

In the later third millennium BC, metalworking technologies began to reach different parts of Britain from Europe, becoming widespread by ca. 2150 BC.¹² As the technologies spread, alongside improvements and intensifications of agriculture (including the resumption of arable cultivation in areas where this had ceased in the Middle Neolithic) and population growth, more stratified social hierarchies developed. Wealth was displayed through weapons, jewellery and other prestige metalwork, and through the construction of numerous round barrows as funerary monuments;¹³ there are three such mounds in Fonthill Bishop, and one in Fonthill Gifford.¹⁴ As the Bronze Age continued through the second millennium BC, the Wessex landscape was divided through the digging of linear boundary ditches and laying out of field systems such as that still visible as earthworks above the south-eastern part of Fonthill Lake. These appear to have affected the layout of the later landscape, as do the probably prehistoric terraces in woodland to the west of the lake. A circular enclosure in Fonthill Clump associated with worked flint may be a settlement of this date, although further investigation is necessary.¹⁵ Clearance of woodland continued, although evidence for the Fonthill area is lacking and so analogies are drawn from the Stonehenge landscape and Wylve valley.¹⁶

In the first half of the first millennium BC, bronze and copper technologies rapidly gave way to iron in most practical aspects of metalworking, although the older technologies were still used for some prestigious items. The first noticeably wealthy residents of the Fonthill area begin to emerge at this time. The Hindon hoard (see [Figure 2.2](#)), found just beyond the northern edge of the estate, contains artefacts dating from the transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. The



Fig. 2.2 The Hindon hoard under excavation.

© Portable Antiquities Scheme, reproduced with permission.

hoard contained 82 objects, including 33 copper alloy axes characteristic of the Late Bronze Age.¹⁷ Alongside these were iron spearheads and an iron sickle, practical objects of significance beyond their utility due to being crafted in the new metal and deposited with a collection of valuable objects made with older technology. We do not know what kind of person or group deposited the hoard, or why, but their ability to collate so many valuable metal objects demonstrates considerable economic power. Agricultural intensification continued in the Iron Age, and it was likely that by this time much of the area's lighter soils were nearly completely cleared of tree cover, with woodland probably being maintained in some valleys and areas of heavy clay soil. It is in the centuries before and between the Roman invasions in 55 BC and AD 43 that the Fonthill area demonstrates its first unambiguous evidence for permanent settlement.

During these final centuries of the Iron Age, Fonthill's location was towards the northern edge of the region controlled by a large group centred on Dorset. The Romans called this group the Durotriges, although it is uncertain whether this was a colonial imposition or the group's original name.¹⁸ Their land was densely occupied, and high status groups among the community became wealthy through trade of the agricultural surpluses derived from intensive mixed farming.¹⁹ Earlier field systems were extended or replaced, and elaborated with complex enclosures for corralling large herds of sheep, cattle and pigs.²⁰ Small farmsteads formed the backbone of the economy, with people coming together at hillforts such as Maiden Castle, Hod Hill and later lowland sites to trade, for seasonal gatherings

and in times of war.²¹ The centre of life on the Fonthill estate was a large enclosure recently discovered through geophysical survey on a high, flat area of land in the south-west of the modern estate.²² The enclosure is subdivided by ditches into areas likely to be compounds of individual dwellings and areas for agricultural and industrial activities.

The settlement is on an area of the estate where high-quality iron ore occurs in the topsoil and subsoil, and this is likely to be part of the rationale for its location. Geophysical results present several areas of very high magnetic responses around the enclosure, and excavation of similar anomalies elsewhere in the field suggests these may be furnaces.²³ A large hoard of Durotrigian silver staters (coins) was found at the edge of the settlement, which together with its characteristically late Iron Age morphology strongly supports the proposed dating of the site. A small outlying enclosure of similar date, probably for livestock, has been excavated 0.5 km to the east of the site.²⁴

Roman Fonthill

During the Roman period the archaeological record shows a strong and gradual increase in activity in the Fonthill area. During the building of Little Ridge (later re-named Fonthill House) in 1902–4 in Withy Beds field, Little Ridge, Roman occupation was discovered in the form of a series of pits and ditches which were interpreted by the excavator as a village, although more likely represent a small farmstead.²⁵ An interment of a skeleton in a stone-lined grave was found just to the west of the site in 1914, probably indicating the location of an associated cemetery.²⁶ Roman material culture was also discovered in the ditches of an enclosure south of Ashley Wood, interpreted by the excavator as a Roman cattle enclosure, although evidence is extremely limited, and the large rectangular earthwork enclosure appears more likely to be a domestic settlement.²⁷

As well as these domestic settlements, numerous finds of Roman coins across the estate and surrounding area demonstrate that the landscape was quite intensively occupied. Occupation at the main Iron Age settlement appears to have ceased in the early Roman period, as few finds of Roman date have been made in this area and another series of enclosures slightly downhill in the same field have produced coins of early to mid-Roman date. In the later Roman period, occupation of the southern part of the estate becomes considerably more intense, with a large-scale industrial operation extracting iron ore to smelt and work on site. A settlement developed around a coombe below the furnaces to support this work, and a temple was built in a circular enclosure at the head of the coombe. Finds of a grain dryer, querns and numerous animal bones at the settlement demonstrate that it drew in agricultural produce from the surrounding area to process and consume.²⁸

The most significant part of the settlement is the temple, a rectangular building measuring ca. 18 m x 9 m. It was floored with large limestone flagstones (see



Fig. 2.3 Photograph of the Roman temple floor under excavation.

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Figure 2.3) and had a limestone tiled roof; clear traces remained of differential wear on floor slabs of a massive timber frame supporting the roof. The floor was very worn, and had been repeatedly repaired and modified through slab repairs, the cutting of post supports and the insertion of a floor in the central room, suggesting that use of the building was relatively long-term.

Dating evidence suggests that the temple, like the settlement in the coombe below it, was active from sometime in the third century AD until the very late fourth century AD, and probably somewhat later. A group of significant artefacts including an assemblage of miniature iron objects (hammers, axes, spears and other items) and curse tablets were found deposited in a central pit, now fully excavated. These, together with other aspects of the assemblage, confirm that this was a pagan temple, and one used by literate and wealthy individuals and groups.

Metal-detectorists have also discovered Roman artefacts on other parts of the estate, and on neighbouring land.²⁹ It appears that the Fonthill area was a key part of a considerable network of agricultural and industrial trade, controlled by a high-status group with the resources to build an elaborate temple and deposit objects there in demonstration of their religious beliefs. It is very likely given the diversity of the finds and focus on metalworking in the miniature object assemblage that these pagan beliefs were shared by those working and living in the immediate vicinity of the temple. Through this group of sites Fonthill provides an important window into late Roman Britain, showing the resilience of older belief systems in rural areas despite Christianity being the empire's official religion for much of the fourth century, and its adoption elsewhere in the region.³⁰

Fonthill after the Romans

After the end of Roman imperial control over Britain around AD 410 there were many complex changes in social and economic life and individual and group identities.³¹ Academic opinion differs quite dramatically on the nature of the post-Roman period across Britain, but it is generally accepted that south-west and western Britain underwent quite different changes compared with eastern Britain in the fifth century AD. The eastern regions saw much more immediate impact from Germanic groups, whereas south-western Britain saw more continuity, with power remaining in the hands of aristocratic elites, who became more militarised, probably maintaining groups of warriors. White posits that much of the south-west region was controlled for approximately 150 years by a post-Roman successor state based on the late Roman province of Britannia Prima, with its capital at Corinium (Cirencester),³² although most others envisage rather looser political arrangements between powerful local warlords.³³ Large-scale production of pottery ceased relatively quickly, trade networks shrank and large urban centres dwindled or were abandoned, yet the successors of the Romano-British aristocracy maintained sufficient power to counter inroads made by groups of Saxon migrants or invaders until the mid-sixth century in western parts of Wiltshire such as Fonthill.³⁴

Indeed, Fonthill's very name fossilises this Brittonic influence, being composed of two British elements, *funta* and *ial*, and was recorded as *Funtial* in AD 901.³⁵ *Funta* (from Latin *fontana*) indicates a stream, or spring, and *ial* denotes a 'fertile upland', suggesting the presence of post-Roman farming settlements under British control until relatively late, likely into the late sixth century AD.³⁶ The *funta* element has also been suggested to be quasi-habitative, i.e. suggestive not only of the presence of a water source, but also of settlement, and specifically associated with Roman stone structures, usually shrines or temples.³⁷ The presence of a notable Roman temple on the estate certainly bears out this pattern, perhaps also demonstrating continuing awareness of the ruined temple quite late into the first millennium AD.

In Fonthill, as in most of southern Wiltshire, it was likely sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries that settlement shifted away from the major downland villages and smaller farmsteads of the Roman period, with their roots in the Iron Age or earlier, and down to their modern locations in the valley bottoms.³⁸ This process was not uniform, or simultaneous, but it was widespread, with the likely central cause being the final failure of the light downland soils to bear the nutritional burden of almost two and a half millennia of increasingly intensive farming, together with a reduction in demand for grain caused by the collapse of any remaining export market to the Continent, and apparent population decline in Britain. Settlement moved and shrank, continuing a mixed agricultural economy, with other resources such as iron, stone and woodland being exploited as part of the yearly cycle. By this time places such as Fonthill were controlled by those owing

loyalty to a Saxon king of Wessex, with all trace of the Romano-British aristocracy gone from the landscape.

As only a small number of Saxon artefacts have been found in either Fonthill Bishop or Fonthill Gifford (seven have been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme), we must turn to documentary history to illuminate the late Saxon period. A letter from around AD 900 informs us that an estate of five hides held by Helmstan at Fonthill was under dispute, having previously been held by Athelfryth, who sold it to Oswulf, at some point after which it was acquired by Helmstan.³⁹ Helmstan's right to the estate was disputed by Athelstan when Helmstan was accused of the theft of a belt. Helmstan proved his right, but in doing so required oath-help from Ordlaf, to whom he transferred his right in exchange for a life-lease on the estate. In turn, Ordlaf exchanged the estate for other lands with Denewulf, Bishop of Winchester, whose successors retained it for several centuries beyond the Norman conquest.⁴⁰ This convoluted series of exchanges appears to be the only documentary evidence of Fonthill prior to 1066, and provides little insight into the lives of the inhabitants of the estate. We know that nearby settlements were flourishing in the late Saxon period, with Tisbury having an abbot, and thus an abbey, by the early eighth century,⁴¹ and probably being the location for one of the Alfredian fortified burghs in the ninth century.⁴² Tisbury would thus have provided a local centre for inhabitants of late Saxon Fonthill.

As with much of western Wiltshire, we can discuss the later prehistory and Roman occupation of the Fonthill landscape with some confidence, drawing on a wide range of evidence. This consideration of these periods has demonstrated how the inhabitants of the region shaped their landscape, and how their activities were shaped by the opportunities it provided through its location at the junction of geologies. These early millennia provided Fonthill with the outlines of its later landscape through the influence of prehistoric field systems on later settlement, the presence of enduring landscape features such as round barrows, a Roman temple and even the parish name.

3

Fonthill from the Middle Ages to 1744

The first Fonthill House

Neil Burton

At the time of Domesday in 1086 the manor of Fonthill Gifford was held by Berengar Giffard, and his descendants retained ownership until about 1200. At some time before 1209 Andrew Giffard relinquished the lands to Robert de Mandeville, Robert Maudit, William Cumin and William de Fontibus. The *Victoria County History of Wiltshire* (VCH) suggests these were the husbands or descendants of female co-heirs.¹ The eldest was Robert de Mandeville, who became overlord. Robert Maudit's portion of Andrew Giffard's estate was later called Fonthill Gifford manor, William Cumin's estate was later known as Fonthill La Warre and it is possible that William de Fontibus held the portion later known as Fonthill Charterhouse because it was owned by the Carthusian priory at Witham in Somerset from 1392 until the Dissolution.

The intricacies of the ownership of these three sub-manors for the two and a half centuries after 1209, often by non-resident landlords, are set out in the VCH and are not of direct relevance here. It is worth noting, however, that there is a record of the existence of a church at Fonthill Gifford in 1291, which implies a village settlement, but it seems unlikely that any of these small manor holdings could have supported anything more than a modest manor house.²

Between about 1470 and 1740, three families made Fonthill their principal residence, steadily augmenting the house, developing the grounds and acquiring landed estate. For all these families – the Mervyns (or Mervins), the Touchets (or Tuchets) and the Cottingtons – there is a dearth of family papers, which means that any historical narrative must contain large gaps. The following account sets out the succession of owners and occupiers and provides an analysis of the mansion house which was the product of their occupation.

The Mervyns and Touchets at Fonthill (1472–1631)

In 1472 the manor of Fonthill Gifford was purchased by John Mervyn from Margaret, Baroness Botreaux; he also acquired land at Tisbury. The manor then passed by descent until some time after 1520, when it came to John Mervyn's great-grandson, another John. In 1533 this John Mervyn purchased the lands of Fonthill La Warre manor from Thomas, Lord La Warre, the then owner.³ Mervyn was knighted in 1547 by Protector Somerset for his service in war against the Scots, although he appears to have cooled in his support for Somerset soon afterwards and in 1549, in his role as Sheriff of Wiltshire, was responsible for conducting Somerset to the Tower of London as a prisoner after the Protector's displacement as effective Regent.

Sir John Mervyn served as one of the knights of the shire for Wiltshire and MP for Calne in two parliaments in 1554. In 1553 he obtained a grant of the lands of the manor of Fonthill Charterhouse, which had been acquired by Sir Thomas Arundell but were forfeited to the crown on Arundell's attainder and execution in 1552 for his part in Somerset's machinations. This must have been a considerable satisfaction to Mervyn, who had earlier been involved in a violent dispute with Arundell over church patronage at Fonthill.⁴ In the same year (1553) Sir John Mervyn also purchased the manor of Compton Bassett in north Wiltshire. He married twice and had 13 children by his first wife, Jane Baskerville, most of whom died in childhood, but none by his second wife Elizabeth Mompesson.

Sir John Mervyn died on 19 June 1566, in his house at 'Founteyne Gifford' and was buried in the parish church of St Nicholas next to the house, to which he had added a new aisle at some time before 1544.⁵ By the time of his death he had reunited the original manor of Fonthill Gifford, which comprised almost all of the parish, and also acquired much land in nearby parishes.⁶ He was evidently a prosperous man, and probably also a ruthless and ambitious one, who lived in a house surrounded by a park which included a lake. This is really the first mention of a significant residence at Fonthill.⁷

On Sir John's death the property passed to his eldest son James Mervyn, who was born in 1529, lived at Fonthill during his lifetime and died in 1611. He is described in his father's 1566 funeral certificate as 'esquire for the body of the Queen's majesty', which suggests some courtly connection.⁸ He served as MP for Wiltshire in 1572 and was knighted in 1574. He married firstly Amy Clarke, by whom he had one daughter named Lucy, and secondly Deborah Pilkington, a daughter of the Bishop of Durham, by whom he had no children. Saxton's 1579 map of Wiltshire (see Figure 3.1) shows Fonthill in Sir James's time, with its medieval church.

Like his father, Sir James Mervyn considerably increased the family wealth and land ownership, and he was also clearly ambitious for status. After an attempt to marry his only daughter Lucy to John Thynne of Longleat was aborted, she was



Fig. 3.1 Detail from Christopher Saxton's map of Wiltshire, 1579.

married instead to George Touchet or Tuchet, 11th Baron Audley, a member of a long-established gentry family, whose main seat was at Heleigh in Staffordshire.⁹ The Touchet family also held the manor of Stalbridge in Dorset, about 12 miles south-west of Fonthill. George Touchet, Lord Audley, was a career soldier who served on the Continent and in Ireland, where in 1611 he was given large estates (including 3,000 acres in the Barony of Omagh). In 1616 he was created Baron Audley of Orier and 1st Earl of Castlehaven in the Irish peerage.¹⁰

Sir James Mervyn's will, proved in November 1611, is an interesting document and throws light on several aspects of his circumstances and character. From the large number of detailed bequests it is clear that Sir James was a very wealthy man, and conscious of his status. The long lists of plate, furnishings, rich clothing and livestock show that the testator lived an affluent lifestyle in what he described as 'my chief house at ffountell'. He stipulated that he should be buried alongside his first wife Amy in 'my church of St Nicholas', which was close by the mansion, and he directed that a 'comely monument' be erected in the chancel of the church to his father and mother. Having no male heir, Sir James was concerned that the Mervyn name should endure and he made a slightly unusual disposition of his main estate:

whereas for the great and mutuall love and naturall affection which I have and do beare to my name and familye of Mervyn and for the better supporting thereof, and to continue my chief house of fountell and the greatest part of my manors, lands and tenements in my name and blood of Mervyn, so long as it shall please Almightye God, I have therefore for some years latelie past agreed and concluded with my cosin Edmund Mervyn late of Durford in the countie of Sussex Esquire, deceased, for a marriage between Henry his eldest son and Christian Mervyn my grandchild, one of the daughters of the said Lord Audley and Dame Lucie his wife, which marriage hath ben synce had and solemnized.¹¹

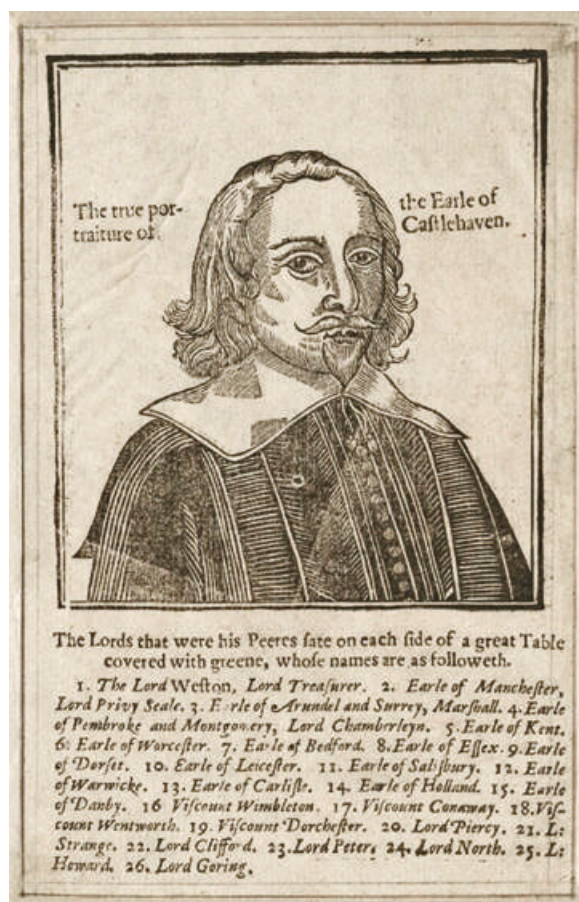


Fig. 3.2 Mervyn Touchet, 12th Baron Audley and 2nd Earl of Castlehaven.
National Portrait Gallery.

Despite the generous provision for his granddaughter in the will, it is clear that the main focus of Sir James Mervyn's affection in the family was Christian's eldest brother Mervyn Touchet, described in the will as 'my loving grandchild Sir Mervyn Audley'. Among other bequests he was left 'my great guilte bason and ewer that is imboist, weighing one hundred and twenty ounces or thereabouts as I remember', all the furniture in the manor house at Compton Bassett and all the livestock there, 'my best hoarse that I shall be master of at my death, and one of my best foaling mares', 'my long silk grogoran cloake, furred with sables', 'my buff jerkyn laced with parchment lace of gould and my wrought velvet gowne'. The executors of the will included Sir James's adopted son Henry Mervyn, his son-in-law Lord Audley, Sir Thomas Thynne of Longleat who had married Christian's elder sister Mary, and 'my honourable and well-beloved grandchild' Sir Mervyn Audley (see Figure 3.2).



Fig. 3.3 Stalbridge Park, Dorset.

From John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (Westminster: Printed by J. Bowyer Nichols & Sons), Vol III, 1863, opposite page 670.

In the decade following the death of Sir James Mervyn his family prospered and consolidated their presence in Wiltshire. On the death of the 1st Earl of Castlehaven in 1617 his eldest son Sir Mervyn, James Mervyn's favourite grandchild, succeeded to the title as 2nd Earl of Castlehaven (see Figure 3.2). In 1618 the new Earl began the building of a large and splendid mansion house on the family estate at Stalbridge (Figure 3.3), which had previously been without a residence. In 1619 his brother-in-law Henry Mervyn, now owner of the Fonthill estate, was knighted and in 1620 the newly ennobled Sir Henry Mervyn sold the Fonthill property to his brother-in-law.¹² Mervyn Touchet, 12th Baron Audley and 2nd Earl of Castlehaven thus became owner of two large properties and two major houses within a few miles of each other on the Wiltshire/Dorset border.

It appears that the transaction may have been part of a property exchange by which Sir Henry acquired some of the Irish estates which Mervyn Touchet had inherited from his father George. In 1626 Sir Henry gave these lands to his son James and after his death they passed to his brother Sir Audley Mervyn.¹³

Early in the seventeenth century Mervyn Touchet, 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, had married Elizabeth Barnham, the daughter of a wealthy London draper named Benedict Barnham, whose fortune enabled her husband to begin building the new house at Stalbridge and to purchase Fonthill. They had six children but she died some time after 1622 and in 1624 Touchet married again. His second wife was Anne Brydges, daughter of the Earl of Derby and widow of the 5th Baron Chandos of Sudeley in Gloucestershire. The second wedding united the high-status and aristocratic family of the bride with the wealth and extensive property of the groom. Four years later in 1628 Touchet's eldest son, Lord Audley, then aged 17, married his step-sister Elizabeth Brydges, who was then aged about 15. It appeared

that the social status and family security which Sir James Mervyn had sought to consolidate was secure, but neither marriage was to prove a fortunate union.

Shortly after the Earl's second marriage, in 1625, a fire damaged one wing of the mansion house at Fonthill.¹⁴ Much worse was to happen a few years later. In February 1630 Castlehaven's Catholic brother Sir Ferdinando was arrested at Dover and briefly imprisoned as a suspected spy. In May of that year Castlehaven's eccentric youngest sister Lady Eleanor Douglas, who had established herself as a Protestant prophet, was summoned before the Privy Council and later banished from court. In September all the Touchet Irish property in County Tyrone was removed from the Earl's possession on the grounds that the original Articles of Plantation, which had given the family rights to land in return for a promise to improve and oversee them, had not been fulfilled. The lands were given to the Earl's step-mother's second husband Sir Piers Crosby. In October Castlehaven's son, Lord Audley, then 19, complained to the Privy Council that his father intended to disinherit him in favour of a servant and had encouraged immoral behaviour in the house at Fonthill. According to Audley, Castlehaven had become too friendly with a favourite servant named Henry Skipwith and had also encouraged Skipwith to have a sexual relationship with Lord Audley's young wife, then 17.

Following the initial accusations there was an investigation during which the Earl's servants and step-daughter and the Earl himself were questioned. A picture emerged of a family in which the Earl, his Countess, his eldest son and his daughter-in-law were all at loggerheads and in which the Earl encouraged the taking of liberties, including sexual liberties, by his servants. Besides encouraging the debauching of his daughter-in-law by Skipwith, it was alleged that Castlehaven had encouraged and assisted in the rape of his own wife by several other member of his household and had enjoyed close physical and allegedly homosexual relations with these and other young men in his service.

Castlehaven was indicted on one charge of rape and two charges of sodomy in April 1631. His trial opened on Monday 25 April 1631 in the presence of 27 of his fellow peers, who had been chosen to act as both judge and jury under the direction of Lord Coventry, Keeper of the Great Seal. Castlehaven was found guilty of both rape and sodomy by majority verdicts and sentenced to be hanged, but the sentence was later commuted by Charles I to beheading, then considered a more merciful form of execution, because of Castlehaven's nobility. He was beheaded three weeks later on 14 May 1631 and buried in the chapel at the Tower of London. Two of the servants involved in the case were hanged at Tyburn in July of the same year.

Castlehaven's behaviour and his fate were the subject of widespread public and private debate among his contemporaries and debate has continued intermittently until the present day. The trial was well-documented and in 1643 the first of many hostile pamphlets was published which contained a summary of the court proceedings.¹⁵ The whole business of the trial, together with its context and consequences, has been fully examined in Cynthia Herrup's recent study.¹⁶ She concludes that while the Earl does not sound a very amiable person, much of the evidence

presented against him was dubious and his conviction unsafe. She also points out that he was probably as much the victim of his supposed allegiances as his alleged behaviour. Both the Earl and his first wife were said to be Roman Catholics. The House of Commons included Castlehaven in lists of Catholics compiled in 1624 and again in 1626. His only brother was a Catholic, as were his children. He took the Oath of Allegiance after the first accusation and publicly stated his conformity to the established church after the second, but this was a period when Roman Catholicism was seen as subversive to the social order and any suggestion of a connection to the Roman faith could be damaging to reputation. Similarly, although Castlehaven seems to have visited his Irish properties only seldom, his Irish connection did his reputation no good. To English eyes at this time, Ireland embodied the anarchic and traitorous character of the Roman Catholic religion.

Since both rape and sodomy were felonies, all Castlehaven's English estates and titles were automatically forfeit to the Crown after his execution. His son succeeded to the Irish titles of 3rd Earl of Castlehaven and Baron Audley of Orier. He clearly expected that the English title and lands would be restored to him in recognition of his services in denouncing his father's conduct, but instead King Charles I granted the Fonthill estate to Francis, Lord Cottington. Cottington was a protégé of Lord Treasurer Weston, a member of the Privy Council and Chancellor of the Exchequer, to whom the King was considerably in debt.

The remainder of Castlehaven's English estates including Stalbridge Park, together with the English title of Baron Audley of Heleigh, were restored to his son, the 3rd Earl of Castlehaven, in 1633. Four years later in 1637 Lord Audley sold Stalbridge Park to Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Cork. Seven years later in 1640 he tried to overturn the grant to Cottington by way of a petition to the House of Lords but was unsuccessful.¹⁷

Lord Francis Cottington at Fonthill (1632–46)

Francis Cottington (Figure 3.4) was born in 1579 at Godminster in Somerset, into a family of clothiers and small landowners.¹⁸ He probably spent his teenage years in London in the service of Sir Edward Stafford through his mother's connection, but apparently he had no formal education. In 1605, aged 26, he went to Spain in the household of Sir Charles Cornwallis, the newly appointed ambassador. Two years later he became a junior secretary in the embassy, dealing mostly with trade negotiations, and when Cornwallis returned to England in 1609 Cottington remained for two more years as agent in his place. He was recalled in 1611, but had no patron to forward his interest and the only post offered him was as consul in Seville. He spent two more thankless years in Spain but returned to London in 1613 and was appointed one of the Clerks Extraordinary to the Privy Council. Spain was then probably the strongest military power in Europe and Cottington's experience of the country was clearly



Fig. 3.4 Portrait of Lord Francis Cottington, n.d.

National Portrait Gallery, 605.

valuable. Inevitably he was associated with the pro-Spanish element at court led by King James's favourite Robert Kerr, Earl of Somerset.

In 1616 Cottington was yet again sent to Madrid as *chargé d'affaires* while the ambassador Sir John Digby was recalled for consultations about the possibility of an alliance with Spain. Both the treaty consultations and discussions with the Spanish court about the possibility of a marriage between Prince Charles, heir to the throne, and a Spanish princess occupied much of Cottington's time. In 1619 Sir

Walter Aston was sent to be the new English Ambassador, but Cottington remained in Spain to help and advise him. In the autumn of 1622 Cottington was finally recalled to England to be Prince Charles's secretary, and became part of the government administration under George Villiers, Marquess and soon to be Duke of Buckingham, who had replaced the Earl of Somerset as the court favourite. In early 1623 Cottington married Anne Brett, a wealthy widow, and was made a baronet through Buckingham's favour.

It soon became clear that the position at court and the baronetcy were inducements to Cottington to support Buckingham's plans for closer relations with Spain. In particular, Buckingham wished to enlist Cottington's support for his plan to visit Madrid in person, accompanied by Prince Charles, to hasten the marriage between the Prince and the Spanish Infanta. In a tense meeting with King James, Cottington advised strongly against the plan, instantly earning Buckingham's hostility, but the King gave his consent to the expedition and Cottington was required to accompany the Prince and Duke.¹⁹ They reached Madrid in March 1623.

As Cottington had foreseen, the Spanish marriage scheme was a fiasco. After four months of discussions in which King Philip and his ministers appeared to support the match, backed by a secret agreement to amend the English Oath of Allegiance in a way sympathetic to Roman Catholics, all came to nothing. Prince Charles and Buckingham returned to England at the end of August in an ugly mood. Meanwhile Cottington fell seriously ill in Madrid and is said to have converted to Catholicism. He denied the allegation repeatedly but the rumour of apostasy followed Cottington throughout his subsequent public life.²⁰

In September 1623 Cottington returned to England and remained as secretary to Prince Charles until the death of King James in 1625. He then lost all his official court posts, probably as a result of Buckingham's dislike, but he seems to have retained the affection of Prince (now King) Charles and it was probably partly through royal influence that he became a Member of Parliament, representing Camelford in 1624, Bossiney in 1625 and Saltash in 1628/9. This experience will have helped him understand something of the domestic politics from which he had been largely absent. He was returned as MP for Bossiney in succession to Sir Richard Weston when Weston was made Chancellor of the Exchequer; this began a long association between the two men which lasted until Weston's death in 1635.

Through the mid-1620s Cottington clawed his way back into favour at court, largely because of his knowledge of Spain and Spanish politics, a subject on which he acted as unofficial adviser to both the King and the Duke of Buckingham. During this period Cottington also began to amass property, including the manor of Blewberry in Berkshire, Freemantle Park on the edge of Southampton and Hanworth Park in Middlesex, which became his and his wife's main residence and from where he later took his title of Baron Hanworth. His son was baptised at Hanworth church in July 1628 in the presence of King Charles and the Duke of Buckingham, who stood as godparents – a measure of his status at that time.

The Duke of Buckingham was assassinated in August 1628 by a disgruntled army officer. Just before his death he had appointed Richard Weston, now Earl of Portland, as Lord Treasurer. Weston was pro-Spanish; Cottington was his man and was made a Privy Councillor in November 1628 and Chancellor of the Exchequer in March 1629. The appointments reflected his ability to deal with money and bureaucracy and also his key role in negotiations with Spain about an end to the ongoing war. When the painter Peter Paul Rubens came to England in 1629 as an unofficial Spanish envoy, he had discussions with Cottington, whom he had known in Spain, visiting Cambridge with him in September 1629 to receive an honorary degree and also visiting Cottington at Hanworth, where he was impressed by his host's style of living.²¹

Shortly after Rubens's visit, Cottington was sent as Ambassador Extraordinary to Madrid to continue negotiations. He was well-received in Spain and the product of his visit was the Treaty of Madrid, ratified in November 1630, which essentially restored the status quo of 1605, with an uneasy peace between the two countries, a secret alliance (concluded in January 1631) against the United Provinces and an arrangement in which Spanish silver bullion was shipped to England for trans-shipment to the Spanish Netherlands in English vessels. Up to a third of the bullion could be re-minted as English money and paid for through bills of exchange drawn on Antwerp. The arrangement profited English trade and brought money into the treasury.

On his return to England in 1631 Cottington was rewarded with a peerage and made Baron Cottington of Hanworth in July of that year. In the summer of 1632 he acquired the Fonthill estate, which was then in Crown hands following Castlehaven's execution. Cottington acquired the estate by purchase (£10,500 to the Crown and £6,000 to the 3rd Earl of Castlehaven), but much of the Crown's share came from the repayment of debts incurred by Charles I when Prince of Wales.²²

Between 1632 and 1635 Cottington was the second most powerful man at the English court after Weston, Earl of Portland, and was part of a small group of leading courtiers and Privy Councillors that included Sir Thomas Wentworth, later Earl of Strafford, and Archbishop William Laud. Cottington also served on various committees and commissions including that for the repair of St Paul's Cathedral by the King's Surveyor Inigo Jones. He was constantly busy, so busy that his visits to Fonthill were probably limited, but he took every opportunity to go down to Wiltshire for the sport. In September 1633 he wrote to Wentworth that 'I have been stuck here [in London] like a turd upon a wall' but was now to be allowed ten days in Wiltshire. In December of the same year he wrote again, 'I have certainly the best hawks there are in England but no tyme to use them ... I tell you when I was last in Wiltshire there was so many gentlemen attended me into the field as has made my Lord Chamberlain (the Earl of Pembroke) leave chasing and courted me ever since.'²³

While his career prospered in the early 1630s, Cottington's family life was shadowed with misfortune. Two of his young children had died of the plague in 1629. Then his wife Anne died in childbirth in February 1633 or 1634 and Cottington commissioned a handsome monument for her in Westminster Abbey from the royal

sculptor Hubert le Sueur (see [Chapter 12](#)). His only son Charles died in the summer of 1636 and his last surviving daughter died in 1641.

When the Earl of Portland died in 1635 Cottington hoped to become Lord Treasurer in his place, but Archbishop Laud in particular was hostile to Cottington's cause, partly because of his association with Portland (whom Laud had thought corrupt), and partly perhaps because of Cottington's reputed Catholicism. After a long interval, the King took Laud's advice and appointed instead William Juxon, Bishop of London, who became Lord Treasurer in March 1636.

Following this appointment Cottington's influence at court gradually waned, largely because of Laud's personal hostility, though he was still an important figure. He was made Master of the Court of Wards and Liveries in 1635. In this capacity he further increased his own wealth but also helped the King considerably by increasing the Crown's income at a time when Parliament was refusing to vote funds.

Cottington remained loyal to the Crown as relations with Parliament steadily deteriorated and the country began the slide towards civil war. He continued working during the impeachment of his friend Strafford in 1640 and that of Archbishop Laud later the same year, but finally in May 1641, one week after Strafford's execution, he resigned all his offices and moved first to Hanworth and then to Fonthill. Cottington lived quietly at Fonthill for nearly two years. It seems probable that he was taking steps to safeguard or dispose of his moveable assets. This would account for the fact that so few of his possessions were traced when Parliament later confiscated his property. In August 1642, in the early stages of the Civil War, his house at Hanworth was looted and in December Sir Edward Hungerford threatened to sack and burn Cottington's house at Fonthill unless Cottington contributed £1,000 for the use of Parliament. Cottington asked his neighbour the Earl of Pembroke at Wilton to intercede with Parliament and as a result the threat of casual despoliation was lifted.²⁴

In the spring of 1643 Parliamentary operations in Wiltshire under Sir Edward Hungerford, including the siege of nearby Wardour Castle, again endangered Cottington's person and estate, and in March 1643 he left Fonthill for the last time and moved to Oxford to join King Charles. He served the King as advisor and Lord Treasurer and finally arranged the surrender of the City of Oxford to Parliament in June 1646, on generous terms which allowed most of the Royalists to compound with Parliament for their estates. Cottington himself was excluded from composition or pardon. He left Oxford on 23 June and remained somewhere in England until November 1646, when he crossed the Channel in company with other Royalists and took up residence in Rouen, where he lived quietly for the next few years.

During his stay in Oxford, Cottington had improved his acquaintance with Edward Hyde, the King's last Lord Chancellor, and in 1650 Cottington proposed that they should make an expedition to Madrid to seek the moral and financial support of Philip IV for Charles II. The expedition proved unsuccessful: Spain recognised the Commonwealth in December 1650. Cottington then surprised everyone

by asking to remain in the country. He lived the rest of his life at Valladolid as a private citizen and converted formally to Roman Catholicism. He died in June 1652 and was buried in the chapel of the English College at Valladolid. After some bequests to local religious houses, he left whatever remained or could be recovered of his property to Francis and Charles Cottington, the sons of his older brother Maurice, who had remained a Somersetshire gentleman.

From this brief summary it is clear that Francis, Lord Cottington was a person of considerable consequence at the court of King Charles I. His companion in the final expedition to Spain, Edward Hyde, by then Lord Clarendon, sketched an acute but generally sympathetic portrait of Cottington's character in his *History of the Great Rebellion*:

He was a very wise Man, by the great and long experience he had in business of all kinds; and by his natural temper which was not liable to any transports of Anger, or any other passion, but could bear contradiction and reproach, without being moved, or put out of his way. It is true he was illiterate as to the Grammar of any Language, or the principles of any Science, but by his perfectly understanding the *Spanish* (which he spake as a *Spaniard*) the *French* and the *Italian* Languages and having read very much in all, he could not be said to be ignorant in any part of Learning, Divinity only excepted. He had a very fine and extraordinary understanding of the nature of Beasts and Birds and above all in all kinds of Plantations and Arts of Husbandry ...

He raised by his own Virtue and Industry a very fair Estate of which, though the Revenue did not exceed above four thousand pounds by the year; yet he had four very good Houses and three Parks, the value whereof was not reckoned into that computation. He liv'd very nobly, well serv'd, and attended in his house; had a better Stable of Horses, better provision for Sports (especially of Hawks, in which he took great delight) than most of his Quality, and liv'd always with great splendour; for though he lov'd money very well, and did not warily enough consider the circumstances of getting it, he spent it well all ways but in giving, which he did not affect. He was of an excellent humour and very easy to live with; and, under a grave countenance, cover'd the most of mirth, and caused more, than any Man of the most pleasant disposition. He never used any body ill but used many very well for whom he had no regard: his greatest fault was, that he could dissemble, and make Men believe that he lov'd them very well, when he cared not for them. He had not very tender Affections, nor Bowels apt to yearn at all objects which deserved compassion. He was heartily weary of the World and no man was more willing to die; which is an argument that he had peace of conscience. He left behind him a greater esteem of his parts than love of his person.²⁵

Cottington had direct and frequent contact with King James, King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, as well as with leading courtiers like Buckingham

and Wentworth and his Wiltshire neighbour the Earl of Pembroke who was Lord Chamberlain. He was on familiar terms with the artists in attendance on the court, including as we have seen at various times the painter Rubens, the Royal Surveyor Inigo Jones and the sculptor Hubert Le Sueur. He was also familiar with the Spanish court in Madrid and clearly became something of a Hispanophile. It is interesting that his portrait, now in the National Portrait Gallery (see [Figure 3.4](#)) shows him dressed in a severe costume like a Spanish nobleman. Besides his diplomatic activities in Madrid, it has been suggested that during his embassy in 1630 he was negotiating on King Charles's behalf for the acquisition of paintings from the collection of the painter G. B. Crescenzi. In 1632 Sir Arthur Hopton, the English Ambassador in Madrid, shipped four paintings by Juan Fernandez el Labrador back to Cottington in England; 'two of your Labradors pictures for the King and two for my Lady Cottington'.²⁶ One of these paintings survives in the royal collection but nothing is known of the two paintings destined for the Cottingtons, or indeed any of Cottington's collection.²⁷

From the time of his return from Spain after the successful conclusion of the peace treaty Cottington was also very wealthy. Some of that wealth was poured into his various houses and estates. The almost total lack of contemporary estate papers for any of these properties makes an understanding of Cottington's activities difficult, but anecdotes provide some information. Cottington's principal residence, conveniently near London, was Hanworth Park, and in 1629 he wrote to his friend Sir Thomas Wentworth about various improvements which were being made:

There begins to grow a brick wall all about the gardens at Hanworth which though it be a large extent yet will it be too little for the multitude of partridges, pheasants and wildfowl which are bred within it...There is a certain large low room made under the new building with a fountain in it and other rare devices. And the open gallery is all painted by the hand of a second Titian. Dainty walks are made abroad ... My wife is the chief contriver of all this machine, who with her cloaths tucked up and a staff in her hand marches from place to place like an Amazon commanding an army.²⁸

Hanworth seems to have been an odd-looking house, to judge by the sole surviving illustration ([Figure 3.5](#)), but obviously impressed visitors including Rubens, who said of Cottington after a visit to Hanworth that 'he lives the life of a prince'.²⁹

On acquiring Fonthill, Cottington made several improvements which were directly related to entertaining and to outdoor pursuits. He added a large new kitchen, built a handsome new stable block and enclosed the park with a stone wall to keep in the deer. The works were described by the Rev George Garrard, who wrote to Wentworth after a visit to Fonthill in 1637:

it is a noble place, both for seate and all things about it, downs, pasture, arable, woods water partridge, pheasant fish and a good house of frieze [coarse]

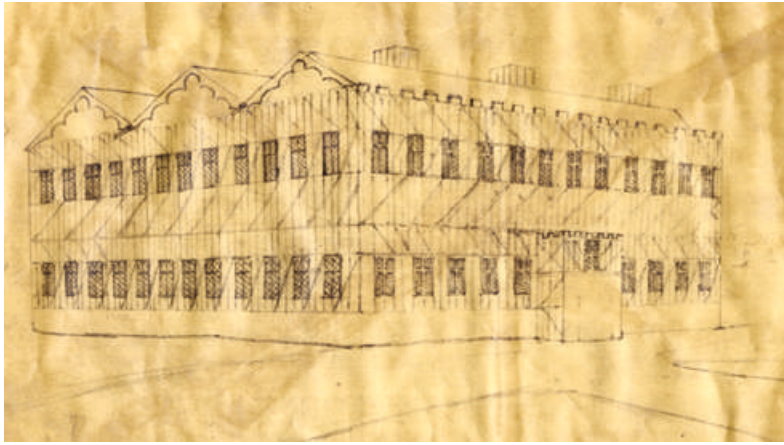


Fig. 3.5 Hanworth Palace.

London Metropolitan Archives.

stone; much better by some additions he hath newly made to it; for he hath built a stable of stone, the 3rd [finest] in England, Petworth and Burleigh on the Hill only exceed it; also a kitchen which is fairer and more convenient than any I have seen in England anywhere, £2000 [annual income from the] land he hath about it: and while I was there his park wall of square white stone, a dry wall only lopped at the top was finished, which cost him setting up £600 a mile but it is but 3 miles about ... He lived then like a great don of Spain; and I was used as a grandee by him, though I am one of his most humble servants.³⁰

Burley on the Hill in Rutland had been the Duke of Buckingham's house and his stables built between 1621 and 1628 may have been designed by Inigo Jones.³¹ Giles Worsley has pointed out that Cottington's stables at Fonthill were part of a significant group of stable buildings erected by Charles I's courtiers that all show an awareness of Classical sources.³² In the case of the Fonthill stables one obvious Classical source is the ninth proposition from Serlio's *On Architecture*, which shows a house with circular openings above rectangular windows. Worsley suggests that the Fonthill stables may have been designed by Isaac de Caus, who was associated with Inigo Jones on work for the court and for the Duke of Bedford in Covent Garden and Woburn in the early 1630s. De Caus was at Wilton in the early 1630s, where he took up residence and, with Jones's help, provided designs for the Earl of Pembroke's new house.³³ He also designed stables and an elaborate garden at Wilton. Cottington's stable was an unusually assured Italianate design for the 1630s, to judge by a painting of the 1740s by George Lambert (Figure 3.17), and de Caus is certainly a possible designer, partly because of his local Wiltshire connection. Besides the well-known work at Wilton he also provided a design for a new building for

the Earl of Cork at Stalbridge in 1638, though the nature of this building is not known.³⁴

As for Cottington's new kitchen, it seems likely on later evidence that a new wing was added on the north side of the old house to form a kitchen court facing towards the new stables.

Garrard does not mention the gardens at Fonthill, although there was certainly an elaborate garden, with enclosures and avenues. When Cottington acquired Fonthill, the rector of the adjoining parish of Fonthill Bishop was Christopher Wren (senior), who had been appointed to the living in 1620 and also in 1624 to the nearby parish of East Knoyle. In 1635 Wren was made Dean of Windsor and gave up the living at Fonthill Bishop in 1638, but he continued to divide his time between Windsor and East Knoyle and must have known Cottington well. The Dean noted (in his copy of Sir Henry Wotton's *Elements of Architecture*, which was first published in 1624) that he had seen at Fonthill House 'a delicate and diligent curiositie ... on ye slope side of a terrace which butts ye choice prospect of ye howse were ye armes of England in ye proper colours by a natural arch of flowers emblazoning them'.

It is pleasant to speculate that Lady Cottington may have taken an interest in the gardens at Fonthill, as she did at Hanworth, though her death in 1633 would have made any involvement brief. The Dean also made some comments on the house itself, noting the existence of a 'tarras' or balcony in front of the second storey and also that, 'one of the corner turrets of the gatehouse is a chimney'.³⁵ The evolution of the house and gardens is described more fully below.

After November 1642, the Committee for the Advance of Money, which had been established to investigate the wealth of citizens, chiefly Royalists, and extract forced loans for the use of Parliament, searched vainly for Cottington's personal property. Among the few items identified as held by his ex-servants were a bed with crimson velvet hangings and three velvet carpets, tapestries worth £528, a crimson plush bed with a French fringe of gold and silk valence, a sarcenet quilt with gold fringe and a plush carpet worth £68.³⁶ All of these appear to have been at Hanworth and we have no account of what was in the house at Fonthill. In fact, it is not at all clear what Cottington did with the bulk of his possessions or with his financial wealth. Soon after Cottington left for the Continent in 1646, most of his properties – including Fonthill – were given by Parliament to John Bradshaw, Lord President of the Council of State. It is a poignant contrast. Cottington was one of Charles I's most loyal courtiers. Bradshaw had chaired the council which authorised the King's execution.

John Bradshaw at Fonthill (1649–59)

John Bradshaw (Figure 3.6) was born at Wibersely (modern Wybersley) in Cheshire in 1602, the second son of Henry Bradshaw of Marple Hall.³⁷ The Bradshaws were of comfortable gentry standing and fairly well connected to other families in the



Fig. 3.6 Lord President Bradshaw, 1713.

National Portrait Gallery.

area. John was called to the Bar in 1627 and built up a lucrative career as an attorney, at least partly on the strength of his local connections. He was made Mayor of Congleton in 1637, later became High Steward of the town and was appointed Steward of Newcastle under Lyme in 1642. In 1638 he married a Cheshire woman, Mary, daughter of Thomas Marbury.

During the 1640s he rose to prominence in the City of London as a Parliamentary lawyer and acted as counsel in several prominent political trials. In 1647 he was appointed as counsel to the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents, charged with negotiating the financial penalties to be paid by the opponents of Parliament, and a contemporary referred to him as being 'As it were Attorney General'.³⁸ In the same year he was made Chief Justice of Chester, Flint, Montgomery and Denbigh.

In January 1649 Bradshaw was appointed Lord President of the court set up to try King Charles I: as a representative of the radical faction on the Common Council of the City of London, he could be expected to uphold the constitutional supremacy of the House of Commons against the royal prerogative. After the appointment he was given apartments in New Palace Yard and later in the Dean's House at Westminster Abbey to mark his new status.

Bradshaw played a crucial role in the conduct of the King's trial, forcing Charles to face his judges and engaging with him in legal debates which often left Bradshaw the victor. Although Bradshaw was compelled by his fellow judges to offer Charles every chance to reach some kind of settlement, the King's inflexibility and failure to recognise the authority of the court eventually led Bradshaw to pass the sentence of death.

After the royal execution Bradshaw was commissioned to chair the courts subsequently established to try several Royalist 'delinquents', including the Duke of Hamilton, the Earl of Holland, Lord Capel and Lord Goring, all of whom were condemned and executed. In March 1649 he was appointed Lord President of the new Council of State set up by the Rump Parliament as the principal executive body of the Commonwealth; he held the post until November 1651.

In August 1649 Parliament voted Bradshaw land worth £2,000 per annum from the estates of the Earl of St Albans and Lord Cottington. The Cottington estate included the manors of Feltham and Hanworth in Middlesex, plus other properties in Berkshire (including Blewberry), Hampshire (including Freemantle Park), Kent, Somerset and Wiltshire. In the latter county, the properties included Hatch, the manor of Fonthill Gifford with Fonthill House and land in the parish of Tisbury.

There appears to be no record of the effects of John Bradshaw's ownership on Fonthill and the other ex-Cottington properties and it is not clear how much he actually occupied the house at Fonthill. By the early 1650s he was apparently living principally at Greenway Hall at Bagnal in Staffordshire, and was busy acquiring more property in that county. He had supposedly also acquired the estate of his brother-in-law, John Fallowes, the heavily indebted lord of Fallowes Hall at Alderley in Cheshire, who was married to Anne Bradshaw. On the other hand, he appears to have been sufficiently interested in his Wiltshire estate to commission a survey of the manor of Fonthill. The Rev. John Watson, in his unpublished *Memoirs of the Family of Bradshawe of Marple in Cheshire*, written in 1779, says that in his time there existed at Marple a survey 'drawn on vellum of the manor of fountain gifford in wiltshire part of the possessions of the Rt Hon John Bradshaw 1658 containing 2,668 acres, 0 rods 39 perches ...'.³⁹

Bradshaw died at Dean's House, Westminster on 31 October 1659. The cause of his death was described as 'quartan ague', usually taken to be malaria or malaria-like symptoms. He was buried with honour in Westminster Abbey on 22 November; his wife, who predeceased him, was also buried there. They left no surviving children. Bradshaw had bequeathed his estate to his wife, with reversion

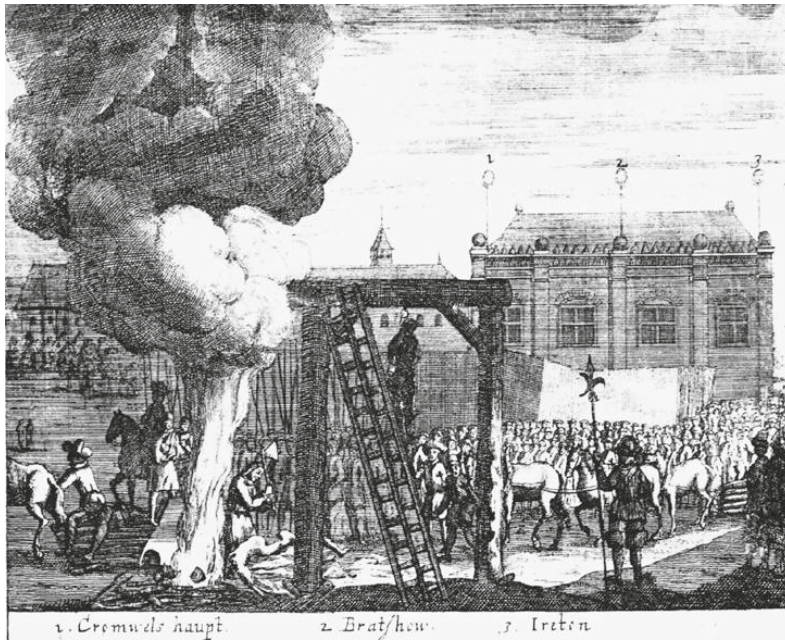


Fig. 3.7 A composite scene showing Tyburn Gallows with Westminster Hall in the background. The heads mounted on poles above Westminster Hall are 1. Cromwell, 2. Bradshaw and 3. Ireton.

By unknown artist, *The Wilkinson Head of Oliver Cromwell and Its Relationship to Busts, Masks and Painted Portraits*, 1934 see Biometrika.

Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6726314>.

to his nephew, Henry. He left £20 for the poor at Fonthill, with bequests to several other individuals in the village.⁴⁰

In fact, Bradshaw's body only remained in the Abbey for two years. Charles II was restored to his throne in 1660. On 30 January 1661, the 12th anniversary of the regicide, the bodies of Bradshaw, Cromwell and Henry Ireton were exhumed and displayed in chains on the gallows at Tyburn and then beheaded (Figure 3.7; see also Chapter 12). The bodies were thrown into a common pit and the heads displayed on pikes at Westminster Hall.

The later Cottingtons at Fonthill (1659–1744)

Fonthill meanwhile was restored to the Cottingtons. In his will, made in Valladolid but proved in England in August 1666, Lord Cottington had left his English estates in trust to Lord Francis Seymour for the benefit of his nephews Francis and Charles, the sons of his elder brother Maurice who had died in 1654.⁴¹ After the death of John Bradshaw the whole of Lord Cottington's former

estate, including Fonthill, Hanworth Park and lands at Blewberry in Berkshire, Raynham in Kent and Freemantle Park near Southampton was taken back into the hands of Maurice's eldest son Francis, who lived at Fonthill until his death in 1665. The regicide Edward Ludlow, who had property in Wiltshire and had been part of the regiment of Sir Edward Hungerford which had once laid siege to Wardour Castle, passed through the village of Hindon near Fonthill in 1659 and later recounted how

Lord Cottington's heir, a papist and even a naturall fool, got parties enough to seize by fraud and to keep by violence the possession of Fonthill House there adjacent, which the Parliament bestowed on President Bradshaw, the kinsman and heir of whom was at that time at Hindon and made his complaint to me. But such were the times that I could do him little service therein.⁴²

The details of Henry Bradshaw's ejection from Fonthill are unclear but Francis Cottington was certainly in possession of the family home by the Restoration. A short inventory of Bradshaw's domestic possessions at Fonthill survives in the National Archives. A list of such items as bedsteads, rugs, bolsters and chamber pots is headed

An inventory of severall goods, Wyche were lately John Bradshawe's at the time of his death, and are now remaining in the custody of Francis Cottington Esq. of Fonthill Gifford.⁴³

There is confusion about the social status of this Francis Cottington. In some accounts he is referred to as Sir Francis Cottington or Francis Cottington Kt., but other documents including the inventory referred to above and various entries in the State Papers and records of some Chancery proceedings refer to him as Mr Francis Cottington or Francis Cottington Esq. As a returning Royalist, he might have been rewarded with a knighthood by King Charles II, but there is no evidence that he was given one.

To add to the confusion, all the eldest sons of the Cottington family at Fonthill were named Francis. Henceforward, the post-Commonwealth Cottingtons of that name who owned the Fonthill estate will be distinguished in this account by a number reflecting their position in the family sequence.

Like all the Cottingtons to own Fonthill after the Restoration, Francis Cottington I was a Roman Catholic, who was part of the recusant network which was particularly strong in this part of the south west.⁴⁴ The family had links to the Benedictine Order and from at least the 1690s until the 1720s there was usually a Benedictine priest resident in the house.⁴⁵ Like most aristocratic recusants, the Cottingtons maintained close links with mainland Europe. There are several entries in the State Papers which refer to Francis Cottington I or members of his family going to the Continent without leave; an entry in 1661 relates to his sons

(one of whom was then 15 years old) spending three months in Paris with their tutor, who was a papist.⁴⁶ The climate towards Catholics at this date was tolerant and Cottington was pardoned.

Francis Cottington I died in 1665 and was succeeded by his son Francis II. The parish registers for Fonthill Gifford record that 'Francis Cottington Kt.' was buried on 10 May 1665. They also record that Francis Cottington 'son to Francis [i.e. II] and Elizabeth' was baptised in April 1665 and buried in May 1666. The child's father (Francis Cottington II) was himself buried in December of the same year, and the main estate then passed to his younger brother Charles. This rapid succession of deaths has confused several historical accounts, but it seems fairly clear that 'Francis Cottington Kt' (whether knighted or not) was the nephew of Lord Cottington, that the latter's elder son 'Francis Cottington Esq.' inherited in 1665 but died just over a year later in December 1666 without a living male heir, and that the estate then passed to his younger brother Charles Cottington Esq., who must have been aged about 20.

By his will proved in February 1667 Francis Cottington II made provision for his wife Elizabeth, leaving her 'all my furniture of my house at Fonthill', with other bequests to his servants and to his sister Jane Cottington, who had married Edward, 13th Baron Stourton, the Roman Catholic owner of the neighbouring estate of Stourhead.⁴⁷ An inventory of the contents of Fonthill House was taken in December 1666.⁴⁸ Sadly, the inventory does not give a full or coherent picture of the interior, but mentions various principal rooms including the dining room, south drawing room, the Countess's Chamber, the Redd Bedchamber, Mr Martin's Chamber, Mrs Witherley's chamber and the Widow's Chamber. The first item in the inventory is eight wall hangings in a room with four windows, which was apparently the dining room. This was linked by a passage to the drawing rooms and can probably be identified with the great hall of the Jacobean house. It was probably also at this time that a survey map was made of the estate, which is described more fully below.

Charles Cottington was in possession of the Fonthill estate from 1667 until his death in 1697, but as with his father the nature and extent of his activities at Fonthill and elsewhere is largely undocumented, with two notable exceptions, one of which relates to his second marriage. His first wife Catherine died childless in 1667.⁴⁹ Like his elder brother, Charles Cottington appears to have been a frequent traveller to the Continent and on one of these excursions in 1670 he met a woman called Angela Gallina in Lyons and travelled with her to her home town of Turin. There he pressed his suit, 'representing to her that he had an estate in England to very great value',⁵⁰ and they made a verbal marriage contract in front of witnesses but without a priest. Cottington travelled to Rome to ask Cardinal Barberini to solemnise the marriage but the Cardinal demurred because he was informed that Cottington was a peer of the realm. In the end, the couple found a priest to oblige and they lived together in Rome and Turin for nearly a year.

At some time during this period Cottington discovered that his wife had been previously married to a man called Frichinono. This marriage had been dissolved in 1666 by the Bishop of Turin on the grounds that it had been a forced marriage (although it had produced a daughter). On his return to England in 1672 Charles Cottington sought to repudiate the marriage but Angela Gallina brought a case in the Court of Arches, the principal ecclesiastical court of England, which eventually declared that the two were legally married.⁵¹ Cottington then appealed to the House of Lords. After a great deal of formal and public debate about the authority of Catholic clergy in England it appears that Cottington was allowed to repudiate the match. Shortly afterwards he married Alethea Maria Loggin, daughter of Robert Loggin of Idbury in Oxfordshire.⁵² The Loggins were an established and prosperous Catholic family with a considerable amount of property, some of which passed into Cottington's hands.⁵³

In the mid-1670s Charles Cottington honoured his great-uncle Lord Cottington's wish to have his body brought back from Valladolid to England for final burial. The remains were buried in Westminster Abbey in June 1678. It was probably at this time that the handsome marble tomb which Lord Cottington had commissioned for his wife in the 1630s was augmented by a full-size marble effigy of her husband and a commemorative inscription. The effigy of Lord Cottington wears the clothes of the 1630s. It has in the past been ascribed to Francesco Fanelli, who left England in 1642, but more recently it has been ascribed to Caius Gabriel Cibber.⁵⁴ For the present the authorship and date of the effigy are unknown (see [Chapter 12](#)).

There is evidence from various sources that Charles Cottington was mortgaging property,⁵⁵ presumably to provide capital, but no indication that he was in real difficulties. His wife Alethea died in 1687⁵⁶ and Charles subsequently married Catherine, who was living at the time of his death in 1697. In his will dated 17 November 1697 he left some specific bequests to his younger son John and to his wife Catherine; he directed also that during the minority of his eldest son and heir, Francis Cottington III, his executors (Lord Arundell, his brother-in-law Lord Stourton and Charles Woolmer – all Roman Catholics) should 'keep up and maintain my now mansion house at Founthill aforesaid with the outhouses, stables and gardens thereunto belonging'. They were instructed to sell the property in Kent to discharge any obligations of jointure or mortgage.⁵⁷ His widow Catherine Cottington moved to Salisbury, where she died in 1739 leaving all her possessions to Catherine Fielding, the sister of the novelist and magistrate Henry Fielding, with whom she was living.⁵⁸

Charles Cottington's eldest son Francis III was probably born in the mid-1680s (no record of his birth has been found) and would have reached his majority some time between 1700 and 1706. In 1708 he married Hellen Golding or Goulding, the only daughter of Sir Edward and Dame Winifred Golding of Colston Bassett in Nottinghamshire. The Goldings were a prominent Catholic family and the marriage brought some new money to the Cottingtons. By way of jointure Francis

settled on Hellen Freemantle Park, in Hampshire, which his father had mortgaged for £2,000. Sir Edward agreed to pay £1,000 to Francis Cottington and £2,000 to pay off the mortgage. The manor and rectory of Colston Bassett were granted to trustees to sell what was needed to raise the total of £3,000 and to pay Sir Edward's debts. The remainder was to be settled on Sir Edward and Dame Winifred for life and then pass to Francis Cottington and his issue by Hellen. By indenture dated 14 October 1714, Sir Edward Golding authorised the trustees of the marriage settlement to sell the whole of the remaining part of the manor and rectory. The sale was completed in the November following. Sir Edward died intestate in December 1715 and administration was granted to his wife Dame Winifred in April 1716.⁵⁹

It is possible that Francis Cottington III may have used some of the funds from the marriage to make improvements to his Wiltshire estate. In an acrimonious court case about rights of access through the Fonthill Park in 1714, one of Cottington's neighbours called Thomas Lampard declared that Cottington 'was a rogue and he would make his new building shake about his ears'.⁶⁰ On the strength of this passing comment the Victoria County History suggests that Cottington may have made improvements to the mansion house, which must have been looking very old-fashioned by this date. It has to be said there is no mention of new works in a survey of the estate made in 1715,⁶¹ nor in a return of papists' estates made in 1717,⁶² but this does not rule out the possibility of new works at this time.

What is certain is that in April 1716 Francis Cottington III was given a Jacobite title by King James III, the Old Pretender. The son of James II still maintained his right to the English throne from his court in exile in France, and was supported by most English Roman Catholics. Francis was made Baron Cottington of Fonthill Gifford with remainder to his heirs male, and then to his younger brother John Cottington. At present no direct connection can be proved, but it seems very likely that Cottington was given the title for providing some assistance, probably financial, to the Jacobite cause in the abortive rebellion of 1715. Although Cottington was clearly living at Fonthill during the early part of his adult life, he appears to have established another household at West Wickham in Buckinghamshire, either near or with his mother-in-law Dame Winifred Golding, and he died at West Wickham in September 1728, a week after the death of his wife.

Administration of his estate was granted to Dame Winifred as guardian of the heir, Francis Cottington IV, 2nd Baron Cottington of Fonthill Gifford, who was then a minor. Apparently he had still not reached his majority in 1734 but in 1735 or 1736 he came into his inheritance and by 1738 was making improvements to the house.⁶³ On 12 June 1738 a traveller (John Loveday of Caversham) passing by Fonthill on his way to Wardour noted that, 'In a bottom Mr Cottington has a very large old Seat of Stone at Fonthill some distance before Tisbury. Many workmen are now employed about it; Sure this gentleman has a considerable estate at Blewberry in Berkshire.'⁶⁴ Clearly something was being done by the young heir, either to the house or the garden or both, and it may have been to celebrate the refurbishment

work that the painter George Lambert was commissioned to paint certainly one and possibly two paintings of the house in 1740.

It is clear from an abstract of title among Alderman Beckford's papers that from the mid-1730s onwards Cottington was raising money by mortgaging parts of his estate and by July 1744 his debt had reached the large sum of £20,000.⁶⁵ Already by this date Cottington had entered an agreement with Alderman Beckford for the purchase of the Fonthill estate. Beckford would pay a total of £32,000: £20,000 to pay off the principal creditor Mary Darnell, leaving Cottington with a profit of £12,000, together with his other estates including Blewberry in Berkshire and Freemantle in Hampshire.

In June 1744 Francis Cottington IV took a lease of a new London townhouse at No. 4 Argyll Street, Westminster, just south of Oxford Street.⁶⁶ The lessor of the house was the Roman Catholic architect James Gibbs, who had joined with other members of the London building world to promote this speculative development on the Duke of Argyll's land. Cottington is shown in the parish ratebooks as occupant of the house from 1744 until 1754. During this period he disposed of many of his other properties and various surviving documents concerned with property transfer describe him as 'now of Blewberry Berks' (1745) and 'now of Freemantle Park' (1750).⁶⁷ The last Cottington to own Fonthill died in March 1758.⁶⁸ He was apparently unmarried and childless and had no obvious heir. He left no will and his place of burial is unknown.

The house and garden at Fonthill before 1744

There is little specific information about the mansion house at Fonthill built by the Mervyns and purchased in 1620 by the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven. From the mid-sixteenth century there are references to a house surrounded by a park,⁶⁹ and it can be inferred from James Mervyn's will cited earlier that his dwelling was fitted up in a rich manner, but there are apparently no descriptions, accounts, inventories or other contemporary written documentation.

On the basis of the recent resistivity survey carried out for this project (see [Chapter 9](#)) it is now possible to say with some certainty that the mansion house was located more or less on the site of the present cricket pitch and extended northwards (see [Figure 1.3](#)). At present, the only other clues to the form and appearance of the building are a painting ([Figure 3.8](#)) and an estate map, both dating from after the acquisition of the estate by Francis, Lord Cottington and both now in private hands. They show what is clearly a late Tudor or Jacobean house in a landscape setting which can be identified as Fonthill, and with the alterations and additions made by Cottington in the 1630s.

The painting was certainly in the house during William Beckford's lifetime because it is mentioned by Rutter in 1820, 'purporting to be view of it [Fonthill House] in 1566' (the date of Sir John Mervyn's death and James Mervyn's



Fig. 3.8 Robert Thacker, *Fonthill House*, ca. 1680.

Private collection, photograph © Heather Norville-Day.

accession).⁷⁰ This date is clearly wrong because the painting shows various later features, including the stable block which was not built until the mid-1630s. Recent research has revealed that the painting is on several sheets of paper, one of which has a watermark which can be dated to between about 1620 and about 1630 (see [Chapter 11](#)). Before this research was begun it was assumed that the painting probably dated from the later part of the seventeenth century. The assumption was based partly on the fact that the painting is signed (crudely) by Robert Thacker, who died in 1687. However poor the signature, Thacker's authorship seemed not so unlikely. He is known to have painted a view of Longleat House sometime after 1684 and also did work at Longford Castle, so he was certainly operating in the Wiltshire area in the reign of Charles II. If Thacker is indeed the artist, his painting presumably shows the mansion at Fonthill sometime in the 1680s.

The view (see [Figures 3.8 and 3.9](#)) is of the main east front of the house with a north/south hall range five bays wide and projecting wings on either side. The house is of two main storeys, with a further storey within the roof which has variegated shaped gables in the main range and simpler gables in the wings. The main range has a slightly recessed three-bay centre and on the ground floor the recess is filled with a balustraded single-storey porch containing the main, round-headed central entrance doorway, flanked by large, rectangular small-paned windows. All the windows have mullions and transoms and most are of multiple lights in two tiers, though the windows flanking the central entrance have a different glazing pattern.

The courtyard in front of the house is enclosed by a decorative pierced stone screen wall between the outer ends of the wings. Extending northwards from the north wing of the main house are service ranges. The front or north-east range is two storeys high with four gables. The rear or north-west range, of which only the hipped roof can be seen, has six dormer windows and several prominent chimney stacks.



Fig. 3.9 Robert Thacker, detail of house and stable.

Private collection, photograph © Heather Norville-Day.

A larger outer courtyard extending beyond the width of the house front is enclosed and divided by stone walls with open balustrades, and also bisected across the front of the house by a channel of water crossed by a small bridge carrying the entrance drive. This continues away from the main entrance of the mansion to a gatehouse with four octagonal corner towers with pepperpot roofs and a wide central round-arched doorway. The location of this gatehouse makes it clear that the principal entrance to the mansion was from the east, from the public road between Fonthill Bishop and Tisbury.

A short distance north of the main house is a large detached stable block which can readily be identified as Lord Cottington's new stable block of the 1630s. The stable building has a main east front of five bays with a handsome rusticated and pedimented central doorway and tall windows with lunettes above. Flanking the centre are projecting two-storey wings and the whole building has a tall pitched hipped roof.

To the south and west of the mansion are rectangular garden enclosures, mostly laid to grass, one of which contains what appears to be a square fishpond with a central round island. There is no sign of the elaborate flower planting mentioned by Dean Wren, but the enclosure immediately south of the house is clearly a pleasure garden and backed by what appears to be a bank or raised terrace with formal tree planting set against mature woodland on the hill behind. Enclosing the house, stable and garden is a tall stone wall which can surely be identified as the 'park wall of square white stone, a dry wall only lopped at the top' built by Lord Cottington and described by Garrard in 1637.

On stylistic grounds one would date the mansion house shown in the painting to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, in other words, to the period of ownership of Sir James Mervyn. The emphasis on symmetry, with a central entrance rather than one to one side, the large and varied windows of the main range and the shaped gables along the main skyline are all typical of the late Tudor and Jacobean period, as is the detached ornamental gatehouse which, along with a

walled forecourt, was very common in houses from the 1590s onwards.⁷¹ It is certainly possible that the basic fabric of the house was built by Sir John Mervyn before his death in 1566 but much of the visible external character of the building can probably be attributed to his son James, who died in 1611. There may have been other works to the house by the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, who had demonstrated his interest in architecture by the building of a new house at Stalbridge, begun in 1618, but at present there is no firm evidence that he altered the house at Fonthill.

This was the house acquired by Lord Cottington in 1632 and the painting shows some of the improvements described by Garrard on his 1637 visit. These included the new stable block, a new three-mile wall enclosing the deer park and a new kitchen, which was probably the north-west wing with its prominent chimneys.

What is not shown is the mediaeval parish church of St Nicholas, which was apparently close to the house,⁷² probably to the north-west behind the stable block. Comprising a nave, chancel and at least one aisle, the church must have been a fairly substantial building and there was also a burial ground, but there is no sign of the building in the painting.

The other major source of information about the seventeenth century house is an estate map (Figure 3.10) which is undated but titled *Fonthill, The Seate of Francis Cottington Esq: and Survey of the Old and New Park*. This means it probably dates either from the mid-1660s or from the period between ca. 1700, when Francis Cottington III



Fig. 3.10 Fonthill estate map, ca. 1666, general view.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

came of age, and 1716 when he received a Stuart baronetcy. The former is perhaps more likely, partly because of the early style of draughtsmanship and partly because the rapid succession of owners in 1665/6 would have made such a survey appropriate.

The principal boundaries of the estate as shown on the map follow lines which can still be traced on a modern Ordnance Survey map (see [Figure 3.11](#)), although the estate map does not show the Tisbury stream, a tributary of the Nadder which is the origin of the present lake, nor the public road which then ran between the stream and the eastern boundary wall of the park. The map key gives a total area of 171 acres for the Old and New Parks, of which 51 acres consisted of the Old Park. The additional acreage was perhaps the area enclosed by Cottington for his deer park.



Fig. 3.11 A detail from the modern Ordnance Survey map, showing clearly the outline of the Fonthill Park defined by public roads (Explorer 143 Warminster and Trowbridge, scale 1:25000).

© Crown copyright 2017 licence 100059352.

The map includes a sketch of what is clearly the same house shown in the painting (see [Figure 3.12](#)), with shaped gables, mullion and transom windows, gabled projecting wings and service wings on the north side. The gatehouse is also shown, slightly diminished in scale, with the canal bisecting the courtyard in front of the house from side to side. Lord Cottington's stable block is shown, but here with a central cupola. Behind the stable block is a square yard, with what is clearly a granary in the middle raised on staddle stones. On the west side of the yard is an open-fronted shed. On the north side is a long building with a pitched roof and at the north-west corner of the yard is what appears to be a cottage with chimney. There is no obvious sign of the parish church, which was supposed to be somewhere in this location, unless it can be identified with the long building on the north side of the yard. There is a faint indication of what may be a bell-cote on the west gable of this building, but otherwise it does not have the appearance of a church; there is no obvious chancel or aisle nor any sign of the burial ground, which is known to have existed. To the south of the stable block, in the north-east corner of the park, is an orchard. To the north of the stable yard is what can probably be identified as a kitchen garden, with six rectangular plots enclosed by trees.

The map also shows the layout of the pleasure grounds and park in considerable detail and with some differences to the painting. To the south-east of the house is a serpentine water garden, presumably fed by the canal in front of the house. The water garden occupies the same location as the pond and island shown in the painting and both show a small building at the north-west corner. To the south and



Fig. 3.12 Detail of house and stable on Fonthill estate map, ca. 1666.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

west of the house are three rectangular enclosures with formal planting layouts, from one of which a gateway opens to a formal avenue planted with trees extending south towards the location of what is now called the ‘Cottington Gate’ opposite the present Beckford Arms. A number of other gateways are dotted around the perimeter of the enclosed garden.

In the wider park there are two particular features of interest, both of which pose problems of interpretation. From a gateway on the west side of the garden a broad ride extends south-westwards up through woodlands to the ridge behind the house. At the end of the ride on the top of the ridge is a large enclosure in the shape of a dumbbell, with a small viewing platform at the western end and three subsidiary enclosures on the southern side, one of which appears to be arranged as a maze (see [Figure 3.13](#)). Perhaps the enclosure had something to do with sport. Lord Cottington was particularly fond of hawking, but this enclosure does not immediately suggest birds of prey. Given its very large size it might have been for deer shooting, or perhaps the bull-baiting which was popular in Spain and for which, apparently, Lord Cottington had facilities on his estate.⁷³ Without more information or comparative examples one can only speculate.

The second feature of interest is a lone tree marked on the map some distance west of the kitchen garden in the exact centre of a long, thin rectangular field or enclosure. It is close to the position of an existing tree, a Cedar of Lebanon, which has recently been tentatively dated to the late 1630s ([Figure 3.14](#)).⁷⁴ This is an extremely early date for the species in England, but

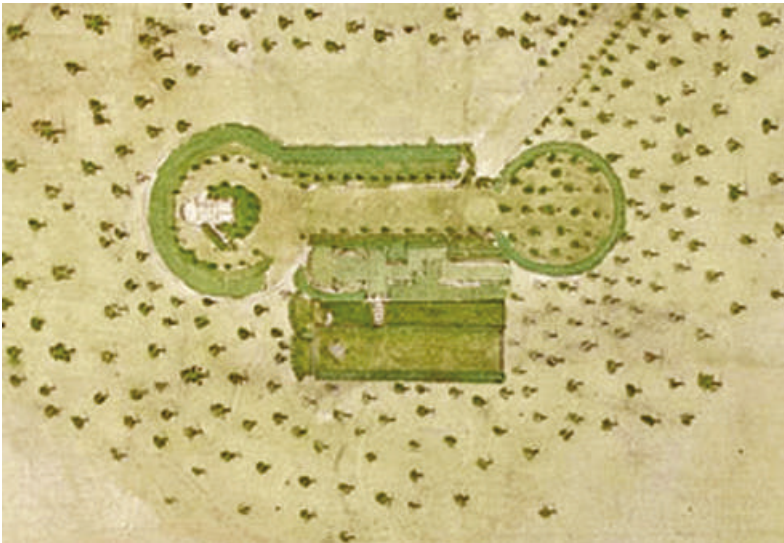


Fig. 3.13 Detail of dumbbell on Fonthill estate map, ca. 1666.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.



Fig. 3.14 Photograph of cedar tree with the red-brick wall of William Beckford's kitchen garden behind.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

cedar cones were brought to England in the late 1630s by Edward Pocock, who gave some of them to his brother who was chaplain to the Earl of Pembroke at Wilton. Lord Cottington was a close neighbour of the Earl and on cordial if not friendly terms. It is pleasant to speculate that Pembroke might have made a present of one of the cones to Cottington and that it was planted and has survived in the park at Fonthill.

The evidence of these two visual sources, the painting and the estate map, helps to paint a fairly detailed and consistent portrait of Fonthill House, but the uncertain chronology poses awkward questions about the gardens. If the map pre-dates the painting then the garden layout was much simplified between the 1660s and the 1680s, which is perhaps not surprising. If the painting pre-dates the map, the gardens were considerably elaborated shortly after the Restoration, which seems unlikely. On the whole the most probable solution is that Thacker, or whoever painted the view of Fonthill, was working some time after the Restoration, perhaps in the 1680s, using paper which was over 50 years old.

From the late seventeenth century there is a 60-year gap in the visual record of the house and park at Fonthill, but in the mid-eighteenth century the mansion house was painted four times in 15 years, providing much information about the form and development of the building and its surrounding landscape. One painting is dated 1740, when the estate was still in the ownership of Francis Cottington IV, and there is a second painting which is probably of the same date. Two paintings probably date from the mid-1750s, by which time the estate had



Fig. 3.15 George Lambert, *Fonthill House*, 1740.

Government Art Collection, 7074.

been acquired by Alderman Beckford. Full details of their provenance are given in [Chapter 11](#).

Of the two earlier paintings, one is signed and dated: *George Lambert 1740* ([Figure 3.15](#)). The painting is taken from a viewpoint slightly further south than that of the earlier view and shows what is clearly the old house, remodelled in an early to mid-eighteenth century style. In the main block, all trace of its Jacobean character has been erased and the exterior is now wholly Classical in style, but with proportions dictated by the earlier building. The whole of the main building is shown with three full storeys. The original elaborately gabled top storey has become a proper attic with a parapet partially concealing the pitched roofs behind. The east-facing main front is seven bays wide, with the three centre bays slightly recessed, conforming to the general arrangement of the Jacobean front. In the centre of the front is a doorway with an elaborate pedimented surround, flanked by two wide round-headed windows with eared surrounds. All the windows in the three-bay centre of the front are oddly wide; the obvious explanation is that the earlier wide mullion and transom windows were simply replaced by small-paned sashes. The two bays flanking the centre have sash windows of the customary shape (round-headed on the ground floor) and the inner sides of the wings are also sashed. The east-facing ends of the wings are shown with sash windows on the ground and first floors and Diocletian windows on the third floor.

The painting makes clear that a new show front had been created on the south elevation, looking towards the Fonthill Gifford and Tisbury. This front was nine bays wide and three storeys high. The three central bays are set forward under a pediment supported by a giant order of attached columns rising through two storeys and an attic above the main cornice, with a second cornice to the pediment. This use of a tall attic storey above the main cornice is an arrangement typical of the English Baroque style popular in the first half of the eighteenth century. The use of a pediment in the attic is more unusual but can be found in several houses of ca. 1720, like Kingston Maureward House in Dorset built in 1717–20 for George Pitt, perhaps to designs by Thomas Archer, and Barnsley Park in Gloucestershire, built or rebuilt ca. 1719 for Henry Perrot, probably to designs by John James. Another example is Crowcombe Court in Somerset, begun in 1723 for Thomas Carew to the designs of Thomas Parker of Gittisham in Devon, but finished after his dismissal in 1727 by Nathaniel Ireson of Wincanton to a different design for which the contract dates from 1734.⁷⁵

To the right of the house the painting shows Lord Cottington's handsome stable block, clearly a building of considerable consequence. Rising behind it is unmistakably a substantial mediaeval church tower, more or less in the location where the old parish church of St Nicholas apparently stood, as shown on Christopher Saxton's 1579 map of Wiltshire (see Figure 3.1). Neither of the two earlier representations of the house and estate show such a tower. There is, for the present, no obvious explanation for the inconsistency.

Lambert's painting makes clear that the elaborate seventeenth-century layout of courtyards and gardens next to the house had all been swept away. The entrance courtyards east of the house between the main entrance and the public road, and the canal which bisected them, had been replaced by a plain lawn with a broad straight drive leading from the main eastern entrance to a pair of rusticated stone gate piers on the public road. The new south front faced another plain lawn flanked by formal hedges and bounded at the southern end by a wide canal, more or less in the same location as the former water garden. This is a typically early eighteenth-century arrangement. Beyond the canal is some formal planting, which may include the beginning of the old avenue leading to the Cottington Gate.

Rising behind the hedge enclosing this lawn to the west of the house was a long raised bank with a terrace walk on top, divided from the park on the west side by a stone wall with a small pedimented temple at the centre, perhaps a banqueting house. The raised promenade with a banqueting house recalls the arrangements in some other early eighteenth-century pleasure gardens. At the crest of a wooded hill to the south-west of the mansion, and presumably within the boundary of the estate, the painting shows the top of a small tower, perhaps a prospect tower. A drawing from the painting (Figure 3.16) made ca.1810 shows many of the details more clearly than the dark original.



Fig. 3.16 *Old House at Fonthill, Wiltshire, ca. 1800–10.*

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.2.25

The second painting (Figure 3.17) probably also dates from ca. 1740 and may also be by Lambert. It shows a view of the house from the north, with Lord Cottington's stable block in the foreground. Rather surprisingly, the north front of the mansion is a formal composition, seven bays wide and three storeys high with a handsome pedimented central doorway, and sash windows with raised surrounds and keystones and a balustrade roof parapet. On either side of the front are projecting wings of seventeenth-century character. Both are two storeys high with mullioned windows and tall pitched hipped roofs with dormer windows. Between the outer ends of these wings is an ornamental wrought-iron screen enclosing a *cour d'honneur*. This all seems unusually grand for what was, after all, the service front of the house, especially as the east and south fronts were also of some consequence.



Fig. 3.17 George Lambert, *Fonthill House from the north*.

© Christie's Images Limited.

There is a clear stylistic similarity between the wings of the house and the stable block, as depicted in Figure 3.17. They all have tall roofs, and mullion and transom windows relieved by the small *oeil de boeuf* windows, which were a popular mid-seventeenth-century feature. The similarity supports the idea that Lord Cottington added at least one of the wings as well as the stables.

The space in front of the stable is enclosed by painted timber fencing. In the yard behind the stable is a small gabled building with what looks like a bell-cote on the south gable, but there is no sign of a church tower. Above the wall of the stable yard is an oblique view of the raised terrace to the west of the main house with its temple-fronted banqueting house.

These two paintings show the house of Francis Cottington IV in or about 1740. This is only two years after John Loveday had seen a large number of men at work about the house and it is very possible that the painting was commissioned by Francis Cottington to record the improvements he had made to his estate. Clearly there had been very substantial changes to both the house and gardens since the time of the seventeenth-century estate map and painting. The house had been completely re-fronted and the garden re-landscaped. But it is not completely certain that all these changes were made in the 1730s. Some of the detailing of the house exterior, like the eared window surrounds and the florid pedimented door surrounds on the east and north fronts, seem more characteristic of a slightly earlier date.⁷⁶

These major alterations to Fonthill House must have been made with the assistance of an architect or surveyor, but in the complete absence of any relevant documentation

a firm attribution is difficult, especially given that there may have been more than one building campaign. The Cottingtons were Roman Catholics and one obvious candidate would be James Gibbs, who was himself a Catholic and had an extensive Catholic clientele. Francis Cottington IV certainly knew Gibbs and leased a London house from him in 1744 when he left Fonthill, but the building shown in Lambert's paintings is not particularly Gibbsian in appearance. It is slightly clumsy in some of the details, which could suggest a local man like Nathaniel Ireson. For the present, both the sequence of work and the authorship of the changes to house and garden remain unclear, but there can be no doubt that the eighteenth-century Cottingtons must have expended large sums of money on the improvement of the house and grounds.

Alderman Beckford purchased the Fonthill estate from Francis Cottington in 1744/5 and some nine years later commissioned two new paintings of the mansion house. Hitherto attributed to Anthony Devis, it is now thought the paintings may be by Antonio Joli, an associate of Canaletto. Both are long views of the house, from the south-east and from the north-east, and comparisons between these paintings and the earlier images from 1740 provide much information about the house which the Alderman had purchased and about the improvements he had made to the building and more especially to the surrounding park.

The view from the south-east (Figure 3.18) shows what is clearly the same house as shown in the Lambert painting, with a broad south front nine bays wide with a three bay centre emphasised by giant columns of the Doric order and a pediment raised above the attic storey. In the centre of the pediment is a coat of arms which is clearly that of the Cottington family (azure, a fess between three roses or). The more southerly viewpoint of the painting (Figure 3.19) takes in something of the space to the west of the house and shows what appears to be a two-storey wing projecting to the west and a long screen wall with architectural ornament projecting westwards from the end of this wing. With the exception of these western parts, there is nothing in this painting to suggest that the Alderman made any significant changes to the house.

The view from the north-east (Figures 3.20 and 3.21) is much more interesting about the form of the main building. Again, the painting confirms Lambert's depiction of the north front as a principal entrance front, with an entrance courtyard between the northern wings enclosed by an iron *clairvoyée*. The function of this side of the building is emphasised by the arrival of a coach and six, which is heading towards the already opened main door. The view also confirms Lambert's depiction of the northern wings of the house as seventeenth-century in character, but shows that the east front of the north-east wing, facing the river, had been re-clad in a classical style along with the main body of the house. Behind the house to the west is a fragment of a garden with trees espaliered on the rear of the screen wall shown in the other view.

The most puzzling feature of the house, as shown in this painting, is the indication of a large range of buildings immediately behind the main range of the mansion. Although none of the earlier views make this clear, it is reasonable to assume that at Fonthill, as in most Jacobean houses, the central range was originally only



Fig. 3.18 Attributed to Antonio Joli, *Fonthill House*, view from the south-east.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.



Fig. 3.19 Detail of house, from Antonio Joli (attributed), *Fonthill House*, view from the south-east.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

one room deep and that the house was H-shaped or half-H, with the main range as the central bar. The 1750s painting suggests that a second and broader central range of equal height had been added to the building. For the present, there is no further information about the provenance of this feature, but it is not impossible that the addition was made by Alderman Beckford to provide a new large room of parade.

Both the 1750s views show the house sitting on a plain lawn with a small apron of paving. The outer forecourt in front of the stable block appears to be a raised platform, with a wide extension leading down to the bank of the lake.



Fig. 3.20 Attributed to Antonio Joli, *Fonthill House*, view from the north-east.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.



Fig. 3.21 Detail of house, from Antonio Joli (attributed), *Fonthill House*, view from the north-east.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

If the Alderman's alterations to the Fonthill mansion appear to have been relatively modest, these two paintings show the parkland completely re-landscaped and with all the garden features visible in Lambert's paintings swept away and replaced with different ones. Among the most significant changes were the damming of the Tisbury Stream to form a new lake and the removal of the public

roadway to the far (eastern) side of the water. The roadway was carried over the southern end of the lake by a new five-arched bridge, which formed a feature in the landscape viewed from the house. To the south of the bridge the lake was curved to feed an ornamental cascade under rustic arches falling down to the main stream. Part way along the new public road, opposite the east front of the mansion, the paintings show a small enclosure with an equestrian statue. There is no mention of such a statue in the Beckford literature and it may never have been erected.

The alterations to the old park on the west side of the new lake were equally dramatic. There was evidently a great deal of tree clearing and the mansion now stood in a completely open setting, with a lawn sloping gently to the edge of the lake. The old boundary wall along the line of the road was removed and there was no trace of the formal avenue which at one time led from the south side of the mansion house towards the village of Fonthill Gifford. The raised terrace to the west of the house was also removed, together with the small temple-fronted building in the middle of the terrace walk. It was replaced by a larger building of similar character, but with pedimented fronts to the east, north and south. This new building was set among the woodland on the eastern slope of the natural hill behind the mansion.

To enhance his estate and enliven longer views from within the park the Alderman erected or beautified several structures at the edges. At the main entrance to the park from the north it was surely the Alderman who erected the great Classical gateway, with its slightly coarse rustication. The pedigree of the archway has long been a subject of debate and it does not appear in any of these early views of the house and park. Although attributed by Rutter to Inigo Jones, the gateway only makes sense as part of the Alderman's park improvements that removed the former entrance from the public road.⁷⁷ The Cottingtons' prospect tower at the crest of the wooded hill to the south-west of the mansion was either rebuilt or enhanced with a cupola.

In 1747 Beckford obtained a faculty for taking down the old church of St Nicholas, on the grounds that it was much decayed, and for building a new church much further south in the village of Fonthill Gifford outside the park enclosure.⁷⁸ The new church was a simple, rectangular box-like structure whose front derived ultimately from Inigo Jones's seventeenth-century church of St Paul's, Covent Garden, with an overall Tuscan pediment at the north end which was visible from the mansion house and can be seen in one of the 1750s paintings. The Alderman was ruthless in his treatment of the Mervyn, Cottington and other memorials in the old church and the graveyard. They were not transferred to the new church and according to Sir Richard Colt Hoare, they were simply buried on the old site.⁷⁹ As he said, 'perhaps some future antiquary may hit upon their place of deposit, and bring them again to light'.

The end result of all these alterations was that there was little left of the Cottingtons' landscape, and after the old house had burnt down in 1755 and

been replaced by Fonthill Splendens there was nothing left of the Cottington house either. Lord Cottington's seventeenth-century stable block may have survived for a while after the house had gone. It does not appear that the Alderman built a new stable block, and Andrews and Dury's map of Wiltshire published in 1773 (Figure 3.22) shows a substantial U-shaped building on the old stable site, although the footprint of the building is reversed.

In sum, although the sources of information about the mansion, garden and landscape at Fonthill in the period before Alderman Beckford are few, the pattern of development they suggest is a traditional one. A substantial Late Tudor or Jacobean mansion built by the Mervyns was improved by the immensely wealthy courtier Lord Cottington, who also enlarged the park and may have laid out or improved the ornamental gardens. During the Commonwealth the house was owned by the regicide John Bradshaw, Lord President Bradshaw, who appears to have made no changes to the building. After the Interregnum, the house returned to the Cottington family who lived there for over eighty years. At some time during the first half of the eighteenth century the old house



Fig. 3.22 Andrews and Dury, detail from map of Wiltshire, 1773.

was completely re-fronted and the gardens re-shaped with formal planting and a canal. Neither the date(s) nor the author(s) of these alterations are known, although there are indications that improvements were being made ca. 1714 and ca. 1738.

The Cottingtons who inhabited Fonthill after the Restoration were all Roman Catholics, who took little or no part in public life. As J. Anthony Williams remarked in his history of recusancy in Wiltshire, 'we find reflected in this family many of the characteristics of recusant families of this class: the continental schooling, the benefactions to religious houses overseas, the maintenance of chaplains, the marriage links with other Catholic families, the attachment to the Stuarts'.⁸⁰ The links to the Jacobite cause were evidenced most obviously by the award of a baronetcy to Francis Cottington in 1716, doubtless for assistance in the 1715 rising. It is tempting to suggest that the sale of the estate in 1744 could also have been something to do with Jacobite fundraising for the 1745 rebellion, although it might equally have been a sale forced by overspending on house improvements. The almost complete absence of relevant contemporary documents and family papers means that there is much more to find out.

4

The Beckford era

Amy Frost

The period of the Beckford family's ownership of Fonthill is the best known and best understood era of the estate's history. During the nearly 80 years of the Beckford reign, from 1744 to 1822, Fonthill became one of the premier country house estates in Wiltshire and was renowned across England both for the fame of its owners and the magnificence of the buildings they created. The houses constructed by the Beckfords at Fonthill were designed as physical representations of the status, wealth and power of their owners. Unlike many of their contemporaries, however, both Alderman William Beckford (bap.1709 d. 1770) and his son William Thomas Beckford (1760–1844) had ambitions that went beyond the standard need to mark their place in the social and political hierarchy of the day. Through Fonthill, father and son cleverly and consciously crafted a public identity for themselves and their family that continues to endure, making the word Fonthill synonymous with the name Beckford. At the epicentre of this image-making were two very different buildings driven by equal amounts of wealth and ambition: Fonthill House (later called 'Splendens'), built from 1755 and demolished in 1807, and Fonthill Abbey, begun in 1796, collapsed in 1825 and finally demolished in 1846.

The Beckfords' Fonthill

Baptised in Jamaica in 1709, as the second son of Peter Beckford, Speaker of the Jamaican House of Assembly, William Beckford ([Figure 4.1](#)) was born into a family that had been steadily increasing in wealth and colonial power since the 1660s when his grandfather, Colonel Peter Beckford, had settled on the island (see [Chapter 13](#)).¹ Beckford moved to England in 1723 to be educated at Westminster School, then Balliol College, Oxford, before studying medicine at the University of Leiden and the Hotel des Invalides in Paris. His elder brother Peter had only the English properties settled on him, ensuring that Beckford would inherit a good share of his father's Jamaican interests. Those interests



Fig. 4.1 Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Alderman William Beckford*, ca. 1770.

From the collection, Parham Park, West Sussex.

had been extended from the supposed horse-rustling and tavern-owning early years of the Colonel to include land and slave ownership through the purchase of extensive sugar plantations. Beckford returned to Jamaica following his father's death in 1735 to settle the estate, reportedly valued at some £300,000. The plantations owned by him and his extended family, alongside several mortgages for the plantations of others, made the Beckfords one of largest plantation owners – perhaps the largest – in the West Indies; they were also the largest slave owners.² Despite not being the eldest son, William Beckford effectively assumed the role of head of the family, a role that came to him in fact when his brother died in 1737. Further visits to England followed as he began to establish himself not just as the head of the Beckford family in island politics, militia and trade, but as a key member of the wider family, whose position in England had been growing in strength alongside their colonial relations. Beckford returned to England to reside permanently in 1744 to begin his campaign to enter British

politics. A man in his position and with clear political ambitions was in need of the essential possession for moving in society: a country estate. Beckford found his when he began the process of purchasing Fonthill in 1744. The sale was completed in 1745 for £32,000.³

In 1747 Beckford's political campaign gathered pace when he was elected as MP for Shaftesbury. The Freedom of the Ironmongers' Company in 1752 followed, and then, in 1754 he was elected as an MP for the City of London. Beckford's strength in the capital continued to grow and he ascended from Sheriff of London (1755) to twice Lord Mayor of London (1762 and 1769). A close ally and personal friend of William Pitt, Beckford was a key member of the Whig party. His political life centred on the aims and advantages of the colonial planters and traders. Beckford's most memorable moment came not long before his death, when he spoke out in support for the civic liberties of the commoner to George III; his controversial political act advocating liberty ironically coinciding with his position as one of the biggest slave owners in the West Indies.

When Beckford purchased Fonthill from Francis, 2nd Baron Cottington (see [Chapter 3](#)), he was purchasing an estate that came with an important pedigree in the country's political life. Fonthill was of an appropriate age and scale for a gentleman with earned wealth looking to work his way up through polite and political society. It was an ideal estate with both historical provenance and the benefit of an older mansion house that had been refaced in the fashionable Palladian style. It is likely that works to the park and exterior of the house were considered by Beckford immediately after his purchase, in order to further improve it in a manner appropriate to the position he already had – and to those he aspired to. Adapting Fonthill House, however, would require not large structural works but rather a process of refinement, to capitalise on its position and showcase Beckford's wealth.

Knowledge of the house and its landscape at the time of Beckford's purchase comes primarily through paintings. The 1740s paintings by Lambert, when seen alongside two works attributed now to Antonio Joli ca. 1750–5, clearly illustrate that while Beckford seems to have made few external alterations to the house he made many changes to the grounds surrounding it (see [Chapter 3](#), [Figures 3.15](#), [3.18](#) and [3.20](#)).

Besides altering the lake, Beckford had the public road that ran through his estate moved. (For a full discussion on these landscape changes see [Chapters 3](#), [10](#) and [14](#)). Beckford also added a large archway at the north entrance of the estate ([Figure 4.2](#)). This addition established an important marker for anyone either approaching the house or passing along the public road between Salisbury and Hindon, and such grandeur announced the significance of the gentleman whose threshold they were about to cross.

Attributed to Inigo Jones by John Rutter, and then to the work of Jones's pupil John Vardy, the gateway's designer remains unknown.⁴ The influence of Jones on designs made for Beckford was to be seen again, however, when Beckford demolished the existing parish church that sat adjacent to the house and commissioned a



Fig. 4.2 *The Entrance Gateway and Lodge near Fonthill Bishop.*
John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.



Fig. 4.3 *Fonthill Gifford Church.*
John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.

new one to the south, dedicated in 1748 (see [Figure 4.3](#)). The new Fonthill Gifford church can be seen standing imposingly in the distance in one of the Joli paintings, its scale exaggerated by the artist. The location of the church was vital, as it created a key vista through the landscape when viewed from the garden in front of the house.

Not long after its construction the new church was compared to Inigo Jones's St Paul's in Covent Garden: this influence of Jones, and the similarity in style with the gateway, suggests that both structures were designed by the same hand.⁵ With

Beckford's position in the political world of London increasing, it is possible he commissioned a London builder to design and construct the church, as he would do again on a larger scale with his new Fonthill House. The same builder perhaps also built the temple to the west of the house, replacing the smaller temple seen in Lambert's painting; in the 1760s this structure would be referred to as a banqueting room.⁶ The Joli paintings show Fonthill as a centre of social interaction, with a carriage and team of six horses arriving and fashionable visitors promenading in the grounds. In the tradition of country house portraits, these works are not simply a record of the estate but also an image of Beckford himself, the appearance of the property representing the identity of the owner.

The full extent of Beckford's internal alterations to the Cottingtons' Fonthill House is unknown, and those few accounts of the house that exist from this time – Richard Pococke's visit in 1754 in particular – focus primarily on the 'modern paintings' and the organ in the main hall.⁷ Whether in the house itself or in the park, Beckford was clearly undertaking works substantial enough to offer employment to a large amount of men from the locality, reportedly spending up to £5,000 per year.⁸ It was interior works to the house that ultimately brought about its demise when, on 13 February 1755, workmen completing a ceiling in the north wing lit a fire in a non-functioning chimney. The blaze that followed destroyed most of the north range and also the great hall with its organ.⁹ Beckford was in London at the time but staff and neighbours on the estate removed furniture and saved the majority of the south range. The aftermath of the fire was widely reported in the press, which quoted the value of the house at £30,000 (but insured only for £6,000). Horace Walpole must have read such a report, as he wrote to Richard Bentley a few days later; 'He [Beckford] says 'Oh! I have an odd fifty thousand pounds in a drawer: I will build it up again: it won't be above a thousand pounds apiece difference to my thirty children.'¹⁰ Walpole's response is an illuminating insight into how Beckford was perceived by some of his contemporaries.

Beckford's response to the fire was not to rebuild the old house but to construct an entirely new mansion to the south of the original site. His election as Sheriff of London seven months later brought with it an even greater need to represent himself as a commanding man of power. A new Fonthill House offered the opportunity to reflect this changed status. From this period he is known as Alderman Beckford, which conveniently distinguishes him from his son William. The need to assert such an identity accelerated between 1755 and 1757 when, as Perry Gauci has shown, the Alderman's public persona was increasingly under attack, earning him nicknames in the press as 'the Wild West Indian' and 'Alderman Sugarcane'.¹¹ Having purchased a country seat in England in the mid-1740s, his next step would logically have been to further secure his place in society through an advantageous marriage. His siblings succeeded in doing so: his youngest brother Francis married a sister of the Duke of Ancaster and his sister Elizabeth married the Earl of Effingham. It would be some time, however, before the Alderman himself married,

although he had been fathering illegitimate children with a series of mistresses since his late twenties.¹²

The need to replace Fonthill House following the fire was further emphasised when in 1756 the Alderman married Maria Marsh, the widow of a West Indian planter who brought her own links to fellow colonialists. More importantly, as the daughter of the Hon. George Hamilton and granddaughter of the 6th Earl of Abercorn, she provided the Alderman with an additional entrée into society.

Fonthill House ('Splendens')

The new Fonthill House built after the fire was a substantial Palladian mansion. Visitors approaching from the north road through the grand archway would see the main front of the house, constructed of a limestone that continued to be noted for its vivid white appearance into the 1790s.¹³ It was an imposing nine-bay mansion with a giant ionic portico rising above the basement storey and proudly supporting in its pediment a tympanum displaying the arms of the Beckfords.¹⁴ The main house had flanking pavilions connected by doric colonnades, curved to embrace the entrance on the north front. The garden elevation, looking south towards Fonthill Gifford church, had rusticated window openings and heavy keystones (Figure 4.4). The house was illustrated across six plates in Wolfe and Gandon's 1767 volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, earning a place alongside the houses of the Alderman's contemporaries, including his wife's cousin the 8th Earl of Abercorn.¹⁵



Fig. 4.4 John Buckler, *View of Fonthill House from the North*, ca. 1800.

Beckford Tower Trust.

In the description of the house for this compendium of the houses of the British nobility and gentry, Fonthill House is noted in particular for its copper roof, unusual at that time.¹⁶ When commissioning a handsome new family seat the Alderman looked to the houses of other gentlemen of political power for inspiration, and his attention was drawn to Colen Campbell's design for Houghton Hall of 1721.¹⁷ Built for Sir Robert Walpole, a fellow Whig and the first Prime Minister, Houghton would have been the perfect model for the Alderman's political and social aspirations. The influence of Houghton would also explain perhaps why a house which was conceived in the late 1750s reflects the forms of those built some twenty years earlier rather than the newer styles of its time. This is emphasised by the company Fonthill House keeps in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, illustrated alongside designs from 20 years before such as Lathom Hall, Lancashire (1725–40) and Moulsham Hall (1728), both by Giacomo Leoni, and Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire (1742) by William Smith and John Sanderson, to which Fonthill bears a striking similarity.¹⁸ In comparison to the 1761 south front of Kedleston by Robert Adam also published in the volume, Fonthill seems particularly dated; a fact pointed out by a later visitor who stated 'the house seems a good one to live in, but as a place of modern architecture, by no means equal to Kedleston'.¹⁹

It has been suggested that the new Fonthill House was the work of architect James Paine who was also working on neighbouring Wardour Castle, but the evidence points towards it being the work of Mr Hoare, 'a London builder'.²⁰ Whether Hoare was working to his own or to another's designs is uncertain, but it is surprising considering the Alderman's wealth and position that he did not turn to a more established and higher profile designer. Although the Alderman himself showed no signs of being an amateur architect, he was certainly involved in the design of the new house. His concern to ensure the new building was better protected against fire led to his association with Peter Wyche at the Royal Society. Wyche presented him with a copy of Count Felix-François d'Espie's publication on securing buildings from fire, and Beckford's interest in the subject resulted in an invitation from Espie to visit him in Toulouse as well as a promise to send workmen from France to Fonthill.²¹ The Alderman followed this advice and when Reverend Richard Warner visited the house in 1800 he was informed by his guide, presumably the housekeeper, that the house was constructed using arches between storeys to secure it from fire as Espie had recommended.²² Work on the house probably began late in 1755 or early in 1756, and although the exterior was largely completed by the time William Thomas Beckford was born in 1760, works continued into the late 1760s. In 1762 when William and Hester Pitt visited they noted the house was like a 'thatched cottage', the copper roof having been blown off in a storm.²³ During the same visit Pitt's brother-in-law, Earl Temple of Stowe, was evidently shown the Alderman's plans for the house, suggesting that although construction had started shortly after the fire it remained incomplete at this date.²⁴ The Alderman continued to employ craftsmen at Fonthill until his death in 1770, in a continual process of improving and fitting up. In a letter to his son ca. 1768

he requests that William should watch over 'my works and workmen', even permitting the then eight- or nine-year-old to give them 'necessary directions' if needed.²⁵ These workmen may have included William Moulton, a Wiltshire builder who from 1768 through to the 1780s was operating from Fonthill House and had perhaps taken on the role of clerk of works.²⁶

The Alderman's political life in London and nearby Bristol was increasingly gaining him a reputation in the press and Fonthill would have become more recognisable to the reading public, not just in Wiltshire but in the capital and beyond. It soon became a key house to visit on a journey through Wiltshire or on an excursion from the nearby cities of Salisbury or Bath, and by the time his son inherited it was a fixed destination on any country house tour itinerary. Accounts of visitors go some way towards filling the gap created by the lack of any collections of the Alderman's personal papers.

For the Alderman the knowledge that his house would be compared to other great houses of the county by guests and by tourists would have been a strong inducement to ensure that it would impress anyone who encountered it. Nearby estates included Wardour, Longleat, Longford and Bowood, but it would have been Stourhead, the seat not of the nobility but of the Hoare banking family, that the Alderman would perhaps have been most keen to emulate and surpass. By 1766 Henry Hoare, who had inherited his father's Palladian mansion and would create the famed landscape at Stourhead, held several of the Alderman's mortgages with a yearly premium of £2,240.²⁷ As a fellow commoner and man of trade, Hoare was also someone to whom the Alderman would have wished to convey financial solvency, or at least the appearance of it.

No expense was spared in the fitting up of Fonthill House and visitors' accounts of the furnishing during the Alderman's lifetime reveal a balance between the house as a political and social asset and as a family home.²⁸ The two most informative accounts of Fonthill House at this time are the diary of the Countess of Shelburne at Bowood House and letters from William Beckford's tutor Robert Drysdale, who reveals that by 1768 the house was still not completed.²⁹ The Countess and her husband travelled often from Bowood to Fonthill, and Drysdale's letters also note visits made by the Bishop of Salisbury and Lord and Lady Arundell from Wardour.³⁰

Drysdale appears to have developed a partiality for Elizabeth Beckford, the Alderman's step-daughter from his wife's first marriage, and he laments the lack of company for her, revealing much about a young man's perception of the age and staidness of those who visited the house. While the house was extravagant and even opulent, the visitors were perhaps more in line with the seriousness of both Mrs Beckford's religious demeanour and the Alderman's public role. Political allies visited, especially William Pitt, but as Gauci has pointed out it was not to be the stream of powerful men that the Alderman had originally imagined.³¹

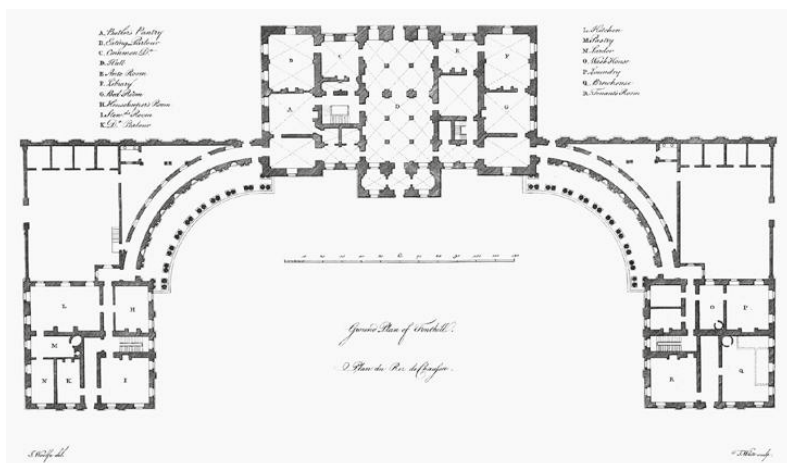


Fig. 4.5 Plan of the ground floor of Fonthill House, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol. IV, 1767.

University of Bath Special Collections.

All the necessary services were moved out of the main house and accommodated in the pavilions, allowing the ground floor of the mansion (Figure 4.5) to become the main family living space including a parlour, eating room and library. The principal floor above (Figure 4.6) centred upon the double-height Organ Hall, surmounted by a ceiling painting of *Apollo and the Muses*, by the Italian artist Andrea Casali, although the organ itself was still absent from its intended space in 1768. The theme of Apollo was continued in the chimney piece of the Organ Hall and it was to be these two elements – quantities of paintings by Casali and elaborate chimney pieces – that dominated most accounts and knowledge of the house. Behind the Organ Hall sat the Grand Salon, and to the east the State Bedchamber hung in crimson velvet (and still awaiting the bed in 1768). Next to that was the State Dressing Room, with paintings by ‘great masters’ and a proudly displayed ‘sweet and pretty picture’ by Casali of the young master Beckford.

The bulk of the family portraits were exhibited to guests in the Grand Dining Room, including likenesses of Mr and Mrs Beckford by Casali and portraits of the Alderman’s father and grandfather by Hoare. From the Grand Dining Room visitors could return to the Organ Hall through the Tapestry Room, where a series of Gobelins tapestries would eventually be installed. The suite of rooms to the west of the Organ Hall was dominated by the Picture Gallery (or Great Gallery) and a staircase top-lit by a ‘large skylight’.³² Knowledge of the furnishing of Fonthill House is limited, although the fittings included chimney pieces by John Francis Moore and Thomas Banks.³³ Accounts also show payments to cabinet makers, upholsters and paper hangers, including £1,500 paid to Chippendale for ‘glasses’.³⁴ Miss Beckford refers to the carver of frames for tables and glasses as ‘Vauxhall’, although

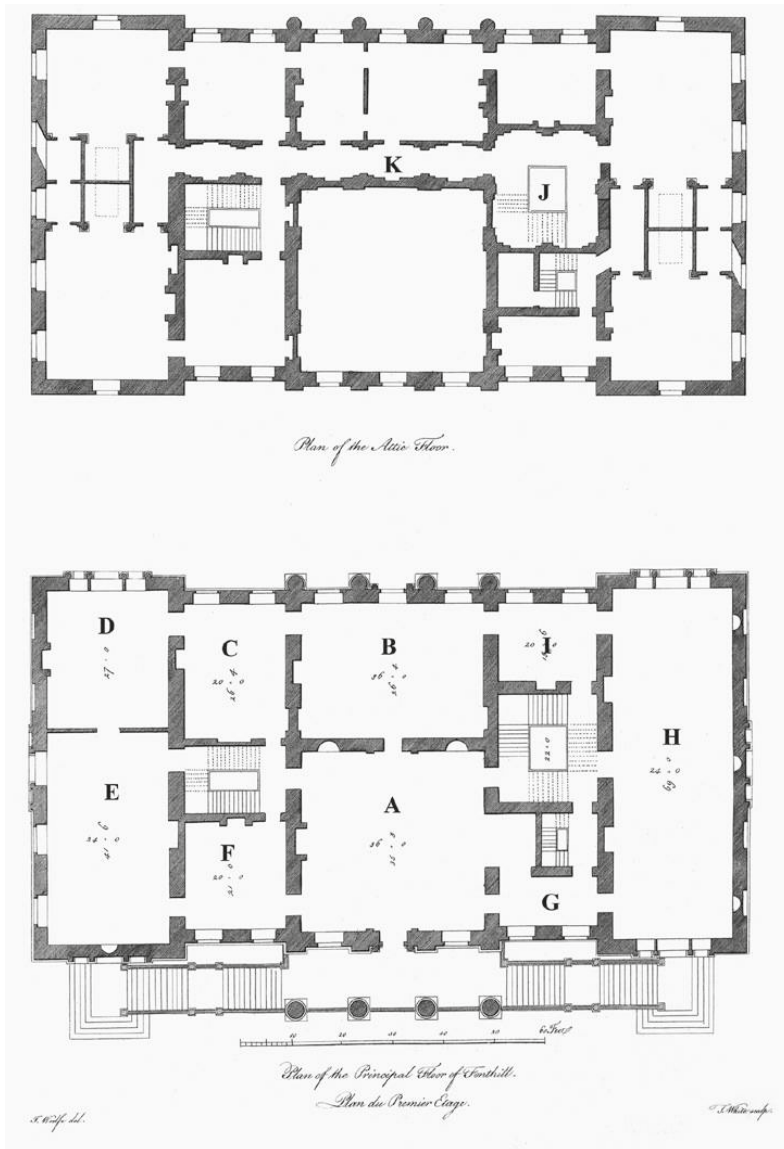


Fig. 4.6 Plans of the principal and bedchamber floor of Fonthill House, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol. IV, 1767.

KEY TO ROOMS: A Organ Hall; B Grand Salon; C State Bedchamber; D State Dressing Room; E Great Dining Room; F Tapestry Room; G Cabinet anteroom; H Picture/Great Gallery; I Small anteroom; J Staircase; K Bedchamber Floor corridor
 University of Bath Special Collections.

it could also have perhaps been Foxhall, who was paid regularly, furnishing the house and taking on the role of agent for the Alderman.³⁵ It has been suggested

that Casali advised Beckford on his collection and the artist's works certainly dominated many of the rooms, both in ceiling paintings and on the walls.

The only known drawings for full interior schemes of the house at this time are by Robert Adam and show designs for the south-east parlour and south-west library on the ground floor, with corresponding ceiling designs dated May 1763.³⁶ Whether any aspect of these schemes was ever executed is unknown, but it seems unlikely, given that no comments are recorded by visitors. On the other hand the library was later refitted by James Wyatt.

While Adam was working on designs for the interiors at Fonthill he also produced a series of alternate designs for a new bridge, presumably on the site of the five-arch bridge across the lake that can be seen in the Joli paintings. The first design for a triple-arched bridge surmounted by a reclining river god is annotated and labelled for Fonthill.³⁷ The other two are titled 'for Mr Beckford' and it can be assumed they too are options for Fonthill (see also [Chapter 15](#)).³⁸ An intriguing elevation drawing by Adam labelled 'A design for William Beckford Esq. at Fonthill' ([Figure 4.7](#)) does not correspond with either the dimensions of Fonthill House, or with any reasoning as to why the Alderman, with the house already underway in the first years of the 1760s, would want to alter the newly built elevations. The explanation is likely to be that while this was a design made for Mr Beckford at Fonthill,

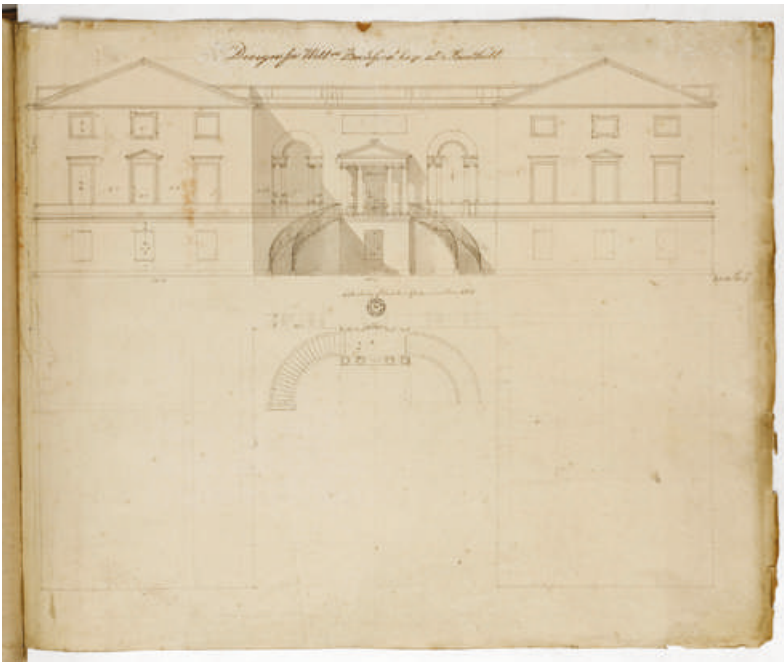


Fig. 4.7 Robert Adam, design for William Beckford at Fonthill (Witham Park), 1767.

Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

it was not actually a design for Fonthill, but rather for the alteration of a completely different house on another estate that the Alderman had just purchased.³⁹

Despite owning Fonthill, the Alderman clearly continued to look for new ways to buttress his social position and in 1762 he purchased the estate of Witham Friary in Somerset.⁴⁰ Witham represented an even more direct route than Fonthill did to placing the Beckfords symbolically within the pages of English history. Founded as a friary in 1178 and declared Mother House of the Carthusian order in 1441, Witham was surrendered to the Crown in 1539 and then granted to Ralph Hopton, Knight Marshall of the Palace and Gentleman in Thomas Cromwell's Household.⁴¹ The estate eventually passed to Sir William Wyndham, who employed the architect James Gibbs to remodel the remaining buildings and form a new house.⁴² Charles Wyndham, Earl of Egremont, sold the estate to John Pennant, the West Indian planter from whom the Alderman purchased it in 1762. The purchase was only made possible through the Alderman taking on heavy mortgages.⁴³

It is possible that the Adam drawing with the Fonthill title was actually for the remodelling of the existing Gibbs house at Witham. The condition of the house at Witham was noted as being poor in 1761 and this perhaps prompted the Alderman to commission Adam to make alterations and repairs when he purchased the building the following year.⁴⁴ In the end, the Alderman chose not to alter the existing house but to build an entirely new mansion at Witham, just as he had done at Fonthill, after the fire. His employment of Adam suggests that by 1762 he was more aware of the architectural climate of the day than he had been in 1755, and was better placed to seek a leading designer of fashionable residences.

Lady Shelburne recorded that the Alderman intended to move his household to Witham from Fonthill.⁴⁵ Witham was better located than Fonthill for communication between London and Bristol and had higher status. The history of the estate stretched back to the Reformation and his association with the estate allowed the Alderman to imply that his family also had ancient lineage and might have been given the property by Henry VIII. Of course most of the Alderman's contemporaries would have been well aware of Witham's recent change in ownership. The historic associations it presented, however, would have been invaluable to a commoner such as the Alderman who wished to strengthen his political position; he was coming under increasing attack following the resignation of his close associate Pitt.⁴⁶

The Fonthill builder William Moulton appears to have been responsible for some of the work at Witham.⁴⁷ However, although both elevations and a plan were illustrated in *Vitruvius Britannicus* in 1771 it is uncertain if Witham was ever more than a shell of a house. Lack of any other images and its omission from accounts of tours in the area suggests that Witham remained unfinished and unoccupied.⁴⁸

The key event that must have encouraged the Alderman in commissioning a modern house by Adam at Witham and proposing new works at Fonthill was his election as Lord Mayor of London in 1762. His rise through the political landscape of the City of London had already seen him receive both praise and censure, and what better way to reinforce the statement of his move to a position of power in London than the elaborate gesture of maintaining not just one grand country seat, but two. The Alderman went even further when, in 1763, with Fonthill House still not yet completed and the project at Witham underway, he purchased the estate of Eaton Bray in Berkshire, which must have stretched even his extensive finances.⁴⁹

Two additions at Fonthill House by the Alderman stand out as moments in his path to claiming identity through the building. The first was reported in June 1767, when 'a large whole length statue of Alderman Beckford' was transported from the house of sculptor John Francis Moore to Fonthill, where it was to be placed in 'a niche in the large gallery built for that purpose'.⁵⁰ The imposing statue had already been exhibited in London at the Free Society of Artists. It shows a stately Beckford clutching Magna Carta in one hand and posed perhaps mid-debate. It is likely the Alderman had been intending just such a statue from the beginning of the gallery's conception, and his image would remain in its niche throughout his and his son's ownership of the house. It is a portrait in marble of a proud and determined politician, which must have had a marked impression upon viewers (Figure 4.8). His son would later place the sculpture in a high niche in the great entrance hall of Fonthill Abbey, an imposing figure overseeing a pseudo-baronial hall.

The combination of Moore's statue and Casali's ceilings gave the gallery at Fonthill an added significance in the creation of the 'Beckford brand'. In the gallery ceiling, alongside other works by Casali designed to show Beckford as a learned man of the Enlightenment, was a canvas depicting the personification of architecture (Figure 4.9). In this work (now at Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire) the figure of Architecture proudly presents to all who look up to her a portrait of Fonthill House. Thus the Alderman displayed to his visitors the ideal of architecture represented by his own architectural creation, hanging above his own likeness. Images built of stone and hewn from marble confirmed the elegance, steadfastness and above all strength of the man.⁵¹

By 1768 Fonthill House was still incomplete and the following year the Alderman took up the Mayoralty of London for the second time. In 1770 he famously supported the MP John Wilkes in a speech representing the rights of the mercantile man to King George III. The Alderman died shortly afterwards and a large statue of him was commissioned for the London Guildhall with the full text of this speech carved upon it. The statue, as well as prints and medals created by the Alderman's supporters in his honour, ensured that his image would be immortalised and that the name of Beckford would continue to hold status within the city long after his death.

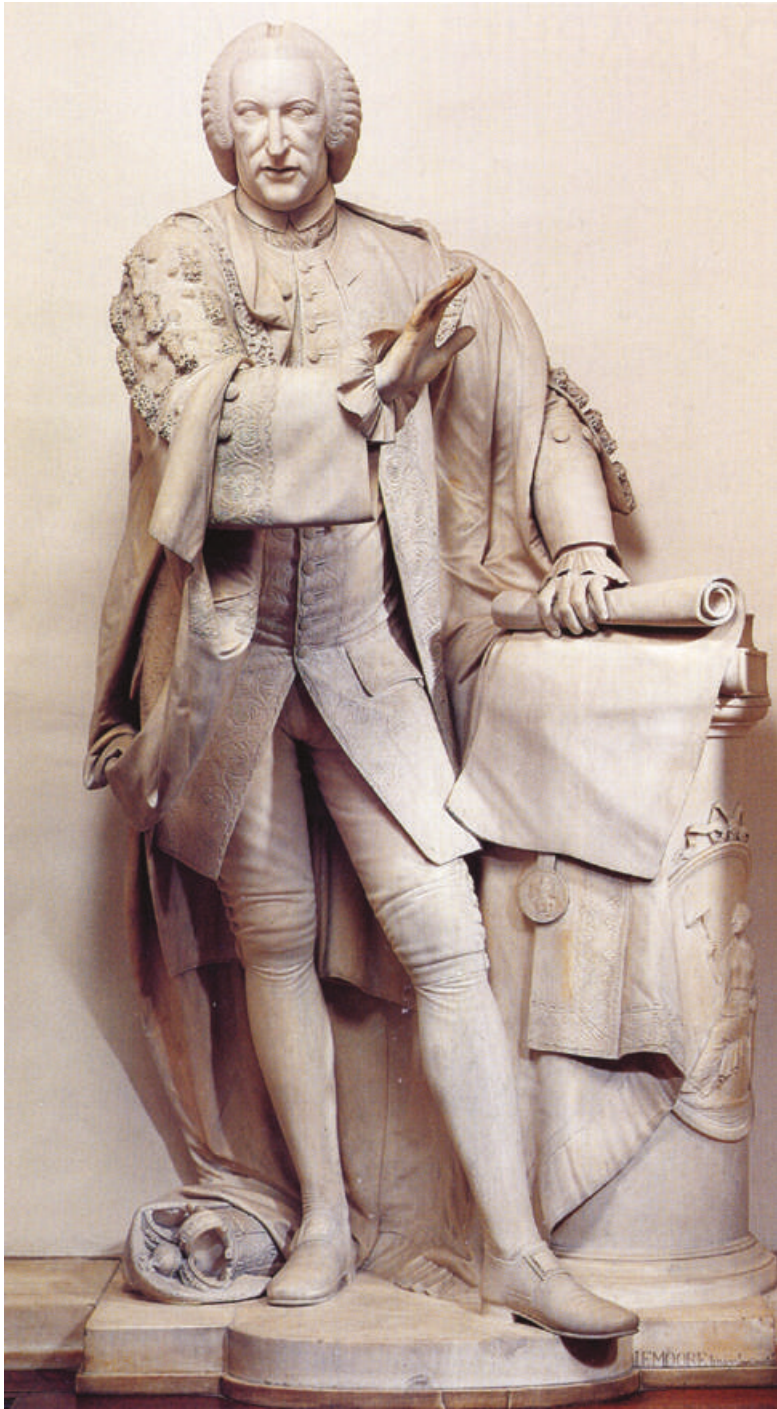


Fig. 4.8 John Francis Moore, *Alderman Beckford*, 1767.

Worshipful Company of Ironmongers of the City of London.



Fig. 4.9 Andrea Casali, *Personifications of Astronomy and Architecture*, now at Dyrham Park, South Gloucestershire.

© National Trust.

William Beckford and Fonthill ‘Splendens’

When the Alderman died on 21 June 1770, his only legitimate child William Thomas Beckford was not quite 10 years of age. The Alderman left his vast fortune and property to his son, but his will also stipulated that should the young William (noted for being a somewhat sickly child) predecease him, that fortune would pass to Beckford’s ‘natural’ children.⁵² Even though Beckford’s widow was her son’s sole guardian the control of his inheritance was placed under the guidance of executors. Her concern about the spectre of these illegitimate children’s claims on the fortune led her to make William a Ward of Chancery.⁵³ At this time a complete inventory was drawn up of the contents of Fonthill House and the insight this document could have offered into the furnishing of the house would have been extensive. Sadly, like so many of the personal papers and archives from the time of the ‘Great Beckford’, the inventory is now lost.⁵⁴

Fonthill House was most frequently described as being not simply a house but a palace: Lord Temple called it ‘the finest and best understood Palace I know’ in 1762, and Henry Hoare referred to ‘Fonthill Palace’ in 1781.⁵⁵ Between the

Alderman's death and his son's majority a variety of accounts of the house help to build up this image of palatial living, although not always displaying the best of taste. The multitude of paintings and the abundance of Casalis were assessed as 'many good pictures, and many very indifferent'.⁵⁶ The style of furniture, praised by some, was seen as 'rather gaudy' by one visitor in the 1770s. The house, though showing 'the utmost profusion of magnificence' was accused of containing 'immense riches, almost too tawdrily exhibited'.⁵⁷ Overhearing such visitors being shown the mansion by the Fonthill housekeeper, the 16-year-old William Thomas Beckford was inspired to write a parody of the lives of artists and patrons, published as *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* in 1780. Living surrounded by such a collection must have made a distinct impression upon him and he would later attempt to improve the collection through his own more modern, sophisticated and sometimes exotic taste. For the Alderman Fonthill had been a means to craft a new position in political society; for his son the estate was to be the means of reclaiming that position following social scandal.

William Thomas Beckford (Figure 4.10) came into his majority in 1781, taking control of Fonthill and all the other property and wealth his father had amassed. His coming of age portrait, painted by George Romney in June 1781, presents a young man at ease with the wealth he had inherited and confident of the power he was soon to hold. Three years before, when newly returned from Switzerland, Beckford had been wandering the grounds of Fonthill and while standing contemplating 'the house my father reared' under a full moon, he had lamented the lack of illumination, music or revellers. The thoughts this scene inspired were recorded in a letter to the artist Alexander Cozens, who had become an aesthetic mentor to the young man. Contemplating his house, where 'all is dark, silent and abandoned', he imagined it with the energy and life of many visitors enjoying entertainments. At the same time he noted his need to seek solitude away from the crowd. The letter introduces two facets of Beckford: a need to be surrounded by conversation, entertainments, beauty and youth, balanced with a deep desire to withdraw himself within the romantic possibilities of nature and his own imagination. The letter also reveals an insight into what Fonthill House and its landscape represented to the 18-year-old Beckford.

I surveyed my native prospects with fraternal affection and looked fondly on every tree as if we had been born in the same hour. The air I breathed seemed nearer of kin to me than that I had elsewhere respired; in short the Hills, the Woods, the Shrubs, the very Moss beneath my Feet entered into this general Alliance and I fancied myself surrounded by an assembly of my best friends and nearest Relations.⁵⁸

It is an extraordinary letter full of romantic wanderings and fantasies in which Beckford's desire for solitary escape within the magic of nature blends with his supernatural dreams. Such ideas would strongly influence the works he subsequently executed at Fonthill.



Fig. 4.10 George Romney, *William Beckford*, 1781–2, Upton House Warwickshire.

© National Trust.

Three years later, on 29 September 1781, Beckford filled the emptiness he had enjoyed that night at Fonthill with a lavish display in celebration of his 21st birthday. The celebrations extended across several days and nights with a grand birthday ball for three hundred guests at the centre. The north front of the mansion, the banqueting house and all the grounds stretching between were illuminated with 30,000 lamps. Guests, neighbours and tenants from both Fonthill and Witham, numbering up to 10,000 according to reports, were entertained by extraordinary fireworks and a series of bonfires. It was a bold and powerful public act proclaiming his ascendance to the head of his family and establishing himself as a man distinct from his father. The mantle of Beckford of Fonthill had firmly passed from the elder politician, who could never quite shake off his colonial past, to the young English gentleman. The party also hinted at the next move Beckford would make to ensure his position in society: for the first dance of the evening he led out Lady Margaret Gordon, whom he was to marry in 1783.⁵⁹

Three months later, for the Christmas entertainments, Beckford made his first significant alterations to Fonthill House. Despite being temporary, these changes would have long-lasting influence over his ideas for the old Palladian mansion. In an elaborate piece of scene-staging Beckford commissioned the artist and designer Philip de Louthembourg to convert the sequence of family rooms on the ground floor, including the main stone hall or Egyptian Hall as Beckford termed it, into a romantic fantasy. His guests experienced the house adapted for their amusement and entertainment so that ‘even the uniform splendour of gilded roofs ... was partially obscured by the vapour of wood aloes ascending in wreaths from cassolettes placed low on the silken carpets in porcelain salvers of the richest Japan’.⁶⁰ It was an exotic, indulgent event, and one that Beckford revisited years later with the highly romanticised memory of an elderly man looking back to his youth.

The experience of that evening would in part inspire Beckford’s novel *Vathek* and was also a precursor to the creation of the Turkish Room that would garner the most attention from visitors to Fonthill House. His first acts in altering the house therefore established a new imaginative approach to the presentation of the building.

Between 1781 and 1787 Beckford’s life was filled with work on the manuscripts for *Vathek* and other writings, and with building up his library.⁶¹ His marriage to Lady Margaret inevitably saw changes to the house and its furnishings, but no evidence survives pointing to any significant internal alterations. The main reason for this was Beckford’s periods of absence from England, including a wedding tour in Europe, and time spent building a political career, following his election as MP for Wells in April 1784. The family’s position would have been further strengthened by the continuation of Beckford’s line with the birth of a son and heir. Sadly this was not to be: Beckford and his wife suffered the loss of their son, stillborn in May 1784.

Although Beckford continually tried he never shared the passion or aptitude for politics his father had displayed. His role in the family was to move the Beckfords into the ranks of the peerage, and in October 1784 the press reported his proposed elevation to a title. Unlike his father, Beckford’s acceptance of a baronetcy would

only advance his public career, not damage his political aspirations.⁶² The title was not to be realised, however, and the Beckford name and position in society suffered its greatest blow when Beckford's relationship with William Courtenay, the heir to Powderham Castle in Devon, was exposed in the press.⁶³

Within his close circle of family friends Beckford's bisexuality was known, though a closely guarded secret, and his infatuation with the young William Courtenay had been a cause of concern for several years. While visiting Powderham in September 1784 Beckford and Courtenay, or 'Kitty' as he was known to his family, were supposedly caught alone in a room together in a compromising situation. If enough evidence had been found to incriminate Beckford it would have proved disastrous to the family, with the risk of trial and even execution.⁶⁴ In the event, not enough proof could be found to pursue such legal action, and Beckford and his wife retreated from society to Fonthill to await the birth of their first child, a daughter. At first the Powderham scandal was kept within the two families and Lord Strathaven, Beckford's brother-in-law, visited Fonthill in an attempt to remove his sister from her husband's home. In an act of devotion that would have a deep impact on her husband, Beckford's wife refused to leave him. She was pregnant again and unable to travel, so it was Beckford alone who departed for Dover with the intention of leaving the country for continental exile. He soon recognised that leaving England would be taken as a sign of his guilt and instead returned to Fonthill. In November 1784 the scandal surfaced in the press.⁶⁵ By June the following year the increasing gossip, fuelled by false stories printed in the newspapers, finally drove Beckford to leave England for Switzerland with his wife and daughter.

Although the scandal had a disastrous impact on Beckford's public identity and position in English society, exile in Switzerland was a time of relative tranquillity while he worked on the manuscript for *Vathek* and the accompanying tales, to be added as the *Episodes of Vathek*. Such peace was short-lived, however. In May 1786, 12 days after the birth of their second daughter, Beckford's wife died.⁶⁶ His daughters were taken to England without him, where they would remain under the care of relatives at Fonthill. Beckford's loss and grief was compounded by betrayal, when only two weeks later Samuel Henley, whom Beckford had entrusted with the task of translating the French manuscript of *Vathek* into English, published the work against Beckford's instructions.

Beckford returned to England later in 1786 with plans to transform his father's house. He started by commissioning the architect John Soane to design a new top-lit picture gallery (Figure 4.11), some new interior fittings and a state bed. The alterations were begun in Beckford's absence, however, as he went abroad again in March 1787. He planned initially to travel to his plantations in the West Indies, but a stop in Lisbon led to a prolonged stay in Portugal. Beckford would in the event never visit Jamaica and instead spent the next 10 years in Europe.

The location of the intended gallery designed by Soane was to be the corridor of the bedroom floor at Fonthill House (Figure 4.6, marked K), and a series of drawings survive showing three variant designs.⁶⁷ The intention was that the

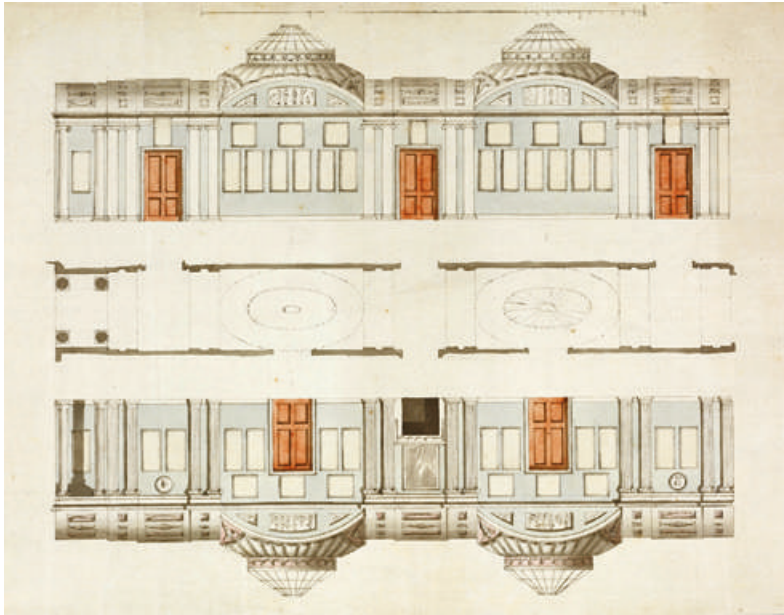


Fig. 4.11 John Soane, design for gallery at Fonthill, 1787. (Room K as marked in Figure 4.6.)

Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

gallery corridor should terminate at the west end with a statue, labelled in one design by Soane as being of Apollo. Two finished and coloured drawings for one of the schemes of the gallery can be found in both the Soane office archive and Beckford's own collection, confirming it as the chosen final design.⁶⁸ Most significantly, all the design schemes show the proposed gallery's primary function, which was the display of Beckford's ever-increasing picture collection. The Soane gallery at Fonthill was never realised but, as Christopher Woodward has highlighted, the designs for it were to be Soane's first experiment with the canopy dome that he would continue to develop throughout his career. Thus Beckford's commission, though never executed, was a key project in the evolution of Soane's architecture.⁶⁹

Beckford himself was absent from England during this time and Soane met at Fonthill and corresponded with Beckford's mother, with Edward Foxhall possibly acting as agent.⁷⁰ Although the gallery was unrealised, Soane did carry out other alterations in the house, designing new chimney pieces for the South-East Parlour and the Tapestry Room, for which he also created coffered niches illustrated in both Beckford's and Soane's papers.⁷¹ Soane's most elaborate work for Beckford was a large gilded state bed. Once again variant designs for the bed survive, but copies of a finished and coloured design dated January 1788 and based on the Greek Choragic Monument of Lysicrates found in both Soane's archive and Beckford's collection illustrate the version which was executed.⁷²

Although Soane's purpose-built gallery never materialised, the second-floor corridor space was used by Beckford to display a collection of pictures that were not the Old Masters seen elsewhere in the house, but paintings that had immense value to his sense of ancestry. When visitors were lucky enough to be permitted access to the second-floor corridor they encountered a history gallery of family portraits ranging from Beckford's great-grandfather Peter Beckford to a portrait of Beckford's two daughters by George Romney. These family portraits were presented alongside the paintings by Thacker, Lambert and Joli of the Mervyn/Cottingham house throughout its history (see Chapters 3 and 12).⁷³ This conscious display of lineage, not just of blood but also of the estate (believed to be almost unique among English country houses at the time), was a clear example of how Beckford would use his interiors, and the display of the collection within them, to illustrate his ancestry and establish his place in society and history.⁷⁴

Despite Beckford's exile from society, visitors continued to call at Fonthill, including the Prince of Wales in 1794.⁷⁵ The estate no doubt held even greater fascination for society due to the scandalous reputation of its absent owner. Beckford himself would move continually between Fonthill and the Continent throughout the first half of the 1790s, with periods at the English estate becoming lengthier as work on Fonthill Abbey took hold. It was the time of the greatest alterations to the collection at Fonthill House, with furniture, paintings and objects continually being purchased, commissioned and shipped back from the Continent. Beckford's finances had been fluctuating for some time, however, and while plans were developed for changes to the house the Jamaican income required to fund them was not as readily available as he would have liked (see Chapter 13).

While still primarily living abroad, by 1791 Beckford was perhaps considering a more permanent return to England when he commissioned a new painting of Fonthill from Hendrik Frans de Cort (Figure 4.12). The public display of this picture at the Royal Academy was the beginning of a campaign by Beckford to return to Fonthill and reclaim a position in society. It offers a view of Fonthill House and grounds under his ownership, and the series of watercolour sketches include rare views from the house of the surrounding landscape (Figure 4.13).⁷⁶

In the same year as he commissioned the painting by de Cort Beckford employed the architect James Wyatt to make improvements at Fonthill. Lack of archival material makes it difficult to state exactly how and when the two came to meet, but the nature of the works by Wyatt and the relationship between architect and client is teased out through accounts by Wyatt's friend Joseph Farington and Beckford's own correspondence.⁷⁷ Wyatt's early work for Beckford included proposed alterations to the park, and the continuation of a project begun by his father to erect a tower at Stop Beacon (also known as Stop's or Stope's Beacon), the highest point of the estate.⁷⁸ It appears that Wyatt's involvement with alterations to the interior of the mansion itself began in 1795 with the design of furniture, and in 1796 Beckford began an extensive programme of redecorating and refurnishing.⁷⁹ Beckford's return from Portugal in March 1796, supposedly on a mission



Fig. 4.12 Hendrik Frans de Cort, *Fonthill House*, 1791.

Image of the painting by kind permission of the trustees of the Walter Morrison collection held at Sudeley Castle.



Fig. 4.13 Hendrik Frans de Cort, *View of Fonthill 'Splendens' from the Right Wing across the Entrance*.

Private collection.

to carry correspondence from the Portuguese to the English court, appears to have been the moment when he decided to make England his permanent home. Though his attempts to reclaim a position through political channels were unsuccessful, his return prompted a new phase of re-presenting Fonthill House. If he was to be living more permanently at Fonthill he would want to adapt it to suit the man he had become and the collection he had by that time amassed. It was also an opportunity to expurgate the memory of enforced retreat that the house had held for him following the Powderham scandal.

The 'painting & new fitting up of several rooms in the House' in 1796, under the design of Wyatt and no doubt the continuing oversight of Edward Foxhall, included changes to rooms on the ground floor traditionally used by the family. Wyatt altered the library, giving it a 'Gothicised' ceiling, and also designed new frames for Beckford's famous paintings, the 'Altieri' Claudes. These were hung by Christmas 1799 in the Grand Salon on the main floor of the house.⁸⁰ The full extent and nature of Wyatt's internal alterations for Beckford is unclear, and it is possible that an intriguing section of cornice, emblazoned with Beckford armorials, and believed to have been removed from Fonthill House (Figure 4.14), may date from this time. A plaster capital of the Lysicrates order shares the same provenance and both could have been made to Wyatt's designs; they certainly suit the Neo-classical style of the furnishing being produced at this time for Fonthill.⁸¹

The fitting up, or 'harmonising', of the mansion to suit Beckford's more modern tastes brought about an influx of cabinets, tables and other pieces of furniture,



Fig. 4.14 Plaster cornice from Fonthill House, Beckford's Tower and Museum.

Photograph by Amy Frost.

as well as paintings, objects, and a seemingly endless supply of books.⁸² A Turkish Room was created in what had been the bedroom attached to the library on the ground floor. This was installed by the time Thomas Hall visited Fonthill in September 1798. Hall praised it for the 'sumptuous style' of furnishing, with a vaulted ceiling by French artists Boileau and Feuglet above walls hung with curtains of rich orange satin reflected in large mirrors.⁸³ The Reverend Richard Warner, visiting Fonthill from Bath in 1800, noted that the music room was still unfinished, which indicated that Beckford was continuing to alter the house, where 'every room is a gold-mine and every apartment a picture-gallery'.⁸⁴

Visits for tourists, or the 'apartments shown to strangers' at Fonthill, ended with the Turkish Room.⁸⁵ Only a privileged few considered family or friends were allowed admittance into the more private spaces of the house. One such visitor in 1800 was John Britton, whose account of Fonthill was published in July 1801 in the first volume of the *Beauties of Wiltshire*. In one of the most extensive descriptions of Fonthill House to survive, Britton records in detail the furnishings and picture collection on view, recognising at the start the divided opinions that were held over the house. He noted and dismissed the outdated schemes that had survived from the Alderman's time, in particular the Casali paintings, proof for him 'of the wretched state of the arts about forty years ago'.⁸⁶ Britton's listing of the contents and the information he supplied about the house and family confirm that he was conducted on a tour by someone with detailed knowledge of the collection, if not by Beckford himself. His information was also supplemented by communication with Beckford, either in person or correspondence, as Britton proudly states in the preface to the book. Such privileged access ensured that Britton would gain admittance up the staircase from the Turkish Room to the chamber storey above, and experience the lineage of Beckford's family and estate as told through the paintings in the second-floor corridor. What makes this visit by Britton to the corridor so striking was that by 1800 the views by Thacker, Lambert, Joli and de Cort had been supplemented by views of Fonthill Abbey.

Beckford's generosity to Britton extended to the gift of an engraved plate of the south front of Fonthill House with which to illustrate the publication.⁸⁷ Beckford would have been aware that Britton's work would be purchased in London. By supporting the publication and contributing to it himself Beckford was once again attempting to manipulate public opinion and reassert his public identity as a landowner. Britton's account was in this respect a piece of marketing for Beckford, highlighting the heroics of the Alderman and illustrating Beckford himself as a man of taste, learning and sophisticated artistic appreciation. There was another more financially motivated reason for Beckford to support Britton's publication. Increasing the public's knowledge of the contents of Fonthill created a captive audience for an auction in which pictures, furniture and fittings from Fonthill were to be sold. The auction was announced in the press the same month Britton's book was reviewed.⁸⁸

Beckford's finances had been in a difficult state for some time and loss of income as a result of a Chancery case was reported in the press in May 1801.⁸⁹ As early as 1797 Beckford had been contemplating the demolition of Fonthill due to it being 'badly situated', and by July 1801 he had decided to demolish the wings and colonnades but retain the main house, which was to become the residence of his daughters.⁹⁰ Beckford had also decided to relocate with the bulk of his collection to his new building, Fonthill Abbey. The increased awareness of the collection through Britton's book and extensive sale notices in the press would have ensured that interest in the auction was at its height when the sale occurred in August 1801.⁹¹ The viewing of this sale was the first time that the mass public had had the opportunity to see inside Fonthill House, and they descended on Wiltshire from 'far and near'. The sale was a 'sensation'.⁹² Another auction followed in October, selling off building material and fixtures, including 40 solid stone columns and pilasters, several chimney pieces and furniture from two suites of rooms.⁹³ The east wing was demolished and though much of the contents was sold the main house remained complete. Beckford's mind was increasingly focused on his new residence.

Five years later, by October 1806, Beckford's daughters had been removed from the old house as their father had once again decided to demolish it, despite attempts by his future son-in-law, Alexander, Marquess of Douglas, to save 'poor old Fonthill'.⁹⁴ Douglas's pleas were in vain and by July 1807 Beckford was attempting to sell the house and its contents to Edward Foxhall for £16,000, on condition that it was dismantled and removed from the site before Beckford's birthday on 29 September.⁹⁵ The deal with Foxhall never materialised and in August 1807 the remaining contents of the house were disposed of at auction. A month later the house itself was sold, with the purchasers of the building material lots responsible for its demolition.⁹⁶ Relics from the house would find new homes as both collectors and dealers took the opportunity to purchase pieces of Fonthill.⁹⁷ Only the west wing was retained as guest accommodation.

What had once been a magnificent palace of two princes was reduced to a single fragment within the landscape. The memory of Fonthill House, however, endured and the tales of its once-fine contents would be embellished to become almost legendary. By 1829 it had earned the name of Fonthill 'Splendens'.⁹⁸ By that time, however, a new house dominated perceptions of Fonthill.

Fonthill Abbey

The best-documented, best-researched and most frequently told story of the Fonthill estate is the rise and fall of Fonthill Abbey. William Beckford's extraordinary creation captured people's imagination from the moment it was begun in 1796, and has continued to fascinate and inspire ever since, a fascination greatly enhanced due to the collapse of the building in 1825 and its subsequent demolition. Understanding of Fonthill Abbey exists through images, written accounts and

a single remaining fragment that stands as an echo of the building that defined the romanticism of the Gothic Revival.

The seeds of Fonthill Abbey were sown in 1790 when Beckford wrote a letter to Lady Craven, in which he made what would become one of his most frequently quoted statements:

One of my new estates in Jamaica brought me home seven thousand pounds last year more than usual. So I am growing rich, and mean to build towers, and sing hymns to the power of heaven from their summits.⁹⁹

This combination of architectural fantasy and financial reality underpins the evolution of Fonthill Abbey; if the building was defined by Beckford's imagination, it was also dictated by the fluctuations in the income from his estates in England and, more vitally, Jamaica (see [Chapter 13](#)).

The beginnings of what would become Fonthill Abbey can be traced to the period when James Wyatt was first commissioned by Beckford to work at the estate in the early 1790s. As early as 1792 the architect was drawing up designs for a tower.¹⁰⁰ Two years later, while abroad in Portugal, Beckford wrote to Wyatt informing the architect that his passion for St Anthony of Padua could be temporarily assuaged by his creating a sanctuary at his residence in Lisbon. This would be enough to tide him over, until he could carry Wyatt's 'magnificent plan for the chapel upon Stop Beacon into execution'.¹⁰¹ Beckford's periods of residence in Portugal between 1793 and 1798 provided him the opportunity to visit the monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha, possibly at the suggestion of Wyatt; those visits contributed to his ideas for Fonthill, as did his earlier visit as a young man to the Grand Chartreuse in Switzerland (see [Chapter 11](#)).¹⁰²

By the summer of 1796, the site for the tower had moved from Stop Beacon further east; by November Beckford's 'Abbey in the Woods' had reached 200 feet in length with 'a good part of the building' having already reached the first floor.¹⁰³ By 1797 it was still a 'little pleasure building in the shape of an abbey', not finished but already filled with painted glass, a gallery, the long-imagined chapel to St Anthony of Padua and a tower 145 feet high.¹⁰⁴ The building would have been a striking scene to come upon when riding through the landscape from Fonthill House, functioning as both a feature within the landscape and a retreat for its creator.

Wyatt exhibited a view of Fonthill Abbey for the first time at the Royal Academy in 1797, and would do so again in 1798 and 1799. His surviving sketches ([Figures 4.15](#) and [4.16](#)) illustrate the changing ideas for the building, starting with the earliest scheme for a tower inspired by the mausoleum of King John at Batalha in Portugal.¹⁰⁵ This was the building as first encountered by J. M. W. Turner and recorded by him from the south-west.¹⁰⁶ Several ideas by Wyatt were clearly being developed during 1797–9, and two later sketches show the existing elements of the building, the south range, fountain court and cloister, main hall and tower base



Fig. 4.15 James Wyatt, *Preliminary Design for a Residence for William Beckford* (design for Fonthill Abbey as seen from the south).

SA55/5/1, 98518, RIBA Collections.

as constructed, joined by proposals for the northern range and an increasingly elaborate tower. Ian Warrell's unpicking of the series of views of Fonthill by Turner further illuminates the process of construction and collapse that Fonthill Abbey experienced during these early years.¹⁰⁷

An initial collapse of the Abbey tower while under construction in May 1800 was recorded by Beckford:

So, after a Somersault very neatly performed in the higher Regions of the Air, down came boards, Beams and Scaffold poles: but so compactly and genteelly as not to have shaken a single Stone of the main Edifice or injured the smallest ornament.

The main body of the building survived relatively intact, so plans for the new tower were immediately begun, Beckford exclaiming 'We shall rise again more gloriously



Fig. 4.16 James Wyatt, design for Fonthill Abbey.

SA55/5/2, 98519, RIBA Collections.

than ever'.¹⁰⁸ Press notices of the fall would only have encouraged Beckford to continue work, knowing that the news-hungry public would be awaiting further information about either the failure or triumph of the Abbey.

In December 1800 Beckford invited his second cousin, Sir William Hamilton, accompanied by his wife Emma and her lover Horatio Nelson, to visit Fonthill. The very public arrangement of this trio would ensure that news of the visit would once again reach the press. Beckford embraced the opportunity which the Christmas party presented for being seen in the company of England's hero of the Battle of the Nile. The Hamilton–Nelson visit was the only major entertainment that the Abbey would ever host, and the published account captures the building not long after the initial tower's collapse, offering an insight into the interiors of the building at the point when Beckford must have been considering whether or not to relocate his household there.

An account of the party was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in April 1801, most probably written by Henry Tresham, who had been present as a guest alongside Wyatt and the artist Benjamin West. He describes the journey between Fonthill House and the Abbey as a procession expertly choreographed by Beckford. Lamps in the trees illuminated the route and drums and music sounded through



Fig. 4.17 *Fonthill Abbey, South End of St Michael's Gallery.*

John Britton, *Graphic and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, plate 9, Beckford's Tower and Museum.

the woods. The Abbey was also illuminated, rising up out of the shadows of the surrounding trees. In staging the journey to the Abbey this way Beckford captured the change his guests would experience in moving from the politeness and formality of his father's house to the romance of his own creation, a physical retreat into an apparent other realm. After an elaborate banquet designed to echo a medieval feast the guests were then shown the 'finished apartments'. They passed up a staircase flanked by people costumed as living statues in hooded gowns, through a salon filled with Beckford's collection and into the library where, passing through a 'large Gothic screen', they entered the main destination: the first floor gallery. The gallery, eventually known as the St Michael's Gallery (Figure 4.17), was already fully fitted up with Beckford's statue of St Anthony by Rossi standing at its northern end.¹⁰⁹

The guests on this night were the privileged few who were allowed access to Beckford's sanctum. John Britton lamented not long after that he was not allowed access to the Abbey, 'Mr Beckford having judiciously determined to keep it secret from the public eye till *entirely* completed'. The reader is further teased by Britton concluding 'when finished, it is intended to be opened for public inspection'.¹¹⁰ In this one statement Britton both encouraged the curiosity of his readers about both Fonthill and Beckford, and arrived at the perfect way to end a published account: whetting the appetite for more information about the building. Britton would himself eventually provide such information in a full-length study of Fonthill Abbey published in 1823.

Beckford moved from Fonthill House to the Abbey in 1801 and took up residence in the rooms in the southern wing. He lived quietly, but occasionally entertained visitors who would appreciate what he was trying to conjure-up out of the woods. One such visitor was the artist Benjamin West, who on encountering the Abbey thought it 'a place raised by majick, or inspiration, [rather] than the labours of the human hand'.¹¹¹ Progress at the Abbey was slow between 1802 and 1805, due both to lack of funds and to Beckford's absence in France. When Lady Ann Hamilton visited with Beckford's daughters in 1803 plans were in place for the next major addition to the building, the north wing, and her account of this visit provides a glimpse into the interiors which Britton had been prevented from seeing. Her route through the building matched that taken by Sir William Hamilton and Nelson three years earlier, and again ended in the gallery, by then 136 feet long but still terminating at the space below the Tower. She records the interiors and sketches examples of furniture, noting the extensive use of both natural light and candelabra, and was particularly struck by the painted glass windows showing the monarchy in the dining (or Abbot's) parlour in the south range and above in the gallery.¹¹²

From 1806–7 the southern parts of the Abbey were refaced and Wyatt's original compo-cement mixture that had made up the exterior walls was replaced with stone. It was a statement of intent about the permanence of Fonthill Abbey that was made more overt by the demolition of Fonthill House in 1807.¹¹³ Financial fluctuations caused Fonthill to be in a continual state of construction, with work frequently slowing or put on hold. The eventual completion of the north range in 1812 concluded a sequence of rooms through the centre of the house that created a vista over 300 feet in length. From the St Michael's Gallery in the south, through the central octagon and into the new King Edward's Gallery and Lancaster Tower, this vista terminated with the Oratory (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). In that final space was relocated the statue of Saint Anthony, realising an idea Beckford had been imagining since the early 1790s.

The completion of the north range was marked by the 1812 publication of James Storer's *A Description of Fonthill Abbey*, which allowed the reading public access even if it was only access in print rather than in person, to a building and landscape that had until then been severely restricted. In his work Storer noted Beckford's intention to build a chapel in what would be the final wing of the Abbey, the Eastern Transept (Figure 4.20). The addition of this substantial new range, terminated by a pair of towers based on those at Canterbury Cathedral, was made possible thanks to an unexpected increase in income from Jamaica.¹¹⁴ The design was Wyatt's but he never saw this final wing completed because, much to Beckford's annoyance, he was killed in a carriage accident on his way to see another of his colonially funded clients, the Codringtons at Doddington Park in Gloucestershire.

The Eastern Transept of Fonthill Abbey was intended to outshine even the Western Entrance Hall as a pseudo-Baronial space, and its design was to celebrate

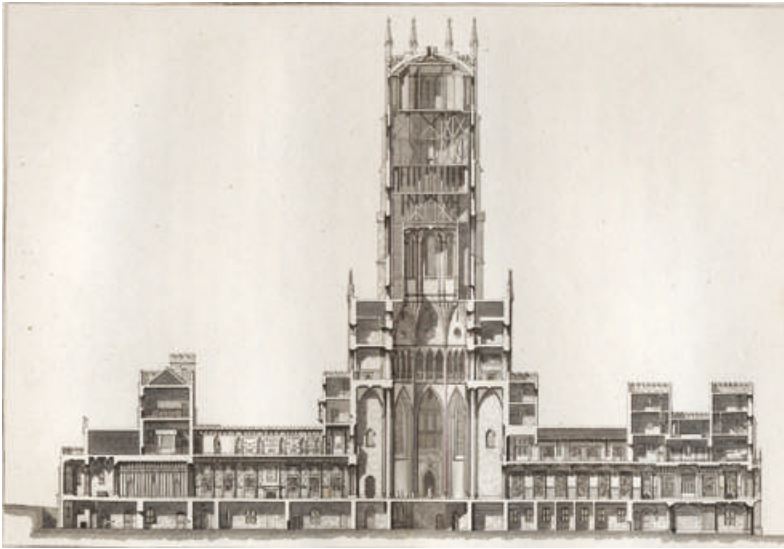


Fig. 4.18 *Cross-section of Fonthill Abbey.*

John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.



Fig. 4.19 *King Edward's Gallery looking towards the Oratory.*

John Britton, *Graphic and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.



Fig. 4.20 *Fonthill Abbey from the South-east.*

John Britton, *Graphic and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.

all the signatories of Magna Carta. It was to be the finale in the sequence of interiors designed to place Beckford and his family firmly within the annals of British history. Visitors started under the hammer-beam roof of the Western Entrance Hall emblazoned with coats of arms, and were then directed in the Oak Parlour and Brown Dining Room to the windows illustrating the pedigree of the country's monarchy. The descent of Beckford and his wife were proclaimed through the decorative schemes, from the abbatial Gothic of the fake vaulted ceiling in the St Michael's Gallery to the armorials and portraits in the King Edward's Gallery. This journey through the Beckford lineage was intended to end in the Baronial Hall in the Eastern Transept (see [Figure 4.21](#)). Although completed externally the Eastern Transept was never finished internally, but its elevations provided the façade Beckford wanted to present. The Abbey, though clearly modern in construction, was an attempt to reclaim the past, allowing its owner, or as he frequently termed himself its 'Abbot', the romance of occupying what in his mind was the remains of a pre-Dissolution monastic house.

Beckford's obsession with ancestry also revealed an important link to the history of the estate that would have helped solidify in his mind his rightful place as the master of Fonthill. While researching Beckford's descent through his mother at the College of Arms, Isaac Heard traced a connection with Sir John Mervyn of Fonthill Gifford, a former owner of the Fonthill estate (see [Chapter 3](#)).¹¹⁵ Such a link allowed Beckford to claim a family connection to the estate, however distant, that pre-dated its purchase by the Alderman.

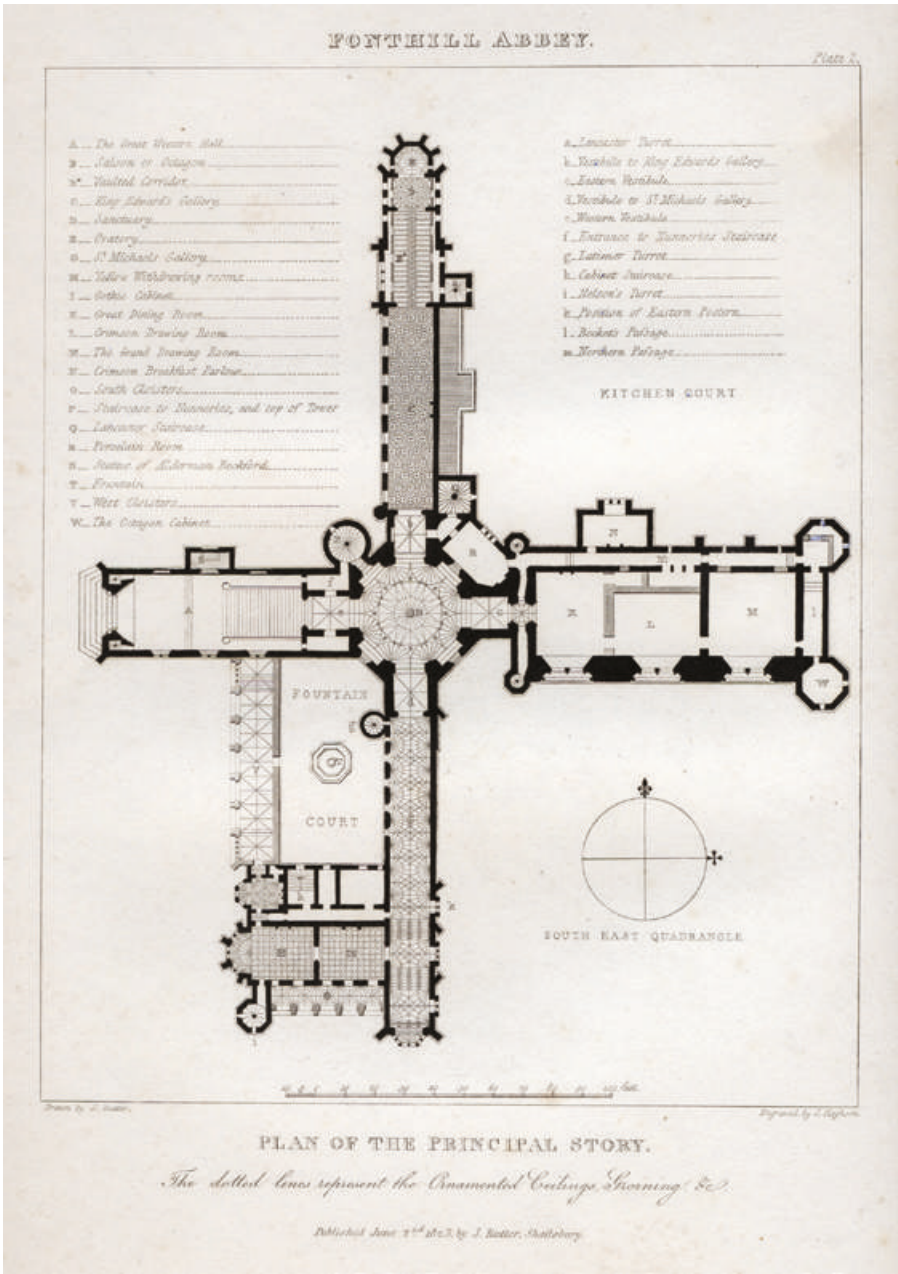


Fig. 4.21 Plan of Fonthill Abbey.
 John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823, Beckford's Tower and Museum.

Even the completion of the Eastern Transept was not enough to keep Beckford focused, and by 1817 he talked of leaving the Abbey. How much of this intent was serious and how much just an example of his impatience or need to create something new is not known.¹¹⁶ In some ways it is difficult to imagine Beckford ever

having been content with a completely finished project. His continual need to refit or commission new furniture allowed him to be constantly in the process of change or refinement without ever actually reaching the end. He visited Paris in 1814 and again in 1819, and continued to travel to London until lack of finances forced him to give up the lease on his London house in 1817. Unlike his father, Beckford was continually diverted from necessary attention to his business affairs and the Jamaican estates in particular; building and collecting was much more interesting. By 1821, Beckford's debts were increasing so much that he was forced to sell many of his other properties, including Witham. Mortgages were also raised on Fonthill.¹¹⁷ By 1822 more drastic action was required. Beckford attempted to stave off selling the estate by offering a deal to his son-in-law, by then the Duke of Hamilton. The deal proposed that in return for the Duke paying off Beckford's debts, covering the interest on his mortgages and providing Beckford with an annuity, Beckford would ensure that on his death Fonthill and his Hindon parliamentary seat would revert to Hamilton.¹¹⁸ The proposal was turned down and by the summer of 1822 the sale of Fonthill became unavoidable.

Beckford engaged Christie's to auction the contents of Fonthill Abbey while at the same time looking for a buyer for the whole estate (Figure 4.22). Like the Fonthill House sales of the previous decade, this sale was to be the highlight of the social calendar and an opportunity for the public (at least those who could afford to purchase the catalogue and viewing ticket) to see inside a building that was shrouded in mystery.¹¹⁹ His plan to find a buyer for the whole estate succeeded, and

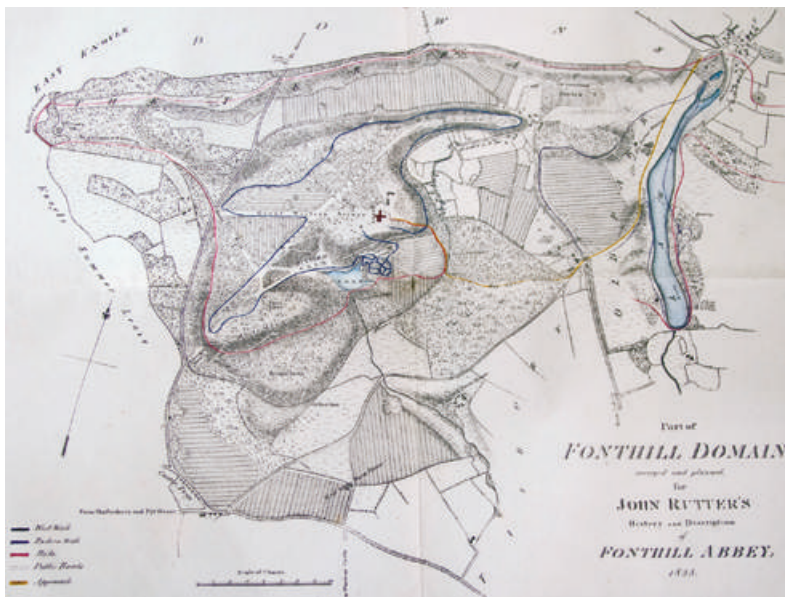


Fig. 4.22 Map of the Fonthill Estate.

John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823. Beckford's Tower and Museum.

at the end of the viewing Christie's was told to cancel the auction. The Abbey, much of its contents and the whole estate were sold to John Farquhar for £300,000.¹²⁰

Beckford moved to Bath, taking part of his collection with him. The following year, Farquhar auctioned much of the contents of the Abbey and the public again had the chance to see – and this time bid for – a part of Beckford's collection. When the architect C. F. Porden visited he predicted with ominous foresight the fall of the building: 'would to God it had been more sustainably built! But as it is, its ruins will tell a tale of wonder'.¹²¹ This was to prove prophetic when the tower of Fonthill Abbey collapsed for the final time in 1825 (see [Chapter 5](#)).

It was in many ways wholly appropriate for Beckford's Fonthill to come to such an end; how could the building be sustained without its 'Abbot' in residence?

5

The break-up of the Fonthill estate

Caroline Dakers

Part one: John Farquhar

This pleasing vision is now past, and the noise of the Auctioneer's hammer will not be heard – silence pervades the long-drawn ailes – the lofty portal is closed – and the Abbot is returned to his Cloysters, with thanks to his Patron Saint, St Anthony, for the numerous Pilgrims who have been attracted to his shrine. But with a farewell look he will shortly bid adieu to his cloistered walls, and extensive solitudes, which are now doomed to greet a second Abbot.¹

While William Beckford was arranging with James Christie the sale of the contents of Fonthill Abbey, he was already in secret negotiations to sell the entire estate, the Abbey and most of its contents to John Farquhar. Thousands of catalogues were printed by Christie's, for sale at a guinea each; hundreds of people visited the Abbey every day through August and September 1822, but suddenly, on 5 October Beckford cancelled the sale. Farquhar had agreed to pay him £300,000 for the whole of the estate, the Abbey and its contents.²

John Farquhar (caricatured in [Figure 5.1](#)) remains a little-known figure in the story of Fonthill. Colt Hoare's *History of Wiltshire* repeats evidence produced during the case heard in the English Ecclesiastical Courts in January 1829 concerning Farquhar's supposed wills;³ there are brief references in contemporary newspapers and an obituary in the *Annual Register* for 1826, rewritten by John Timbs in *English Eccentrics* (1875). He has inspired more recent pieces, including an anonymous article published in the *Fraserburgh Herald* in 1966, titled "The millionaire Brahmin from Bilbo who played "Double Your Money" in 1822".⁴ *Fonthill*, a novel by Aubrey Menen, published in 1975, goes further, proposing Farquhar was obsessed with collecting, a seeker after social status and, like Beckford, a homosexual.

Farquhar was born in 1751 in Crimond near Aberdeen. He made his fortune in Bengal, first dabbling in commercial activities then experimenting with the



Fig. 5.1 *A Sketch from the Ruins of Fonthill*: caricature of John Farquhar, published October 1826.

National Portrait Gallery, D40729.

manufacture of gunpowder. He worked directly for Lord Cornwallis, governor-general of Bengal, researching into the quality problems of the gunpowder produced at the factory in Pultah, then becoming superintendent of the factory and ultimately the sole contractor to the government.

Over a period of time Farquhar sent large remittances to his bankers Messrs. Hoare of Fleet Street to invest in three-per-cent funds. In 1814 he had amassed a

fortune of some half a million pounds so returned to England. Timbs, enhancing the 1826 obituary, gives a colourful account of Farquhar's reception in London:

Landing at Gravesend, he took his seat upon the outside of the coach, and in due time found himself in London. Weather-beaten, and covered with dust, he made his way to his bankers, and there, stepping up to one of the clerks, expressed a wish to see Mr. Hoare himself. But his rough appearance and common make of the clothes about his sunburnt limbs, suggested to the clerk that he must be some unlucky petitioner for charity; and he was left to wait in the cash-office until Mr. Hoare happened to pass through. The latter was some time before he could understand who Mr. Farquhar was. His Indian customer, indeed, he knew well by name, but he had none of that hauteur which was then common with the successful Anglo-Indians. At length, however, Mr. Hoare was satisfied as to the identity of his wealthy visitor, who then asked him for 25_l., and saluting him, retired.⁵

Farquhar was certainly eccentric, reportedly shocking his niece Charlotte, wife of the 7th baronet Sir William Templer Pole, by not caring for fine clothes or even personal cleanliness. His obituary in the *Annual Register* described him as 'slovenly in his dress, and disagreeable at his meals.'⁶ Beckford called him Old Filthyman. Apparently the Poles' offer to hold a grand ball in his honour if he might buy some new clothes led him to leave their house in Weymouth Street and set up on his own, in a house on the corner of Portman Square and Upper Baker Street, with only an old woman for his servant. The novelist Aubrey Menen replaces the old woman with a beautiful young Indian boy called Abdul, who is mentally undressed by Beckford during his first meeting with Farquhar.

Farquhar continued to increase his fortune, becoming a partner in the East India agency house of Basset, Farquhar & Company, and in Whitbread's brewery. He invested in government stock, bought property in London⁷ and the country, including the East Mark estate in Somersetshire, and attended sales where he was 'a keen bidder for any object that struck his fancy'.⁸ Timbs recounts that he was charitable to others though spent little on his own comforts; he was often mistaken for a beggar in the street:

In charitable deeds Mr. Farquhar was munificent to a princely extent, and often, when he had left his comfortless home with a crust of bread in his pocket to save the expenditure of a penny at an oyster shop, it was to give away in the course of the day hundreds of pounds to aid the distressed, and to cure and care for those who suffered from biting poverty, hunger, and want. But in his personal expenditure he was extremely parsimonious; and whilst he resided in Baker Street, he expended on himself and his household but 200_l. a year out of the 30,000_l. or 40,000_l. which his many sources of income must have yielded him.

He was also a scholar. The *Annual Register* noted he was ‘deeply read in classics. In the sciences, as a mathematician, chemist, and mechanic, he greatly excelled’. An article in *The Times* found his mind ‘of extraordinary vigour and originality – his conversation of a superior order, impressive and animated on every subject’.⁹ His years in India had given him a strong admiration for the moral system of the Brahmins, and he apparently wished to donate £100,000 for the foundation of a college in Aberdeen, with a ‘reservation in regard to religion’, but without parliamentary sanction the scheme foundered.¹⁰ Colt Hoare summed up his peculiarities in his history of Wiltshire:

In Bengal he was remarkable for the closeness of his application, unabating perseverance, and extraordinary mental vigour, and also for habits of penuriousness ... which continued to the time of his decease. Those, therefore, who were not acquainted with Mr Farquhar, considered him a miser, but those with whom he associated recognized a powerful and enterprising mind, deeply versed in ancient and modern literature, and given to parsimony more from habit than inclination.¹¹

But why did he buy Fonthill? Aubrey Menen suggests it was all about becoming a gentleman. Beckford says to him: ‘These are the keys of Fonthill, Mr Farquhar. Buy it, and at a stroke you will be the finest gentleman in the land. Everything is there, all in its proper place.’¹²

Farquhar undoubtedly had a scholarly interest in the property. Beckford had already commissioned John Rutter, a local Shaftesbury Quaker printer and political activist, to produce *A New Descriptive Guide to Fonthill Abbey and Demesne*, also *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, both published in 1823. Beckford also commissioned the publication in 1823 of the antiquarian scholar John Britton’s *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*. The following year, John Preston Neale published his *Graphical Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, The Seat of John Farquhar, Esq.* Neale’s book was dedicated to Farquhar.

For all his apparent interest in the history of the property, Farquhar did not want to keep much of the contents of the Abbey and another sale was planned, even larger than the aborted Christie’s sale. A correspondent in the *Morning Herald* explained:

The various articles with which Mr. Beckford furnished the Abbey in so elaborate a style, never accorded with Mr. Farquhar’s taste. The latter is said to admire the bold and substantial, rather than the delicate and ornamental, in all works where the force of original genius is called into action; and hence he is not pleased with the numberless minute objects which the former has collected. As toys, he thinks they may amuse for a moment, but as decorations for a Gothic edifice he regards them as alike offensive to common sense and good taste.¹³

The same correspondent reported that Farquhar was inclined to promote a national interest in the Abbey by making it an English *Louvre*, open to the public at certain times of the year as a museum.¹⁴ Neale, however, in his *Graphical Illustrations*, confirmed Farquhar's taste for the 'bold and substantial', in particular for statuary, 'in accordance with which he has caused a very fine cast of the celebrated group of Laocoon to be placed in the hall' (see Figure 5.2).¹⁵

Farquhar engaged the auctioneer Harry Phillips, who had been senior clerk to James Christie's father and assisted in the earlier negotiations with Beckford. He had resigned from Christie's, apparently having been refused a pay rise, and opened his own auction house in 1796. The new Fonthill sale revealed his business acumen and flair for showmanship.

While the catalogue of the sale claimed 'the whole sold as genuine property' of Beckford, Phillips added pieces from elsewhere. William Hazlitt's horror at the tawdry objects was perhaps influenced by their dubious provenance, while Alaric Watts, writing in the *Leeds Intelligencer*, titled his piece 'Humbug! Fonthill Abbey!'¹⁶



Fig. 5.2 August-Jean-Marie Carboneaux, *The Laocöon*, early nineteenth century. Bronze life-size copy modelled from the original marble sculpture.

Photograph Philip Brakefield © Christie's Images Limited.

Tickets were half a guinea, the catalogue cost 12 shillings. Again thousands of people arrived, including the Duke of Wellington, Beckford and his son-in-law the Duke of Hamilton. Both Beckford and Hamilton bought objects apparently at knock-down prices in a depressed market.

The actual sale lasted 37 days, Farquhar realising £43,869.14s.¹⁷ The tenantry and neighbours were permitted access to the Abbey and grounds for free on Sundays (when they were closed to the general public) but apparently there was a minor riot on one occasion when a crowd from the 'lower orders' tried to force entry at the gate.¹⁸ Charles Knight visited with his friend the architect Stedman Whitwell. Whitwell had drawn the ticket and other illustrations of the proceedings for Ackermann's *Repository*, as well as setting up the unfinished Eastern Transept as the site of the auction: 'Artists were there making drawings. Journalists were there writing elaborate paragraphs, with a slight tendency to puff. My friend Stedman Whitwell was with me, and we rambled freely over the American gardens, and partook of the choice fruit of the hothouses ... To me the ostensible lord of the place, the clever auctioneer, was particularly civil.'¹⁹ John Constable went with his friend Fisher, who pointed out 'there have been great changes in the articles since last year; so that it is quite an auctioneer's job. Many superb things are now not there, and many others added.'²⁰

The surviving pavilion of Fonthill Splendens was fitted up by Thomas Harrington, proprietor of the Black Horse Inn in Salisbury, with bedrooms, a large common coffee room and private sitting rooms. Constable noticed 'a large room fitted up with boxes like a coffee-house, for dinners'.²¹ A public refectory was established at the Abbey inside the Fountain Court of the Western Cloister (Figure 5.3), William Dore from the White Lion in Bath supplying the refreshments and running special coach trips from Bath to the Abbey.

Once free of Beckford's collection, Farquhar set about extending the estate by over 2,000 acres. He bought the manor of Berwick St Leonard and Lyngevers (part of Chicklade), also land in Dorset (including Boyton, Keynton and Stour) for £100,000 from his Fonthill neighbour John Benett of Pythouse, who was heavily in debt. He also controlled the two seats for the rotten borough of Hindon and offered them, as Beckford had done, for £5,000 apiece. His activities were noted in the local newspaper:

If the property purchased by Mr Farquhar from Mr Benett (our county member) be added to Fonthill, the domain will then form one of the most splendid estates in this kingdom. Fonthill Abbey is itself a residence for a Prince.²²

Farquhar was copying another neighbour, the very wealthy Robert, Earl Grosvenor (1767–1845), just over the county border in Dorset. Though Earl Grosvenor owned the Eaton estate in Cheshire and valuable land in London, in 1819 he had begun to build up a considerable estate in Dorset. His main interest was political, at a local and national level. His purchase from Lord Rosebery for £70,000 of 400 or



Fig. 5.3 Fonthill Abbey. *View of The Fountain Court Within the Western Cloister. With The Additions Made in June 1823, To Convert It Into A Public Refectory For The Visitors.*

Stedman Whitwell. Private collection, photography David Wiltshire

so premises in Shaftesbury, completed just before the 1820 General Election, was large enough to carry the voting rights to the ‘property of Shaftesbury’ and thus return two Whig Members of Parliament of his choosing.²³ He bought the manor of Gillingham from Sir Francis Sykes in 1821,²⁴ and, in 1825, the Motcombe estate, for £51,000.²⁵ A report drawn up for the Earl pointed out Motcombe ‘is situate nearly adjoining the Town of Shaftesbury, and unites his Lordships Estates at Shaftesbury and Gillingham’.²⁶ Earl Grosvenor admired Beckford’s collections, if not the man, and bought a number of his books at Farquhar’s sale. The Gothic library at Eaton was enlarged by William Porden in 1824 especially for his ‘Beckfordiana’.²⁷

According to Neale, Farquhar had ambitious plans for the Fonthill estate. The unfinished eastern wing was to be completed ‘for the residence of the family’, the Pavilion (which had already been used for accommodation during the sale) was to be fitted up as an ‘elegant Inn with every necessary accommodation, stabling &c.’ and a drive was to be formed from the eastern front of the Abbey towards the Pavilion, ‘by which means a fine view of the Lake will be obtained’. As Neale observed, ‘Mr Farquhar has at this time [1823–4] more than a hundred workmen and labourers employed in making various alterations both in the Mansion and the Garden.’²⁸ The auctioneer Harry Phillips had continued to manage the property, but in September 1824 he was dismissed. George Mortimer, Farquhar’s favourite

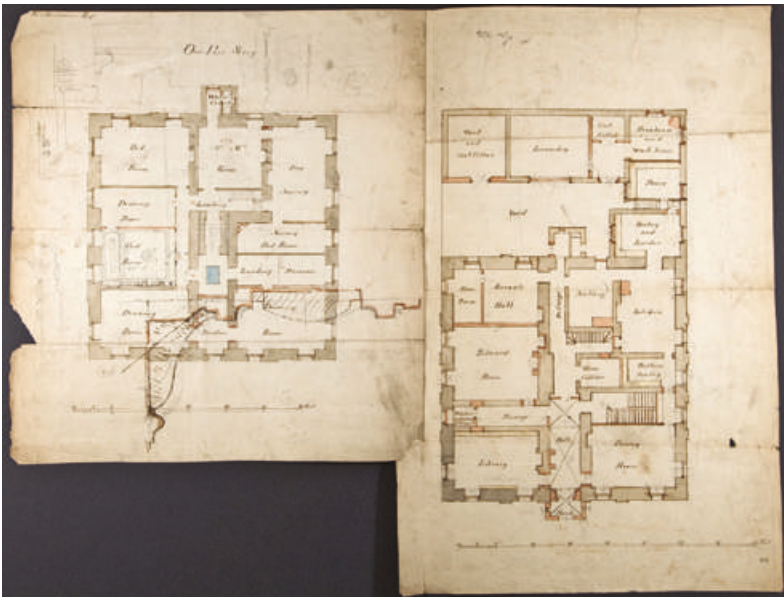


Fig. 5.4 Plans of the ground and first floors of the Pavilion.

Metropolitan Museum of New York (in exchange with the RIBA, 1960), accession number 60.724.85a.

nephew, moved into the Pavilion with his wife and it remained their residence until 1829.

Surviving plans on paper (Figure 5.4) with a watermark of 1824 (but no architect's name) suggest the Pavilion was to be enlarged with a portico to the front and offices to the rear; on the ground floor a library, dining room and billiard room; above two drawing rooms, a boudoir, bedrooms and nurseries: a comfortable family house.

George Mortimer was a cloth manufacturer and Blackwell Hall broker. Blackwell Hall near the Guildhall (demolished in 1820) had been at the centre of the wool and cloth trade in London for centuries. Mortimer had been borrowing money from Farquhar to buy wool since 1821, but in 1824 he persuaded his uncle to finance a commercial woollen mill on the lake at Fonthill. The enterprise was foolhardy, given the collapse in the woollen industry in the immediate area following peace with France and the renewal of competition. However Mortimer was later described as 'the peculiar object' of Farquhar's affections.²⁹

The lengthy Chancery case which dealt with Farquhar's estate (he died intestate in 1826) and the competing demands of seven nephews and nieces provide details of the complex finances involved. Mortimer was certainly given 'almost unlimited credit' by his uncle and a memorandum of agreement conveyed to him 'certain lands, not to exceed fifty acres – part of the estate of Fonthill – for the erection of a woollen manufactory'.³⁰ It was claimed during the hearings that Mortimer 'induced [his uncle] to erect a factory ... though it was represented by



Fig. 5.5 Hendrik Frans de Cort, *View of Fonthill 'Splendens' from the south, 1791*. Government Art Collection, 9164.

his friends as very injurious to the property'.³¹ However the foundation stone was laid by Farquhar himself on 9 October 1824.³² Merino wool and sheep worth over £6,000 were supplied by John Benett from the neighbouring Pythouse estate, and indigo to a value of £2,372.13s.5d was supplied by Farquhar's company Bassett, Farquhar & Co.

A drawing by Hendrik de Cort (part of the series accompanying his painting of *Splendens* commissioned by William Beckford) shows the 1791 view of the site which would be chosen for the mill, immediately below the retaining wall and waterfall at the south end of the lake. *Splendens* is visible in the distance (Figure 5.5).

Just as the woollen mill and a group of cottages for the workers were being erected the tower of Fonthill Abbey creaked, groaned and finally, on 21 December 1825, at three o'clock in the afternoon, crashed to the ground. Colt Hoare, still working on his *History of Wiltshire*, 'was so anxious to see it in its dilapidated state, that I sent an artist [John Buckler] to take a view of it the week after its fall' (Figure 5.6).

Buckler's drawing was quickly engraved to illustrate Hoare's article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in February 1826, 'Sic transit Gloria Fonthill'. It was included also in the fourth volume of the *Modern History of South Wiltshire* published in 1829. Colt Hoare observed 'Mr Buckler had previously made two large drawings of the Abbey in its perfect state, which, in picturesque effect, are far inferior to it in its ruined state; for the tower, from its excessive height, was out of all proportion.'³³



Fig. 5.6 John Buckler, *Ruins of Fonthill*, 1825.

Fonthill Estate Archives.

John Claudius Loudon, editor of *The Gardener's Magazine*, recounted the fall in an article published in 1835:

Mr Farquhar, however, who then resided in one angle of the building, and who was in a very infirm state of health, could not be brought to believe there was any danger. He was wheeled out in his chair on the lawn in front, about half an hour before it fell; and though he saw the cracks, and the deviation of the central tower from the perpendicular, he treated the idea of its coming down as ridiculous. He was carried back to his room, however, and the tower fell almost immediately. From the manner in which it fell, from the lightness of the materials of which it was constructed ... neither Mr. Farquhar nor the servants who were in the kitchen preparing dinner, knew that it had fallen; though the immense collection of dust which rose into the atmosphere had assembled almost all the inhabitants of the village, and had given the alarm even as far as Wardour Castle ... only one man (who died in 1833) saw it fall. 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 ... The cloud of dust which arose was enormous, and such as completely to darken the air for a considerable distance around for several minutes. 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 30 ft., among dust so thick as to be felt. Mr. Farquhar, it is said, could scarcely be convinced that the tower was down; and when he was so, he said he was glad of it, for that now the house was not too

large for him to live in. Mr. Beckford, when told at Bath, by his servant, that the tower had fallen, merely observed, that it had then made an obeisance to Mr. Farquhar, which it had never done to him.³⁴

False rumours circulated suggesting Farquhar was inclined to leave the Abbey to Beckford, who was thrilled by the idea: ‘Good heavens, yes, I should have been in an extacy at it, for it would have falsified the old proverb, “You can’t eat your cake and have it too”’.³⁵ However, Farquhar actually began negotiations to sell everything the day after the collapse.

John Benett of Pythouse agreed to buy the Abbey, the land within the enclosure, and land in Fonthill Gifford and Tisbury, totalling 2,975 acres. The contract was made on 22 and 27 December 1825, at a mutual valuation of £130,000. John Peniston, a Salisbury surveyor and architect, carried out the valuation for Benett.³⁶ The ruins of the Abbey were to be sold by Benett as building materials.

Henry King of Chilmark (a village to the east of Fonthill), a local gentleman farmer, agreed to buy 1,400 acres of farm land for £20,000. George Mortimer agreed to buy the Old Park estate, the Pavilion (where he and his wife were living) and 1,200 acres for £19,700.³⁷ And Earl Grosvenor contracted to buy the manor of Berwick St Leonard and half the borough of Hindon (33 properties), totalling 1,150 acres, for £45,000.³⁸ This property Farquhar had acquired a short time before from Benett; it was the first Wiltshire property the Earl bought and came with heavy costs. Grosvenor’s Shaftesbury solicitor Philip Chitty warned ‘the repairs at Berwick Saint Leonard are and will be expensive’, while the Hindon properties housed a number of paupers.³⁹

Chitty, working for Benett as well as Earl Grosvenor, was already concerned about Farquhar’s health when he wrote to the Earl in February 1826 confirming £10,000 had been paid to Messrs Hoare, Barnett & Co. ‘on account’.⁴⁰ When Farquhar died of apoplexy in his London house, Newland, on the New Road (now Euston Road) opposite Regent’s Park, on 6 July 1826⁴¹ none of the contracts for the sale of his Wiltshire property had been completed.

Farquhar was buried in St John’s Wood Church (now St John’s Wood Chapel). The church had been completed in 1814, designed by Thomas Hardwick. It attracted a number of East and West India merchants and their families. Farquhar’s medallion profile portrait was sculpted by Peter Rouwe the Younger in the manner of a noble Roman, and with no attempt at flattery.

When his probate was finally settled Farquhar was found to be worth over a million pounds.⁴² His property was extensive, including not just the Fonthill estate but leaseholds in central London, in Harley Street, Upper Seymour Street, Gloucester Place, Cavendish Street, Portland Place, Golden Square and Upper Baker Street.⁴³ However the legal wrangling that followed his death was reminiscent of the Chancery case in Dickens’s *Bleak House*.⁴⁴

First there was a dispute about whether he had written a will in India, then whether it had been deliberately destroyed in his London house. ‘The will was

thought to have contained a large bequest to be used for educational purposes in Scotland, but when the prerogative court of chancery considered the case in 1829 Sir John Nicholls decreed that Farquhar had in fact died intestate.⁴⁵ The Court also declared Farquhar to be ‘an extremely acute, clever man, though fanciful, capricious, irritable, and passionate ... he seems latterly to have considered its value [his property] only as it contributed to his amusement in the management of it – in buying, selling and speculating – reckless of what became of it afterwards.’⁴⁶

Once the ‘asserted will’ was declared to have been destroyed, the seven nephews and nieces were able to negotiate their individual inheritances. Only George Mortimer was interested in having his ownership of part of the Fonthill estate ratified; the rest wanted the money promised by Benett, Earl Grosvenor and Henry King. But the legal process took so long that the deeds of purchase were only finally signed in 1838. Meanwhile Mortimer, established at the Pavilion, and Benett, living on the neighbouring estate, behaved as if they were already the legal owners of their parts of Fonthill.

Part two: John Benett and George Mortimer

John Benett’s marriage to Lucy Lambert of Boyton brought him a substantial dowry which he used to design and build a larger house.⁴⁷ The new Pythouse, with its Neogrecian façade, was completed in 1805. When Beckford demolished ‘Splendens’, Benett bought two of the magnificent Italian chimney pieces for his state rooms at Pythouse. Benett was ambitious for political power and land. He served as High Sheriff, magistrate and captain of the Hindon yeomanry, and spent over £50,000 fighting elections to Parliament in 1818 and 1819. He was a Whig, a close friend of the Arundells of Wardour and in favour of Catholic emancipation. However his finances had been stretched by his new house and election expenses, hence his need to sell land to Farquhar in 1823. His ambition to own the Abbey estate was never viable.

Benett was meant to have paid a first instalment of £10,000 in October 1826 for his part of the estate, but with the death of Farquhar and no confirmed contract he hung on to his cash. He was obsessed with acquiring the Abbey estate. A neighbouring landowner, Charles Ashe à Court of Heytesbury, wrote:

In the course of conversation Benett let out to me in confidence his expectation of an entire dislocation of the Fonthill property on old Farquhar’s death & his determination in such case to strain every nerve to purchase that portion of which is in Tisbury Parish & which adjoins his property ... [but] I believe he is sadly distressed for money; so much so, that he has just purchased an Estate upon which I have a mortgage, not having a single shilling to pay for it; which will of course oblige me to withhold the title deeds. He is an arrant Jew to deal with.⁴⁸

Benett was not alone in being financially stretched. His friend and neighbour, James Everard, 10th Baron Arundell, had inherited the Wardour estate, including the enormous New Wardour Castle designed by James Paine and the ruins of the old castle, together with the debts of his grandfather, in 1817. He was a scholar and co-author with his friend Richard Colt Hoare of the *History of Modern Wiltshire*, but lacked any ability to reduce the family expenditure. He decided to live abroad, thus avoiding imprisonment for debt, and hoped Earl Grosvenor might rent Wardour from him. When the Earl declined, George Mortimer made an offer. Arundell was apparently horrified: after all, Mortimer was merely a cloth manufacturer.

I cannot accede to it. I am humbled but not so low as to put a Scotch weaver in my House, sooner shall it fall piecemeal to ruin. Sir Joseph Radcliffe's Scotch servants were dirty enough. Mr Mortimer's will be a bad edition of his.⁴⁹

Arundell settled with his wife in Rome, pursued by his creditors until his death in 1831.⁵⁰

Though he had no legal right, Benett proceeded to engage his friend John Peniston to measure and value the Abbey remains in preparation for their sale. Peniston wrote to the Shaftesbury solicitor Philip Chitty in the autumn of 1827 worrying about vandals: 'much of the glass and some portions of it the most valuable having been destroyed between our first survey and final valuation.' He was 'at a loss to say what price should be fixed for the metallic [sic] content of the fallen tower'.⁵¹ The architect Edward Blore, engaged by the Seymours to enlarge Knoyle House a few miles to the west, was interested in buying stone and lead.⁵² The sale of items from the Abbey was advertised in April 1828:

materials from this most splendid building are now on sale ... the splendid range of plate glass and painted windows in St Michael's Gallery ... would to a gentleman fitting up a Picture Gallery or Library be a most valuable acquisition ... builders of Churches or Chapels may also find windows, stone architraves, mullions and Gothic Ornaments well calculated for such edifices.⁵³

George Mortimer, meanwhile, was getting on with completing his mill and improving the Pavilion. In August 1828 Peniston asked Benett what had happened to the statue of Alderman Beckford which had survived the fall and was once in the Great Hall of the Abbey (see [Chapter 4](#), [Figure 4.8](#)). If he had called at the Pavilion he would have found the statue and a number of pieces of furniture, plate, glass and fixtures formerly in the Abbey. Mortimer declared his uncle had given him permission after the collapse of the tower to take away anything he required.⁵⁴ He eventually sold the statue back to Beckford, who then presented it to the Ironmongers' Company.⁵⁵



Fig. 5.7 The Pavilion.

31488, RIBA Collections.

The Pavilion was enlarged (Figure 5.7), with a second floor added to the offices along with a larger portico. There is some indication of how Mortimer adapted pieces from Fonthill Abbey in the sale particulars of 1829:

Two Drawing Rooms, finished in Oak, the Chimney Pieces very handsome and of pure Statuary, the Windows of Plate Glass, the Folding Doors of massive Oak, and completed in the Gothic Taste (these form a portion of the valuable Relics from the Abbey); the Library ... is tastefully designed, the Ceiling humbly imitating the one at the Abbey; the Dining Parlour ... ornamented by very rich and ancient Tapestry, Plate Glass Windows, and very fine specimens (from the Ruins) of ancient stained Glass.⁵⁶

It also appears that Mortimer built a substantial stable block on the hillside to the south of the Pavilion. This is again described in the 1829 sale particulars but was not included in John Rutter's map drawn up in 1823. The particulars describe the 'Carriage yard ... well placed and away from the Pavilion ... standing for Four Carriages, Nine Stall Stable, Servants' Apartments over, and Harness Room, large loose Stall ... Erected of Stone and covered with Slate.' The adjoining farm yard was 'adapted also to the exercise of the Horses.' Mortimer had built a new bridge at the north end of the lake, inscribed '1826 GM'; his mill was finished by the autumn of 1826.⁵⁷

Mortimer's intention was to make money. There appears to have been no thought for the picturesque quality of the site. The complex was large – 'one of the

most compact and valuable Clothing Establishments in the Kingdom' – according to the sale particulars, erected 'at an Expense exceeding £20,000.'

The largest building was of stone, 105 feet by 35 feet, and six storeys high, containing three water wheels, gear work, stocks, washers, indigo pots, gigs, cutters, carding machines, scribbling machines, abb-mules and warp-mules. There was a wash house, also of stone, and a dye house 136 feet by 14 feet, containing a steam boiler. Another building, 172 feet by 21 and five storeys high, contained a drying house, a press room, store rooms and weaving rooms. Close by was a six-bedroom house with its own garden and orchard and a further 24 'uniform' cottage houses. Each workman in the new cottages was allocated a portion of land 'in order that he may accustom his family to the cultivation of the soil'⁵⁸ and therefore not be solely reliant on work in the factory.

John Britton described the factory in his *Graphical and Literary History of Fonthill*:

... every improvement in machinery as applicable to the manufacture of superfine cloths, was introduced ... The quantity of cloth manufactured was about from forty to fifty ends per week; all the work of which, from the very first to the last process, as done on the spot, and employed of men, women and children, no more than 200 persons, although, without the latest improvements, it would have required 1000 hands.⁵⁹

But the factory was not a success and by 1829 clothmaking had ended.⁶⁰ Mortimer's first attempt to sell the mill, reported in the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 16 April 1829, was a failure, so shortly after it was let:

Replete with every convenience for conducting and carrying on every branch of the manufacture of superfine woollen cloth and kerseymere under the immediate eye of the occupier. No expense has been spared by the proprietor in rendering these mills the completest in the West of England. The supply of water is never failing, and is capable of producing double the power now used by the erection of an additional water wheel, and possesses the superior advantage of never being subject to floods, with a fall of upwards of thirty feet. The present power is equal to 50 ends per week.⁶¹

But again no one was interested.

Mortimer then decided to move permanently to London. He arranged the auction on 29 October 1829 of the whole of his estate, including the Pavilion, even though the actual ownership of the property was still being discussed by Chancery. He had written to John Benett on 29 August 1829 from Fonthill Park to ask a favour: 'Having avail'd myself of the professional assistance of Mr George Robins in the disposal of this Estate he has suggested that as it will probably create some

excitement and the visitors from afar may be anxious to see the Abbey, that I should wish the favour of you to indulge their curiosity.’⁶²

The property was divided into three lots. John Benett acquired Lawn Farm and 107 acres of land for £5,000, adding this to the Fonthill Abbey estate (which he had not yet paid for).⁶³ The Pavilion and surrounding park, some 1,000 acres, were bought by a London haberdasher, James Morrison, for £35,000; he also bought the cloth mill, cottages and 39 acres of land for £12,000.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare summed up this final melancholy break-up of the Fonthill estate: ‘[the] magnificent mansion [Splendens], once the seat of science, hospitality, and comfort, but now reduced to one small fragment; its fine transparent lake, disfigured by an unseemly cloth manufactory erected on its banks; its pleasure grounds neglected; its stately abbey in ruins; and an extensive property parcelled out and dismembered.’⁶⁴

6

Fonthill in the nineteenth century

Caroline Dakers

Part one: James Morrison at the Pavilion

Fonthill begins now to look very fine, some Gentlemen were here from London last week and went from here to Stourhead, when they returned they told me that Stourhead was not worthy to be compared to Fonthill.¹

James Morrison (Figure 6.1), the London haberdasher who purchased the Pavilion and surrounding park from George Mortimer, was born in 1789 in Middle Wallop, some 11 miles east of Salisbury.² He was the son of a successful innkeeper who benefited from the turnpiking of the London to Salisbury road, which passed by his hostelry – the Lower George – conveniently situated on a crossroads in the Wallops. Morrison was apprenticed to a haberdasher in London. He proved to be both hardworking and imaginative in business, becoming a partner in Joseph Todd's business in Fore Street, Moorgate and marrying Todd's daughter Mary Ann. By 1830 he was sole owner of the business, which had an annual turnover of nearly £2 million; he had also begun to form a collection of contemporary art including paintings by Constable and Turner. At the General Election in 1830 he was elected MP for St Ives, joining the radical wing of the Whigs. Fonthill was the first country property he purchased, as both a financial and a social asset. Further purchases of property in England and Scotland, the continuing expansion of the Fore Street business, investments in North America, and the acquisition of important Old Masters meant that at his death in 1857 he was probably the richest commoner in Britain.³

Morrison was not to become the undisputed owner of Fonthill for many years. The delay did not prevent him from transforming the Pavilion and surrounding parkland into an attractive gentleman's seat, but the legal implications were complex: the death of Farquhar was followed in December 1832 by the death of his nephew George Mortimer. Mortimer had auctioned his part of the estate (even though his uncle's estate was not settled) on 29 October 1829. It was bought by



Fig. 6.1 Henry William Pickersgill, *James Morrison*, 1824.

Image of the painting by kind permission of the trustees of the Walter Morrison collection held at Sudeley Castle.

James Morrison for £35,000, minus £500 'in consideration of Mr Morrison agreeing not further to investigate the Title'. Mortimer, however, was entitled to the Park estate only when he paid a balance of £18,000 and the interest which had accrued since the 1826 contract with his uncle. Consequently, Morrison's initial payment of £14,000, which he made on 18 September 1830, was a mortgage 'to pay off the

balance of purchase money to Farquhar's Estate so as to get the legal estate of the property into his own name'.⁴

Two further payments were made by Morrison of £1,500 each, but then in December 1832 Mortimer died in his brother James's house in Pentonville with the Farquhar case (and his own) still unsettled. Morrison thus had to make a new arrangement with Mortimer's widow and the rest of Farquhar's heirs.⁵ He agreed to pay James Mortimer to advance Ann, the widow, £1,000, plus £200 per quarter until the legal situation was resolved. This was not until the final settlement in Chancery on 6 December 1838. Morrison had to wait even longer, until 24 March 1842, for the deed of covenant to be drawn up between him and William Beckford for the production of deeds relating to the Fonthill estates.⁶ This was followed in 1844 by the final judgement. Morrison's agent James Combes wrote on 19 November 'I have the pleasure of informing you that the whole of Mr Morrison's claim against the Estate of the late Mr Mortimer has been this day allowed by the Master.'⁷

In London Morrison had engaged the architect and designer John Buonarotti Papworth for a number of years, first designing handkerchiefs (an expensive commodity in the early nineteenth century) for the Fore Street warehouse, then working on Morrison's villa on Balham Hill and commercial buildings in Fore Street and Milton Street, Moorgate. At Fonthill, Papworth's commission was extensive:

[He] effected general repairs and decorations to the house, and designed furniture, with the arrangement of pictures, and works of art. His attention was, however, principally devoted to the improvement of the extensive grounds, including plantations, new roads, the bridge at the head of the lake, the quarry gardens, etc., entrances, lodges, gates, lamps, garden pedestals, and vases; seats, and other embellishments.⁸

The letter Papworth wrote during his first visit provides a glimpse not just of Morrison's estate but of the ruined Abbey and grounds. Morrison had himself written 'you will like to see this wretched specimen of bad taste and the ruins of one of the finest in the kingdom in what remains of the Abbey'.⁹ Papworth for his part 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 – This morning, after some small business, I have been on the Lake ... Fonthill is a beautiful place – but does not come up to those ideas that from recent descriptions (George Robins's, Christie's, and Phillips's, 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 Centaur ... I am about to have another visit by myself to the Abbey this afternoon – to explore it in quiet – No wonder it tumbled down – the wonder would have been it should stand at all – it stood until it was finished, and sold, and so it might have been thought to do its duty.¹⁰

According to the sale particulars of 1829, Morrison acquired ‘all the pictures furniture household goods and implements of household and all chattels and effects articles and things whatsoever under every description in and about the said premises.’ However, as no inventory was ever made there is no firm evidence as to the contents of the Pavilion.

Papworth was immediately tasked with making the Pavilion a comfortable country home for Morrison’s expanding family: his sixth child was born in 1830; the eleventh and final child was born in 1842. Drains and pipes were dealt with first (March 1832). His agent or steward, James Combes, a local surveyor and commissioner, oversaw much of the work, interpreting Papworth’s instructions, directing stonemasons and carpenters.

Papworth made few changes to the outside of the Pavilion. He enlarged the ground floor windows, added decorative urns to the balcony and fitted external canopies over the windows and balcony (Figure 6.2).

Inside, however, Papworth’s work was extensive (Figure 6.3): all the rooms were redecorated, new floors and ceilings were designed and chimney pieces added.

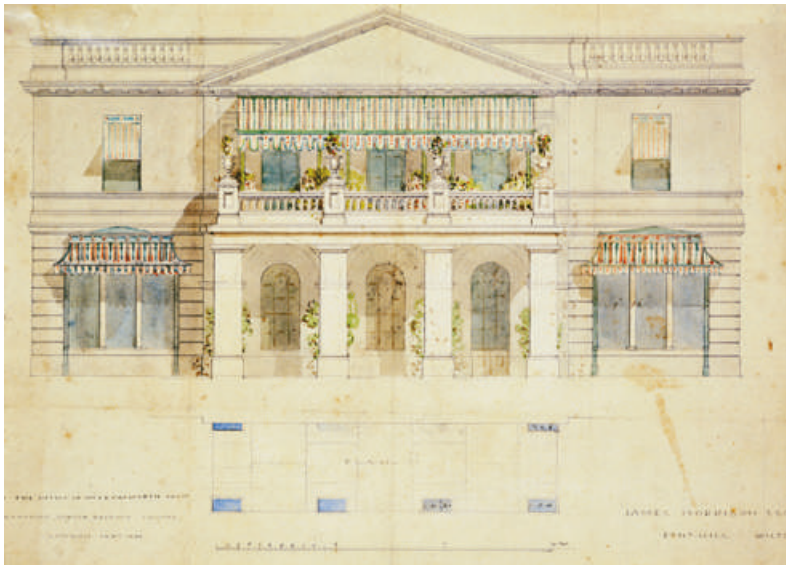


Fig. 6.2 Design by J. B. Papworth for alteration of portico to the Pavilion.

13469, RIBA Collections.

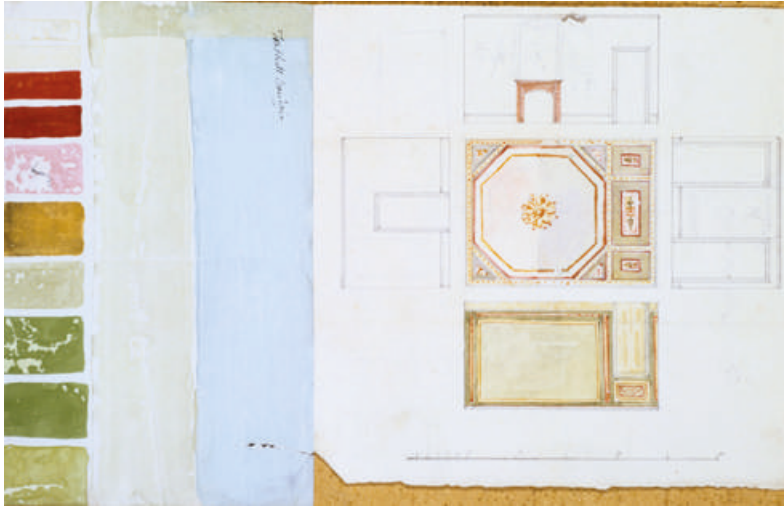


Fig. 6.3 Design by J. B. Papworth for alterations to the interior of the Pavilion, plan of ceiling of Mary Ann Morrison's boudoir.

13158, RIBA Collections.

The only description that survives of the interior is provided by Mrs Andrew Stevenson, wife of the United States envoy in London, who visited in 1836: 'it contains twenty-six rooms some of them very rich, tasteful and beautiful beyond anything I have seen except in the Palaces of the Nobility ... Mrs Morrison told me that the ceilings of my chamber, dressing room, and the one adjoining had cost 800 pounds.'¹¹ The Snells and the Seddons made furniture designed by Papworth; the Seddons made curtains of green cloth trimmed with gold for the drawing room, curtains of scarlet and white cloth, lace and tapestry for the dining room and curtains of cinnamon and gold for the library. Crimson and gold prevailed; also highly ornamented tables with tops of coloured marbles, bronze statuettes, Etruscan vases and antique marble urns.¹²

Papworth planned a new route for the public road, moving it away from the Pavilion and much closer to the lake. A balustrade was constructed in front of the house to provide further privacy. Alderman Beckford's northern archway, visible from the coach road and through which everyone travelling south to Tisbury passed, was enhanced with walls and substantial piers built either side of the approach, suggesting Morrison was making a statement about his ownership of the estate. Papworth also worked on the south entrance opposite the Beckford Arms, designing a lodge of stone and thatch. However his proposal to fix elaborately carved heads to the gate-piers was rejected by Morrison (see [Figure 6.4](#)). The simpler design on the right-hand pier was chosen.

When working at country properties, Papworth was always particular about the views across the park, imagining himself inside rooms and looking out. At



Fig. 6.4 Design by J. B. Papworth for south entrance to park.

84604, RIBA Collections.

Fonthill he focused on the view looking from the Pavilion towards the north end of the lake, enhancing the southern side of Mortimer's bridge and adding tall vases either side of the 'cascade' (see [Chapter 10](#), [Figure 10.13](#)). Combes wrote to Morrison 'Mr P is much pleased with the new waterfall and so in fact is every one that has seen it ... the view from the House northward is totally changed, I never saw a greater difference in a landscape.'¹³ There was no bridge across the lake further south but Papworth designed a landing stage on the far side ([Figure 6.5](#)) to which the Morrison children could sail or row in their boats (also designed by Papworth).

The grottoes at Fonthill (see [Chapter 14](#)) were repaired and Papworth acquired inhabitants for some, including Polyphemus ([Figure 6.6](#)), Acis and Galatea from the sale in 1843 of the stock of the Coade Artificial Stone Manufactory. The trio cost 16 guineas. In 1799 it had formed the 'coup de theatre' at the Coade Gallery, with a fulsome description in the visitor's guidebook:

this stupendous design is conceived at the moment when Polyphemus discovers, from the summit of the rock, the nymph Galatea with his rival Acis, upon whom, in his fury, he hurls a fragment of stone, and kills him. This work occupies a space of 20 feet in height by 12 ft in width, the Polyphemus is a statue of 10 ft. 6 ins, a cave is formed in the rock, at the entrance of it lays the Acis and Galatea, much larger than life.¹⁴



Fig. 6.5 Design by J. B. Papworth for landing stage on Fonthill Lake.
84607, RIBA Collections.



Fig. 6.6 John de Vaere, *Monumental Coade stone fragment of the torso of Polyphemus*, ca. 1800.

© Christie's Images Limited.

There were further general improvements in the park: the hothouses were repaired in Beckford's kitchen garden and exotic American trees were planted, a gift from one of Morrison's partners.¹⁵ But, although Morrison was a radical Whig, he did little to improve the condition of his tenants. Papworth had written on the efficacy of estate improvements in *Rural Residences* (published in 1818):

few embellishments of an estate are more interesting than those small buildings which compose the farm-offices and residences for the active, the superannuated, or other servants of the domain, particularly if they are designed in a manner conformable to the surrounding scenery, and distributed about the property with judgment. Such buildings, neat, clean, and in good repair, become testimonies of that liberality and care of his dependants that have always been distinguishing features in the character of a British gentleman.¹⁶

Morrison commissioned only a handful of dwellings at Fonthill. He built more estate cottages, however, on two much larger properties which he acquired later at Cholsey and Basildon Park both in Berkshire; he moved to Basildon in 1844, leaving his second son Alfred at Fonthill.

At Fonthill Papworth designed a gardener's cottage inside William Beckford's kitchen garden and a rustic house for chickens with a room for women and a nursing porch just outside the garden (identified in the surveys carried out by David Roberts; see [Chapter 9, Figures 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3](#)), as well as two houses for gamekeepers on Great and Little Ridge.

The cottage on Great Ridge, four miles from the Pavilion, was a challenge. Combes told Morrison the plan was 'foolish': 'it will be very foolish if Mr Papworth goes to great expense at Great Ridge, but what his ideas are I know not – it will be an expensive place to build at on account of Carriage and water'.¹⁷ The foundations were nonetheless laid in June 1840. Now called Penning House, the dwelling was intended for a gamekeeper but served also as a destination for Morrison and his guests, as Papworth explained: 'to have a room – a reception ... a room 15 by 15 which might have some old carved oak embellishments some Colord Glass – in fact a little decorative quackery might make it a tempting object for a morning or evening ride or drive to employ visitors two or three hours'.¹⁸ This reception room, labelled 'Mr Morrison's Room' on the plan, looked 'towards Fonthill Abbey', so the carved oak and coloured glass could well have been Papworth referencing both the ruins and the miscellaneous remnants which George Mortimer had fixed in the Pavilion.

The cottage on Little Ridge stood across the lake from the Pavilion. Papworth's first design was considered too ornate (and expensive) by Morrison, so the later, plainer version ([Figure 6.7](#)) was built. James Lampard, tenant of Ashley Wood Farm, handled the submission of estimates. Among these, Mr Fitt was successful:

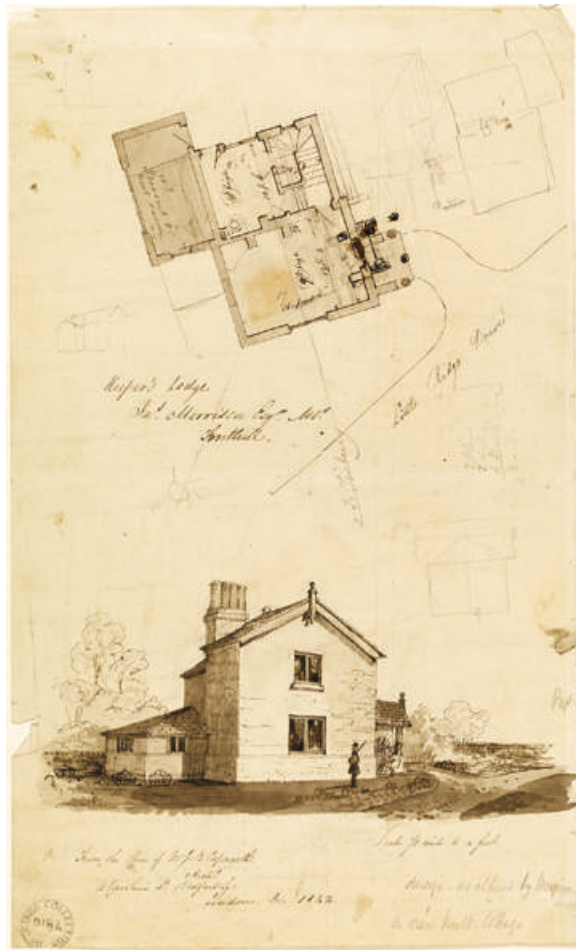


Fig. 6.7 Design by J. B. Papworth for gamekeeper's lodge, Little Ridge, Fonthill. 84615, RIBA Collections.

I have sent for Mr Fitt and he has examined the plan of the House, and Ground where it is to be built, Mr Fitt said that Mr Papworth's plan is all right. We all admire the Place thinking it will be a very pretty Cottage in my opinion & the spot that Mr Papworth looked out will be a nice one for the House – it is 17 yards long from the Steep of the Hill, where the House is to be built, to the road, wont [sic] you want a small portion on this length of Ground for a yard behind the House as well as a Flower Garden in Front.¹⁹

At Fonthill Bishop Papworth was commissioned by Morrison to design a school. Once again, Papworth's initial designs were scaled back for economy. But his ideas about the site reveal his interest in place, as well as the welfare of the pupils:

The School Room is designed to have a parochial character; as the site is proposed to be the Green, near the Church, it will combine with its style, in perhaps a sufficient degree. As the spot is at the junction of crossing roads, it will be an object seen on every face: perhaps if the corners of the building be placed to the Cardinal points or near to them it will become more picturesque or ornamental, than in any other way, and it is desirable that the sun in its course should suit every face of the building for the benefit of warmth and ventilation.²⁰

Morrison's wife Mary Ann took responsibility for running a school at Fonthill Gifford using the old woollen factory buildings.²¹ She paid for a school teacher; £47 in 1835. This was before the Marquess of Westminster bought the Abbey estate and the village. Mrs Andrew Stephenson recalled Mary Ann hoping in a few years 'to be able to ameliorate the condition of her parish but Mr Beckford has left her much to do'.²²

Indeed conditions for the labourers in and around Fonthill were not good. One of the most famous of the Swing Riots took place close to the estate in November 1830. A 'mob' attacked threshing machines owned by John Benett of Pythouse and also the abandoned machines left by Mortimer in the woollen factory below Fonthill Lake. The Hindon troop was called up; Benett was hit by a stone, there were a number of arrests, 14 men were transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and two imprisoned with hard labour. Immediately after the 'Pythouse Battle' *The Times* noted:

At Fonthill some thrashers are still working at 7s per week ... The mill at Fonthill has been unoccupied for nearly two years, and very few persons indeed are employed about the grounds. Indeed the whole place seems fast sinking into ruin. The cottages are fast decaying, and the broken windows indicate the extreme poverty of the once prosperous and happy peasantry of Mr Beckford.²³

The garden historian and journalist John Claudius Loudon, visiting in 1835, found conditions close by in Hindon no better. Once more, many of the labourers had formerly been employed by Beckford:

On arriving, at the miserable little town of Hindon ... without trade or manufacture and with no main road passing through it, it contains only a few houses, the largest of which assume the character of inns; but of these inns the best does not even take in a newspaper... the inhabitants are in the greatest misery.²⁴

Morrison's annual gifts of money, faggots and meat must have been welcome; he also offered financial support to labourers willing to emigrate to Canada and found

employment for a few at his Fore Street warehouse. But tenants on his land would have to wait for his second son Alfred to inherit the estate before their living conditions significantly improved.

Part two: John Benett and Fonthill Abbey

Of all desolate scenes there are none so desolate as those which we now see as ruins, and which were lately the abode of splendour and magnificence ... If you wish for a sight of all that is melancholy, all that is desolate, visit a modern ruin.²⁵

John Benett was the main target in the Pythouse Battle of 1830. His labourers, according to Lord Arundell, were the poorest and most oppressed in the entire country. His acquisition of the Abbey estate proved to be a foolhardy action, bringing little if no financial gain to his already stretched finances. Like Morrison, he was not, as yet, legally the owner. But once he had sold off many of the fallen 'materials' in 1828, he engaged in some desultory building work.

James Combes reported to Morrison in 1832 that Benett was 'proceeding to convert the East wing into a Villa & making offices to it – he is making abutments also to the north great [?] tower] formerly proposed as a Chapel with a view to keep it up'.²⁶

John Rutter described the activities to J. B. Nicholls in 1835. 'The present owner, Mr Benett MP for Wilts is gradually connecting the Brown Parlour and Yellow Rooms into a residence of some sort by the addition of offices and other buildings – but these proceed very gradually and no part is at present inhabited.'²⁷ William Beckford visited his old property without warning in 1835. According to Rutter he 'expressed much approbation of its appearance as a ruin'.²⁸ James Morrison's son Charles met him on the Fonthill estate:

I don't know whether you have heard that Beckford came over from Bath some days ago to look at his old residence. He recognised the swans, disapproved of the new portico & other embellishments on the side of the house [the Pavilion], & asked whether Mr Benetts new building at the Abbey was not intended as workhouse for the use of the Poor Law Commissioners.²⁹

When Loudon visited the Abbey in 1835 he was appalled by the state of things.

All the interesting parts of the grounds ... are in such a state of neglect, as hardly to be recognised for what they were in 1807. To preserve the abbey from falling was impossible, from the nature of its construction; but it is deeply to be regretted that the grounds have fallen into hands which, from

some cause or other, could suffer the ruin to extend to them ... 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 the 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.³⁰

The settlement of Farquhar's estates in 1838 had been a relief for James Morrison, but it put Benett in an awkward position. Not only was he expected to find the required moneys first agreed with Farquhar, but he was also accountable for profits from selling part of the Abbey ruins and timber. According to his biographer Robert Moody, 'following an action in the Chancery Court, Benett agreed that a total of £114,380.18s.7d was due under the two contracts that had been entered into'. The sum that was to be paid to settle the court proceedings amounted to £95,518.0s.11d, and upon payment of this Benett would accept a conveyance of the property.³¹ Benett, of course, had nothing like this amount, but he may have been trying to effect a subsale of all or part of the estate.

Morrison's agent James Combes was gleeful, writing to Morrison on 20 March: 'as soon as Mr B saw that he could not wriggle out of the Abbey contract without being accountable for what he had sold thereupon, that moment he was off ... he is full of spite and malice, being disappointed at not grabbing something out of his concern.'³² Benett was forced to consider 'selling' the land he had never actually paid for.

He approached Morrison. Would he buy the Abbey estate? However, they were unable to agree a price, Morrison noting in his diary for 6 June 1838 that he had 'decided to stop negotiations with Benett'. He wrote on 7 July 1838: 'My Dear Benett, As I see no possibility of ever agreeing upon terms for the property at Fonthill I think we had better not pursue the subject any further ... I regret that our views respecting the value of the Estate are so different as to make it appear to me impossible that we should agree.'³³

Benett had no option but to auction the Abbey estate, including the village of Fonthill Gifford, on 30 October 1838. Tickets for viewing were available from Messrs Farrer and Parkinson, 66 Lincoln's Inn Fields and Mr Phillips of 73 Bond Street. The particulars provide a useful snapshot of the condition and extent of the estate, bearing in mind the usual estate agent hyperbole; the estate was 'distinguished for the fertility of the soil, the salubrity of the air, and the purity of the

water'; the village of Fonthill Gifford was 'picturesque'.³⁴ Benett's work at the ruins was noted:

The buildings now remaining of the Abbey and the detached erections being covered with good copper and lead, and the timbers principally of oak, with the large mass of applicable materials, are together of considerable value. The present Owner has recently expended a large Sum of Money in the erection of Offices and other improvements, which are not yet finished.

The auction, however, failed to attract a buyer; on 31 December James Combes told Morrison 'a gentleman has been looking over the Abbey lands to make offer', but again nothing came of it.³⁵

Morrison's eldest son Charles was relieved, writing to his father on 9 October 1840 'I'm glad to learn that there is little probability of a determined effort to sell the Abbey this year, because I shd be glad that you shd buy it some time or other – but certainly not until you have fully covered by the gradual accumulation of income or the quicker process of sale, the whole of your investments & cash advances.' Charles was concerned about whether his father could pay for the Basildon estate and also honour loans of £123,000 from his bank Overend and Gurney.³⁶

Besides, Morrison had other priorities. He was keen to buy more productive land to extend his Fonthill estate. In 1838 he negotiated with Robert Grosvenor (the 1st Marquess of Westminster since 1831), to buy the property Westminster had acquired from Farquhar in 1826. This comprised parts of Hindon, Chicklade and Berwick St Leonard. Neither could agree the value of the property but they eventually settled in Chancery on a figure of £39,000.³⁷ James Combes was aware that John Benett would be upset at the sale. 'Mr Benett will be sadly mortified at your having Berwick [St Leonard], for this was his principal reliance for making up an estate for somebody, at least this was to be held out as a bait, viz stating that Berwick might be added to Fonthill.'³⁸

At about the same time Morrison also bought Place Farm including land south of Fonthill Lake from Lord Arundell. His holdings at Fonthill now totalled 3,254 acres; the value had increased from the purchase price of £35,000 to over £82,000. The Arundell purchase was symbolic. Beckford would 'have given almost any money to have been put into the position in which you now stand, but Lord Arundell would never sell the land to him'.³⁹

Beckford made a final visit to Fonthill in 1843:

William Beckford lived on at Bath till 1844, and about the year 1843, Alfred Morrison walked up one afternoon to the terrace to look at the abbey, a ruin since its great tower fell in upon it in 1825. Another visitor was there before him. 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 hill-tops. The old man and the young man looked at it in silence, and then each returned to his own place.⁴⁰

Meanwhile the Abbey continued to suffer from both the elements and pilferers. When Henry Venn Lansdown visited in 1844 he crawled all over the ruins, discovering the statue of St Anthony of Padua, Beckford's patron saint, by Joseph Theakston (see Figure 21.2). Its condition summed up the pathetic scene: 'St Anthony still holds out his right hand as if to protect the sylvan and mute inhabitants of these groves that here once found secure shelter from the cruel gun and still more cruel dog. But he is tottering in his niche, and when the wind is high is seen to rock, as if hi[s] reign were drawing to a close.'⁴¹ The same year, 1844, the Abbey estate at last attracted the attention of a serious buyer, Richard, Earl Grosvenor, the eldest son and heir of the Marquess of Westminster.

Richard and his wife Elizabeth Leveson-Gower 'belonged to the highest ranks of the Whig aristocracy, and both were immensely wealthy'. Elizabeth's father the 1st Duke of Sutherland was, according to Charles Greville, 'a Leviathan of wealth ... the richest individual who ever died'; he was also notorious for his part in the Highland clearances.⁴² In 1831 the Marquess of Westminster offered Richard a country house on his estate at Motcombe, Dorset. Elizabeth thought it:

momentous ... we were to have it for our abode ... we shall be with Lord and Lady Grosvenor at Eaton just as much as we wish and shall have Motcombe for a resource and retreat for a few weeks in the year alone which is a very great agreement provided we can manage the expense which I daresay we shall, and it will be a great amusement to put it in order and live in such a pretty country.⁴³

There was already a 'respectable Gentlemanly place adapted for the residence of a Man of modest Fortune', called Palmer's Place, and this was extensively altered for their use.

The couple spent their first summer in residence in 1833. Two years later the Marquess gave all his Dorset property to his son:

'Belgrave [Richard Earl Belgrave] received a letter from Lord Westminster putting the Dorsetshire properties wholly into his hands, for rough or smooth, richer or poorer, better or worse, and independent of his allowance, which was a most welcome and agreeable piece of news, giving so much facility to B. [Lord Belgrave] to execute all the improvements he meditates.'⁴⁴

The couple embarked on an ambitious building programme across all their estates in Dorset. The village of Motcombe was practically rebuilt; everyone benefited, especially the local builders.⁴⁵ A school was planned, to Elizabeth's delight: 'only imagine we are going to begin a real one [school] at Motcombe and I have got a real live mistress engaged from the National School at Westminster [run by the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church] and I want to prevent her finding out, if I possibly can, that I know nothing of any rudiments at all.'⁴⁶

Meanwhile the Marquess continued to acquire property in Shaftesbury on behalf of his son. James Combes kept Morrison up to date with the news, writing on 22 March 1840 that 'The Marquess of Westminster has been buying considerable property at Shaftesbury subject to a valuation, I have to fix the Price upon two of the purchases consisting of about 200 Acres of land and a lot of Houses – it will be useless for any one to dispute his nomination to the Borough.'

Then the Marquess's son approached Benett about buying the Abbey estate, with the intention of persuading his father to provide the money. Apparently he had no idea his father had sold Berwick St Leonard and other parts of his Wiltshire lands to James Morrison, thus reducing the value of the whole property. Benett wrote to an unknown recipient:

Lord Grosvenor was with me yesterday on the Fonthill matter, as we feared, he was quite ignorant of his Father's having sold the Berwick Estate to Mr Morrison [in 1838]. This he had not heard till he came to me. This circumstance he fears may make a vast difference in regard to the desire of Lord Westminster to possess Fonthill which desire he has long entertained, and Lord Grosvenor when he last saw me, and before his knowledge of the sale of Berwick, felt no doubt of his being able to prevail on him Lord Westminster to do. Notwithstanding this sale of Berwick Lord Grosvenor said it was his anxious wish to purchase Fonthill and that his Father should do so for him, and that he would apply to him immediately for that purpose.

Benett's irritation at Morrison's gain is clearly revealed in his final comment about his neighbour: 'Mr Morrison you see has done this very cleverly, by which he has surrounded my estate [the Abbey] on two sides, but should he not now get my estate he will be defeated of ever making any thing comfortable of his House and estate – so that it cuts both ways.'⁴⁷

A deal was struck, Benett writing to his London lawyer John Parkinson on 22 August 1844: 'I have agreed to sell the Fonthill estate to LG [Lord Grosvenor] on certain conditions which will I think be approved by yourself – viz that Messrs Coutts will allow the money to remain on Mortgage of this and the Semley Estate for a time at 4 per ct. Allow him also to pay off by instalments as may be agreed as a settlement as soon as possible.'⁴⁸ Grosvenor was to pay £89,500 for 2,156 acres with the advowson of Fonthill Gifford. He also requested that his name might

remain a secret for the time being, 'though as he said Combes [Morrison's agent] knew it the secret cannot be much longer kept'.⁴⁹

On 17 February 1845 the Marquess of Westminster died. Combes commented 'Mr Benett sold the Abbey just in the right time'.⁵⁰ Rather bizarrely Benett kept possession of the model of Fonthill Abbey made by James Wyatt for William Beckford.⁵¹

At the death of his father, Richard Earl Grosvenor now became the 2nd Marquess of Westminster. He was one of the richest men in Britain. Only Moor Park passed to his younger brother Robert, otherwise he inherited all his father's property, 'the immense and still growing Grosvenor fortune and estates'.⁵² Grosvenor House in London and Eaton in Cheshire became his principal town and country seats.

He wasted no time trying to persuade James Morrison to sell back to him the Berwick St Leonard estate and properties in Hindon,⁵³ but Morrison refused. Benett, however, was willing to sell more land for which Coutts & Co. received £95,000 in March 1845. Benett's own debt to his bank was thereby reduced to *only* £70,000 (over £7 million in today's money). Meanwhile, the new Marquess was earning himself a reputation for meanness:

The Marquis of Westminster has been down at Motcombe, he went down on the outside the Mail on Wednesday night, was met (so Shaftesbury people told me) by a man with a wheel barrow to take his luggage, gave the Guard one shilling, at which the Guard demurred [sic], and said 'my Lord your servants pay me more than this' he reply'd 'I cant help it' and walked on – It is now noised abroad that he is the purchaser of Fonthill.⁵⁴

A letter from the Shaftesbury solicitor Philip Chitty to Morrison explained he had no idea of the Marquess's intentions now he owned Eaton, Motcombe (Figure 6.8) and Fonthill: 'Nothing is as yet known here I believe as to Lord Westminster's intentions with reference to Motcombe except that it is said His Lordship is partial to Dorsetshire and that he is not likely to make Eaton his principal residence'.⁵⁵ The rumours were correct. Motcombe did become the Marquess's principal residence, at least for him and his family; this comfortable, if not beautiful house, was preferred by both the Marquess and his wife to either the palatial Eaton or their town house in Grosvenor Square.

So why had the Marquess decided to buy the Abbey estate, and why did he decide to build a new house there? Perhaps he was looking ahead to the inheritance and occupation of his sons. Hugh, the eldest, would inherit Eaton and the London estates but Gilbert and Richard would need their own properties. Dowries also had to be found for the remaining unmarried daughters; agricultural estates, particularly with 'improved' dwellings, were reliable sources of income. The Marquess was in the habit of repairing and building on all his estates: cottages,



Fig. 6.8 Motcombe House.

Private collection in Somerset.

schools, churches, farm-houses and, in London, terraces and mews. Under his care the total income from his estates rose to some £200,000 per annum;⁵⁶ by 1865 his London estate income alone reached £96,000.⁵⁷ The imminent arrival of the railway, with connections from Gillingham, Semley and Tisbury to London, would increase the value of all his southern property; even the trees at Fonthill, planted by Beckford, were a valuable commodity.

The Marquess approached the architect William Burn in 1846 to design a new house on the Abbey estate. However, it was his neighbour James Morrison at the Pavilion who actually began the next wave of building at Fonthill.

Part three: James Morrison and David Brandon at the Pavilion

James Morrison was certainly motivated by his increasing family to buy more land. In 1846 he had seven sons aged between four and 29 plus four daughters. In 1838 he had bought the Basildon estate in Berkshire for nearly £100,000.⁵⁸ The grand Palladian house designed by John Carr became his principal country residence from 1844. It was considerably nearer to London than Fonthill, and connected by the newly-opened Great Western Railway. Morrison divided his important and valuable collection of paintings between Basildon and his town-house in Harley Street, leaving only a few pieces at Fonthill. Basildon was designed to be an appropriate inheritance for his eldest son Charles, if and when he retired from making his own fortune in the City. The Pavilion at Fonthill was planned to be the home of his second son Alfred, but only after considerable alterations and additions.

Sadly, Morrison had fallen out with J. B. Papworth in 1844⁵⁹ over a new stable block at Basildon and eventually engaged the architect David Brandon to complete works both inside and outside the Basildon mansion. Brandon's first piece of work, in

May 1846, was to inspect the church at Lower Basildon,⁶⁰ in particular the memorials to Sir Francis Sykes and his family, the previous owners of the estate.

Meanwhile, at Fonthill, the first architect who was approached by James Morrison to follow Papworth appears to have been Owen Jones. A letter from Morrison's land agent James Combes dated 4 April 1845 states 'I intend to remain at home till after your new architect comes.' The commission, however, was for an ornamental dairy and cottage, not the transformation of the Pavilion. Jones and Morrison already knew one another. Early in his career Jones had worked with William Wallen, Morrison's surveyor at Fore Street; his 'Alhambra' drawings, shown at the Royal Academy between 1835 and 1841, brought him to the attention of Morrison (who referred to him as 'Alhambra Jones' in his diary) and he was one of those invited to Mary Ann Morrison's special 'at home' in 1839. All of the artists at the party were patronised by Morrison, including Turner, Charles Eastlake, George Jones, Sir Francis Chantrey, Clarkson Stanfield and William Collins.

The design for the dairy and cottage was exhibited at the Royal Academy and reviewed in the *Civil Engineer and Architects' Journal*, July 1845, p. 215; also in the *Athenaeum*, 17 May 1845: 'He here gives us a modified version of some Alhambra ideas in a subject that readily lends itself to some play of fancy ... we cannot better express our opinion of it than by terming it a pleasing architectural Anacreonatic.'⁶¹ The dairy was never built and the design is lost, but letters between Jones and Morrison suggest there was no acrimony. Jones asked for five pounds to cover his travelling expenses 'as I never make any charge for works that are not approved of'. Morrison sent him a cheque for 20 pounds.⁶² Coincidentally, Jones would be invited back to Fonthill by Alfred Morrison in 1862, after Alfred saw Jones's designs, including the dairy, at the International Exhibition of that year.⁶³ Meanwhile David Brandon was engaged to enlarge the Pavilion to make it fit for a young gentleman who would inherit a fortune when his father died.

Brandon practised from 77 Great Russell Street in Bloomsbury, in partnership with the better known architect Thomas Henry Wyatt (1807–80) whose second cousin James Wyatt had designed Fonthill Abbey. T. H. Wyatt's country house practice had grown to be one of the biggest in the country and by 1838 he needed a partner to share the workload; he worked with Brandon until 1851.⁶⁴ Brandon was engaged by James Morrison while Wyatt would become the principal church architect for the Marquess of Westminster and his family.

Brandon visited Fonthill in 1846 and very quickly produced designs. James Morrison may have been the wealthiest commoner in nineteenth-century Britain but he never built a new house. The Pavilion was given a new floor, a tower in the fashionable Italianate style which may have doubled as a water tower, a portecochère replacing the portico, an enlarged set of offices on the north side and up against the rising ground to the west and a new range to the south containing a morning room and conservatory (Figures 6.9 and 6.10). The tower was a more classical echo of the tower of St Mary and St Nicholas, Wilton, designed by Brandon's partner T. H. Wyatt in 1840–5.



Fig. 6.9 Exterior view of Fonthill House, photograph, ca. 1890.

BL 08782, by permission of Historic England Archive.

The ‘Specification of the Works in Completing the Mansion known as The Pavilion Fonthill Park Messrs Wyatt & Brandon May 1848’ survive in the Prints and Drawings Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁶⁵ The ‘Tisbury stone’ specified by Brandon was cut from the Nippard Quarry, to the south of the lake. The steps and landings of the principal staircase were of stone; columns, pilasters, balusters and the handrail of the staircase and hall were finished in scagliola ‘in the best manner in imitation of Sienna or other not more expensive marble’. Tisbury stone chimney pieces were fitted in the servants’ hall and scullery (18 shillings each), kitchen (30 shillings), and the remainder of the servants’ apartments (15 shillings). There were ‘Veined marble box chimney pieces in all the other rooms 50s each with 2 [inch] Tisbury stone hearths & Kenton stone inner hearths except to the Ante Room adjoining the morning room which is to have 1 ½ Venice marble slab the chimney & slab for the morning room will be provided.’

Brandon was at Fonthill on 22 May marking out the work but a month later James Morrison’s agent James Combes was expressing doubts as to progress, and indeed about the architect:

The work at the House progresses very slow – alteration upon alteration.
I am apprehensive that Mr Brandon had not well matured his Plan before he

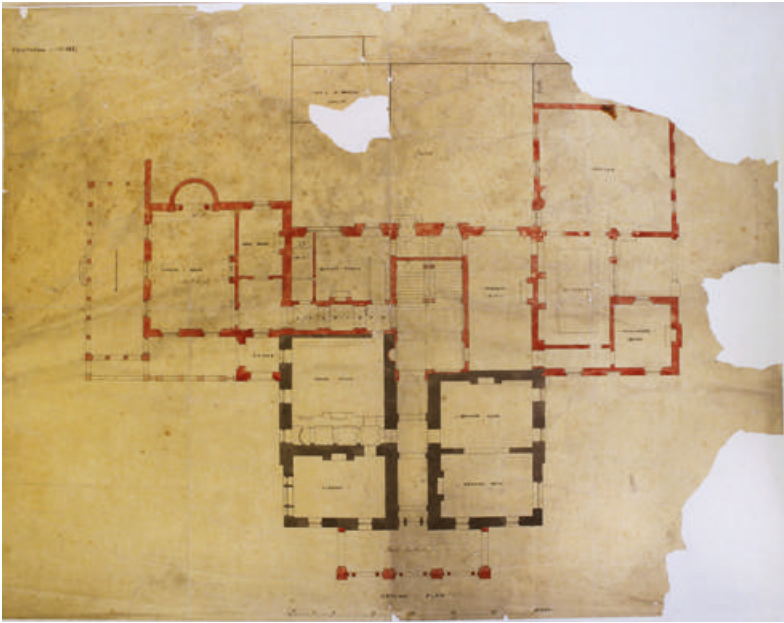


Fig. 6.10 David Brandon, plan of Fonthill House, formerly the Pavilion.
Fonthill Estate Archives, F/2/1120.

began – tho’ it is generally the case with those high Architects, they generally do things twice before it suits. Don’t tell Mr Brandon what I say, for I know nothing is ever got by offending such Gentry – for they will do as they like, or do nothing.⁶⁶

On 19 July Combes expressed worries about the demolition of the back wall and some internal walls of the old Pavilion, which would

thro’ the House open as far as the foot of the front Stairs – This would be of little consequence if it was likely to be closed in before the winter, but this is out of the question for I do not believe it will be closed in for a year to come seeing what progress has already been made ... by the end of August the new walls of the House will be Two feet eight inches above the ground – Perceiving that it would be impossible to get any part of it covered in before the Winter made me object to thro’ the House open for so long a time without first obtaining your consent – But of course you can do as you like.⁶⁷

A letter from the rector of Fonthill Gifford to Morrison written the following year was hardly reassuring: ‘the works at the Pavilion are advancing, but the character of the perfected building is not yet discernable’.⁶⁸

The plasterers finished their work in the late summer of 1848; the tower was completed by the end of the year, as was the new porte-cochère. James Combes Junior (who had succeeded his father as the estate's agent) sent details of the work to Morrison on 3 January 1849: 'I make the total expenditure in respect of the House to be £7238 – which with Bills due to Laurence Beckett & for Glass, Iron Work, Plaster, & plasterer &c abt £800 altogether £8000.'⁶⁹ However Brandon warned Morrison in September 'there remains to be done the alterations of the inside of the portico, the fixing of the stonework of the conservatory above the windows – & some carving in stone which Fowler (the plasterer) is competent to do – In the inside, the work is nearly finished except the morning room & the passage leading to it.'⁷⁰

In 1850, when the building works were completed, the surviving pavilion of Fonthill 'Splendens' was transformed into a new Fonthill House. James Morrison gave the house, its contents and the estate (3,254 acres valued at over £82,000) to Alfred by deed of settlement.⁷¹ Alfred's sister Emily thought the idea excellent, writing to her parents on 14 December 1850: 'I dare say you felt very much about giving up Fonthill for good. I believe Alfred is likely to spend his money well & to look after the poor there, & if you see him happily settled & well employed, I am sure you will not regret your self sacrifice.'⁷²

Two years later Alfred again tried to get into Parliament as the Free-Trade candidate for Wallingford, the local seat to Basildon (he had failed in 1847 by seven votes), but he lost by four votes, ostensibly because his father was unwilling to spend money on bribes on his behalf. He then gave up any political ambition, focusing on his estate and travel. He led a bachelor existence, looked after at Fonthill by a general servant, Susan Purling, and three male house servants. He kept an apartment in London at 34 St James's Square, close to the Reform Club and Brooks', the auction rooms of Christie and Manson and the shops of Mayfair.

After the death of his father in 1857 Alfred's life changed dramatically. His ownership of the Fonthill estate was confirmed, his income from investments increased and he began to collect on an extraordinary scale. In London he bought a very large town house overlooking Green Park; he commissioned building works at Fonthill and, in 1866, he married.

Part four: The Marquess of Westminster, William Burn, W. A. Nesfield, Charles Raymond Smith and T. H. Wyatt at Fonthill

At exactly the same time that David Brandon began designing the alterations and enlargement of the Pavilion for James Morrison, William Burn was engaged by the Marquess of Westminster to design a new house on the Fonthill Abbey estate. Brandon wrote to Morrison on 18 August 1846 'I have received a letter from the

Marquis [sic] of Westminster in which he says that he has been for some time engaged to Mr Burns [sic] to carry out his works at the Abbey.⁷³ The project, however, did not progress smoothly.

James Combes was keen to suggest to Morrison that the Marquess was mean and obsessed with privacy:

The Marquis of Westminster [requests] you to put some kind of a fence across the Terrace, he thought as the fence belongs to you so far as there is one that you would like to make the other part, or otherwise he would make it himself as he is determined to stop peoples riding there. I said I would communicate with you and let him know in a few days – The Marquis is said to be determined to make the place as private as it was in the days of Beckfords prosperity. He talks of raising the Abbey wall 3 or 4 feet higher.⁷⁴

Gervas Huxley, a descendant, and editor of *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors* (1965), also noted that the Marquess's parsimony was the 'the subject of comment.' He was 'a man of almost painfully upright character, high-principled, reserved, and ever conscientious of his duties whether as husband and father, in politics, or as a landlord. His tastes were simple and he greatly disliked any form of ostentation or extravagance.'⁷⁵ His only fault in the eyes of his adoring wife was his lack of demonstrativeness: 'I sometimes tell him he is not demonstrative enough and nobody would know whether he is pleased or not.'⁷⁶ He was one of the richest men in Britain, dedicating his life to service as a Whig MP, then as a member of the House of Lords, Justice of the Peace, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Lord Steward of the Household and Privy Councillor. The Marchioness, however, possessed an unusual capacity for enjoying to the full all the minor pleasures of life, especially in the country; 'as to being bored in general I don't find it and I don't think it need happen with a good constitution and a competency and friends to care about'.⁷⁷ They were a devoted couple, both preferring above all things staying in the West Country with their youngest children: he hunting, shooting, fishing and overseeing planting trees, both of them planning and inspecting new cottages and farm buildings, attending church and reading. Building works at Fonthill, Motcombe and Eaton were very much joint efforts, as testified by their diaries (which survive in a private collection).

When William Burn first visited on 16 April 1846 the Marchioness recorded that he was 'electrified' by Fonthill, inspecting the ruins and the grounds 'immediately adjacent' with the bailiff Mr Jay. There were 'quantities of wild Daffodils'.⁷⁸ Drawings record that the Canterbury Towers were still standing (Figure 6.11) – as well as the Lancaster Tower.

According to James Combes, Burn's initial idea was to build on the site of the old Abbey, first getting rid of the remaining ruins.



Fig. 6.11 John Pennrudoche, *Drawing of Fonthill Abbey*, 1846.

Private collection.

The Marquess of Westminster is pulling down the ruins of the Abbey, this is his Architects advise [sic], not to leave one stone upon another. Public notice is given that there will be no admittance to the Abbey grounds Terrace &c &c. He has also bought all the Oak which Mr Benett had left unsold to the tune of £800. He has again applied to Mr Benett to sell him other lands south of Ruddlemoor Farm, and also some other part of Semley. Mr B. has been lucky in meeting with such a good customer. The Marquess intends to build a large Mansion on the site of the Abbey.⁷⁹

Mark Girouard has summed up the appeal and success of Burn: ‘if one wanted an architect to design a sensible hard-wearing country house with no nonsense about it, one went to Scotland ... in particular to William Burn. His success was so great that in 1844 he moved from Edinburgh to London. Thereafter, until his death in 1870, he had the biggest country house practice in the British Isles.’⁸⁰ He was already working for the Marquess at Eaton in partnership with the garden designer William Andrews Nesfield (1793–1881) and the stone sculptor Charles Raymond Smith.⁸¹ The Marquess was Raymond Smith’s greatest patron. Seven statues, vases, pedestals and other ornaments were commissioned for Eaton by the Marquess, who visited the sculptor’s studio in the New Road, London.⁸²

Nesfield dominated garden design between 1840 and 1860, encouraging ‘the burgeoning field of landscape architecture by elevating the vocational landscape designer to professional landscape architect’.⁸³ Burn and Nesfield regularly visited

Fonthill, London and Eaton to discuss their designs. Burn's first drawing of the new house at Fonthill is dated 19 September 1846, though it is not clear if the building was to be on the site of the Abbey. Part of the ruin was cleared, including the Canterbury Towers, but the Lancaster Tower was left. The Marquess recorded the process in his diary: 'We drove over to Fonthill for some shooting. Inspected the Pulling down the Ruins with Mr Hale & walked with Jay about the grounds.'⁸⁴

Burn worked on the design of his Fonthill Abbey for the next six years (the last surviving drawing is dated 3 March 1852). However, he showed one finished drawing at the Royal Academy in 1850 (Figure 6.12). The rector of Fonthill Gifford was a little unsure of the style, which he described to James Morrison as 'a mixture of the light French Castle with the Scotch'.⁸⁵ Girouard summed it up as 'a dour Victorian exorcism of Beckford's extravagant fantasies'.⁸⁶

In 1853, however, before any work began on the site, the Marquess changed his mind about the whole project. He recorded in his diary visiting Fonthill on 12 May with his wife, daughter Agnes and Mr Burn, 'where we examined the quarries & the place for building. Mr Lyon [the Marquess's bailiff from Motcombe] met us there & Mr Parker & Master Mason.' The next day, Burn and Parker returned to London; the Marquess and Marchioness had a 'long talk with Mr Lyon & decided upon not building a large House at Fonthill'.

What had happened? The Marquess had been rumoured to be 'nibbling' at the Stalbridge estate in Dorset in 1849. It was 20 miles to the south west of Fonthill, 10 miles from Motcombe. The estate included the villages of Stalbridge, a number of farms and a park of 570 acres, surrounded by a wall five miles long but with no mansion; the annual rental income was £9,500.

Negotiations had rumbled on until October 1853 when the Marquess finally agreed to buy it from Lord Anglesey.⁸⁷ The Marquess's youngest daughter, Lady



Fig. 6.12 William Burn, *Design for Fonthill*, 1850.

GLAHA 42038 © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow 2017.

Theodora, wrote in her study *Motcombe Past and Present* of the extraordinary historical link between Stalbridge and Fonthill: 'Both of them once in the possession of the Earls of Castlehaven, were once more united in the hands of the same owner' (see [Chapter 3](#)).⁸⁸

There is no record of the reaction of Burn and Nesfield and no evidence the Marquess paid for the drawings which remained in Burn's office. Burn did, however, get a commission in 1852 from the Marquess's son-in-law Sir Michael Shaw Stewart to design a house for his gardener at Ardgowan in Renfrewshire.

On 2 March 1854 both Burn and Nesfield were driven by the Marquess and Marchioness and Mr Lyon in the britchka (an open carriage with a folding hood) to Stalbridge 'to inspect the Park with a view to building a House on it.' They were back again in August with Mr Lyon, who laid out the grounds of Stalbridge Park and began planting trees. Presumably Burn and Nesfield also began to draw up their plans for the new house and gardens; however, the commission was uncertain as the Marquess was still attracted to building at Fonthill.

In September 1855⁸⁹ the Marquess acquired the extraordinary model of Fonthill Abbey made by James Wyatt for Beckford, and in the spring of 1856 he was discussing the restoration of part of the surviving Abbey with Mr Fish, who had been carrying out further additions to their house at Motcombe. In January 1857 the work at Motcombe was completed but still no work had started at Stalbridge. Then on 6 March the Marquess noted in his diary 'we drove over to Fonthill where we met Mr Burn & Mr Keith from London to mark the site for the new House at Fonthill'.⁹⁰ There was to be no house built at Stalbridge.

Burn's second attempt at a house at Fonthill took another five years to complete. No drawings survive but the finished building was a reduced version of the first, still in the French Scottish Baronial style ([Figure 6.13](#)). The Marchioness's diary entry, also for 6 March, describes the selection of a new site, which may confirm that the first proposal worked up by Burn was on or close to the ruins.

We got up at 7 ½ & breakfasted at 9 before Prayers... got to Fonthill at 1 ½ met there Mr Burn Keith his Foreman ... & again a good deal of measuring – discussing the Plans & finally settled satisfactorily on the site of the house. In the large field at the head of the Lake ... Ag. Theo & I walked down to the new [?embankment] & cutting for the Creek, & round the Lake, back to the Tower – which with the Cottage is looking very nice - & the Bowling Green in formation.⁹¹

The Clerk of Works was to be William McLeish, a Scotsman who lived in Fonthill Bishop.

On 11 March the Marchioness was discussing the site of the kitchen garden: 'we found we must give up making the Kitchen Garden in the sloping ground below the new House, as it wd interfere too much with the Views both ways & another site must be looked for.'⁹² The site eventually chosen was in a field



Fig. 6.13 Lady Theodora Guest, née Grosvenor, *Fonthill Gifford Towers, South Front, 27 July 1877.*

From a private collection in Somerset.

below the house at a distance of a quarter of a mile. It was the subject of an article in the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* in 1888. ‘The kitchen garden is enclosed and divided in two portions by high brick walls. It is situated on the face of the hill about a quarter mile east of the abbey and having a south aspect. The soil being stiff loam on a bed of clay is not only congenial to the growth of vegetables, of which there is a good supply, but also of fruit trees.’⁹³

By the spring of 1857 work was proceeding on the house (the concrete foundations), the grounds, particularly around Bitham Lake, and the remaining part of Beckford’s Abbey, the Lancaster Tower:

EG 27 April 1857 Fonthill where we found all the things going on very satisfactorily – the little Tower nearly up at the rear of the ... old abbey ... cuttings, creeks, & indentations ... Round the Lake ... The foundations of the house preparing with concrete. Watchmens sheds & offices erected.⁹⁴

By August the walls of the house were up to the top of the drawing room windows, while the system of creeks and cuttings around the lake, devised by Mr Batten, was almost finished. Planting included magnolias, on the knoll between the house and the head of the lake; also *Wellingtonia giganteas* (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), among the first in England.⁹⁵ Nesfield’s terrace garden was on a smaller scale than the one at Eaton but similarly close to the house, with a central axis leading to a distant view of picturesque scenery.

While decisions were still being made about building a house on the Abbey estate, the Marquess began improving conditions for his tenants in Fonthill Gifford. He had acquired 39 cottages and gardens forming 46 tenements and proceeded to replace the majority of the houses. The Marquess's action was commensurate with the preoccupation of landowners all over the country, as Jill Allibone explains:

cottage building became a preoccupation of the landed classes as a measure of self-protection and also as a means of display. A man living in a grand house did not wish to see hovels at his gate; rehousing his tenants could demonstrate his good taste, philanthropy, and also be a measure of the wealth which allowed the building work to take place.⁹⁶

This approach would also be followed by Alfred Morrison.

The first reference to new cottages in the Marquess's diary is on 4 September 1855: 'I walked to the new Cottages by Stop Farm.' These buildings were the closest of the cottages to the farm (see Figure 6.14). A couple of years later, seven red-brick double cottages had been built in the village '& more must be built'; so wrote the Marchioness in her diary.⁹⁷ The earliest are dated 1853 (see Figure 6.15). These doubles are different in style to the four further along Stop Street.

The double (or semi-detached) cottage is of interest. A letter from 'Selim', 'an amateur architect from Wiltshire', published in Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Cottages* in 1846, explained the advantages:



Fig. 6.14 Double cottage near Stop Farm, Fonthill Gifford.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.



Fig. 6.15 Single-storey double cottages, Stop Street, Fonthill Gifford.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

Double cottages have several advantages, especially in a scattered village. Two cottages are built cheaper, if united, than if separate; and the effect is often more picturesque. Besides, it adds to the comfort of the poor, to have a neighbour close at hand, in case of sickness; and, in other respects, near neighbours may be mutually useful to each other ... It also facilitates attendance on divine worship, as the two families might alternately heat their ovens on Sundays, and one of the women might remain at home, to take care of the dinners for both houses, and have an eye to the gardens; a very necessary precaution in most English villages, particularly in the fruit season. Besides these obvious advantages, there is a feeling of security and cheerfulness in having a near neighbour, especially to an old couple, who must often stand in need of assistance.⁹⁸

Three further pairs of stone semi-detached cottages were also built in Stop Street, Fonthill Gifford, with the date 1857 (see Figure 6.16), and another between Stop Farm and the parish church.

Three more pairs of cottages were built below Beckford's terraces. The Marchioness recorded on 25 April 1865 'W & I then walked with Davie, by a



Fig. 6.16 Double cottage, Stop Street, Fonthill Gifford.

Tisbury Local History Society Archive.

beautiful walk in the woods ... then up & down the Village to look for a site for a double cottage & we thought we found best at Greenwich'. All were built in a rustic Gothic style.

These cottages were designed and built by local builders, stonemasons and carpenters, as were two of the lodges to the new Abbey. Possibly the Mr Fish who made additions to Motcombe House and built cottages at Semley was responsible. However, William Burn was commissioned to design the two main lodges to the new Abbey. Their Scottish Baronial references are in marked contrast to the other quaint lodges built of brick, stone and timber (see Figures 6.17 and 6.18).

The Marquess's decision in 1859 to engage James Pulham (1820–98) to design rockery work in the American Garden was in advance of fashion. While the Pulham family had been in business for a number of years, the Fonthill commission was one of their earliest on a large scale and also for someone as distinguished as the Marquess. The Prince of Wales and Lord Rothschild commissioned Pulham works at Sandringham and Waddesdon some years later.

The Pulhams became well known for creating 'a wide range of artificial landscapes ... fashionable bespoke landscapes'. They used both artificial and natural rocks and a 'proprietary cement with a striking resemblance, in colour and durability, to natural stone'. This came to be known as 'Pulhamite.' James Pulham, the second generation of Pulhams in the business, had established his home and manufactory at Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, in about 1848 and won prizes at the Great Exhibition of 1851.⁹⁹ Presumably the Marquess saw his work there and was impressed.



Fig. 6.17 William Burn, Tisbury Lodge.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.



Fig. 6.18 Stonegate Lodge, by unknown architect.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

The diaries of the Westminsters record James Pulham visiting in 1860 and again in 1862.¹⁰⁰ The Pulhams' publication of 1877, listing all their clients and commissions so far, described the work at Fonthill as 'Waterfalls in a Rocky Stream; Pond, Island, Rocky Pass and Cliffs, &c., in 1859 and 1860'.¹⁰¹ A pump (by Green and Carter of Taunton) was installed at the bottom of the steep Pulham gully; the

water flowing down the gully was then used to power a sawmill (see [Chapter 10](#) for further discussion of the Pulham works).

On 3 March 1862, the Marquess wrote in his diary 'to Fonthill walked down to the Farm & slept first in the New House'. Sixteen years had passed since Burn was commissioned to design a house on the Abbey estate. Returning in the autumn, the family held an extended party across 11 and 12 September for all their tenants and villagers from Wiltshire and Dorset (some came by train). The Shaftesbury Rifle Band played; there was dancing, football and other games, as well as dinner and tea on both days.¹⁰²

While staying in London for the Season, the Marquess and Marchioness had gone shopping for Fonthill, buying furniture and stone figures at Seeleys. They also attended the International Exhibition in September, buying more pieces of furniture,¹⁰³ most probably including the urns visible in the photograph of the tidied-up ruin ([Figure 6.19](#)). The photograph also documents the single-storey cloister range added by the Marquess.

Firm evidence of the contents of Burn's house does not survive. No inventory was taken of the Westminster houses at Fonthill (or Motcombe) and there are no surviving photographs of the interiors of the new Abbey, Motcombe or the surviving tower. After the death of the Marquess, his widow distributed a few pieces of furniture and paintings at Fonthill Abbey and at Motcombe between her youngest unmarried children, Theodora and Richard. This provides some indication of the Westminsters' taste, which was typical of the period and their position in society.¹⁰⁴ At Fonthill she listed Buhl cabinets, Burmese idols, a magnificent Canaletto and



Fig. 6.19 Old Fonthill Abbey, photograph, 4 October 1952.

Wiltshire Museum, Devizes

a portrait of the Marquess by Partridge. The artist visited their London house in 1865; his studio at 21 Brook Street was conveniently positioned close by.¹⁰⁵

Recent sales at Christie's of miscellaneous pieces dating from the Westminsters' occupation of the 'new' Abbey include George III armchairs, a mahogany concertina-action card table; a Regency mahogany dining chair by Gillow; a George IV commode by Robert Blake; porcelain including Meissen Kakiemon plates, Vincennes blue lapis-ecuelle, and some Sèvres pieces; a Japanese chest on a stand. Further pieces in marble were acquired, like the urns, at International Exhibitions, and include solid Cornish serpentine obelisks by John Organ of Penzance, Derbyshire black marble vases on plinths and a large malachite and Derbyshire black marble ewer and basin by the Ashford marble works.¹⁰⁶

Charles Raymond Smith was commissioned to sculpt two large groups for the formal gardens close to the house and these were near completion when the Marchioness visited his studio in the New Road in July 1865; 'quite beautiful', she thought.¹⁰⁷ The groups were the Four Seasons and the Four Elements (Figure 6.20).

With their house completed, if not completely furnished, and new cottages being built in Fonthill Gifford, the Westminsters turned to their other passion, building churches. They had already commissioned George Alexander to build at Motcombe; in 1863 they decided to rebuild the church at Fonthill Gifford.¹⁰⁸

Richard Colt Hoare was not complimentary about the Georgian church built by Alderman Beckford (see Chapter 4 Figure 4.3): 'the church is a modern edifice, with a portico of four columns and a cupola, all out of proportion. The interior forms a perfect square, measuring 34 feet 4 inches either way, and is unworthy of further notice.'¹⁰⁹ By the 1860s it was in bad repair, and the parishioners approached Westminster for



Fig. 6.20 Raymond Smith statuary, 'New' Fonthill Abbey.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

assistance. He preferred to build a new church. His chosen architect was Thomas Henry Wyatt, at one time in partnership with David Brandon, who had enlarged the Pavilion for James Morrison.

Wyatt was, in 1863, at the top of the architectural profession. John Martin Robinson sums up his success and his appeal:

He was highly efficient. His well-organised office was able to cope with his large practice and to turn out appropriate designs for every occasion.... His career was that of the quintessential Victorian professional man, playing his part in the internal politics of the profession, sitting on all the committees, and rising to its highest posts and honours where he presided with tact, energy and courtesy.

He possessed all the gentlemanly virtues; his manners were unfailingly perfect. His obituary declared he was not 'a brilliant wit' but 'he was conciliatory and politic; always modest and a gentleman'.¹¹⁰ His appeal for the Marquess must have been in part his social standing; 'of the architects of his day he was considered to be socially pre-eminent'.¹¹¹

Wyatt had already designed one of his finest churches in Wiltshire, SS. Mary and Nicholas at Wilton (1840–5), in the Italian Romanesque style. His later churches were all Gothic; Holy Trinity Fonthill Gifford, in the opinion of Robinson, was to be one of his most successful (Figure 6.21). It is quite small, in the French thirteenth-century style; 'the stone vaulted chancel is impressive and the build-up of the east end from the polygonal apse through the stair turret to the asymmetrical spire is spectacular'.¹¹²

Wyatt visited the Marquess in London on 26 February 1864; the Marquess then consulted the rector, Mr Coxe Radcliffe, on 5 March, about their preferred site, and invited Wyatt to visit on 1 April to 'fix the site'.¹¹³ Alderman Beckford's church was demolished and the new placed exactly on top, leaving no access to the tombs of the Alderman, his wife and William Beckford's wife; they all still lie somewhere beneath. The foundation stone of the old church is set into the wall of the vestry. It reads '18 MAY 1748 WILLm BECKFORD ESQR FOUNDER.' While the church was being built, services were held for the parish in the new small school-room to which the Westminsters had contributed. They attended services in the church for the first time in September 1866.

Wyatt was immediately commissioned to design a new chancel for St Leonard's Semley (designing the rest of the church in 1874); St John the Baptist Hindon followed in 1870–1. He also carried out work at St Mary's Stalbridge in 1878 and restored, reroofed and refitted All Saints Fonthill Bishop in 1879.

In 1865 the Westminsters engaged a specialist gardener to look after Fonthill. Robert Burns Annandale (Figure 6.22) was one of many Scottish gardeners who came to England during the Victorian period to take charge of English estates and gardens. He had worked for John Rennie Strachan Carnegie of Seaton House Forfar



Fig. 6.21 Thomas Henry Wyatt, Holy Trinity, Fonthill Gifford.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

(where he cultivated a new cooking apple called the ‘Seaton House’) before taking up his appointment at Fonthill. His status was that of the respected professional, as attested in the letters he exchanged with both the Marchioness and Lady Theodora. He was quickly promoted to bailiff and remained at Fonthill until his death in 1881. He cultivated Royal George, Noblesse and Violette peach cultivars in the 100-foot-long curvilinear roofed peach house; fine pear and plum trees were trained against the kitchen garden walls and the central walk had pyramidally trained pears on each side. His skills were confirmed in the *Journal of Horticulture* (1888).¹¹⁴

Annandale’s arrival coincided with a period of relative calm for the Westminsters. They continued to fund the building or repair of houses and cottages, schools and churches across all their estates. A ‘cheque account’ of the Marquess’s for 1868 lists all the charities he supported: clothing clubs, coal funds, general relief funds, hospital funds, local volunteer funds, curates’ funds, widows



Fig. 6.22 Golden wedding photograph of Mr and Mrs Robert Burns Annandale. Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D.1452/1.

of the clergy, clothing for the poor. He was spending several hundred pounds a year in Wiltshire and Dorset alone.¹¹⁵

Each year they moved between Eaton, London (for the Season), Motcombe and Fonthill. Theodora, their youngest child, remained with them. She was 25 years old in 1865. Their son Richard, a bachelor, and Liberal MP for Flintshire since 1861, made regular visits. All their other children apart from Gilbert, who died at sea in 1854, were married. At Fonthill and Motcombe the company was mostly just the Marquess, Marchioness and Theodora, with their servants.¹¹⁶ Their dinner guests comprised the local clergy and owners of neighbouring estates.

Theodora was an avid watercolour artist and her paintings are almost the only surviving images of Fonthill Abbey in the nineteenth century. She was also a serious historian, sending essays to the *Gentleman's Magazine*¹¹⁷ and writing a history of Motcombe. She was thrilled when she received *Motcombe Past and Present* from the booksellers on 13 August 1867 'bound & ready to be published! Hurray!'¹¹⁸ Her greatest passion, however, was horses. She photographed them (usually with poor results); she also drove a variety of carriages, rode all over 'my lovely & beloved county' and was an avid huntswoman.

The Westminsters' enjoyment of Fonthill and Motcombe was short-lived. In October 1869 the Marquess was struck down at Fonthill with erysipelas, which developed into a malignant carbuncle. Within days he was unconscious; he died on 31 October. The Marchioness and Theodora were present: 'we saw his last gasp! He is happy! But poor Mother!' the latter wrote.

In his will the Marquess left all his southern estates to his wife for her lifetime (the Eaton and London properties were already left to Hugh, now the 3rd Marquess¹¹⁹), together with his personal estate consisting of properties worth £195,000. Theodora received £4,000 a year (if she married this would be reduced to £1,000), some magnificent sapphire and diamond jewellery and a property, Pensbury House, Shaftesbury. After the Marchioness's death, Motcombe was to pass to her son Richard and Fonthill Abbey to her son-in-law Sir Michael Shaw Stewart of Ardgowan, the husband of Lady Octavia.

The brief period in which the Westminsters enjoyed their new Fonthill Abbey, just seven years, coincided with significant changes in the life of Alfred Morrison, their immediate neighbour and owner of the other half of the Fonthill estate.

Part five: Alfred Morrison, George Devey and Owen Jones on the Fonthill House estate

In 1857, following the death of his father James Morrison, Alfred's inheritance was confirmed: the Fonthill Park estate, Berwick St Leonard, Place Farm, Idmiston Farm, land and property in Hindon and Tisbury, the North Waltham estate in Hampshire and the Ton Mawr estate, Neath in South Wales, as well as American securities worth £88,333.6s.8d. In 1861 the Fonthill estate was valued at £157,690; Alfred's total real estate £170,776, his capital account £618,686 and his revenue account £32,301. He was worth a total of £821,764 – by twenty-first-century values some £90 million.¹²⁰

Alfred (Figure 6.23) began improving Fonthill before his father died. Thomas B. Miles, a Shaftesbury builder, made repairs and alterations to the stables and new iron hatches were constructed at the head of Fonthill Lake to trap eels. In 1858, following the departure of the steward James Combes Junior to seek his fortune in Australia, the collecting of rents and general management of his estates was given to the rapidly expanding land agent partnership, Rawlence and Squarey, for £115 per annum. Alfred also engaged more servants in Fonthill House, four male and three female.

At the same time that Alfred was improving the estate he also began to indulge his other passion, collecting; for the rest of his life he would divide his time and energy between building up one of the most extraordinary and important collections of art and objets d'art in Britain, and developing the Fonthill estate, building cottages and breeding champion race horses and Downland sheep. In 1859, for



Fig. 6.23 Placido Zuloaga, *Alfred Morrison*, ca. 1880.

Private collection.

example, he attended the sale of the Northwick collection, buying two paintings by Bronzino.

The following year he commissioned a handsome farmhouse at Ashley Wood and restored the church at Berwick St Leonard, and in 1861 he began to buy precious porcelain looted from the Summer Palace in Peking (Figure 6.24).¹²¹

Alfred never stinted on commissioning quality building work and once 'hooked' on the work of a particular artist, designer or craftsman his inclination was to buy everything he could lay his hands on. He bought 11 works for Fonthill by the American artist Jasper Cropsey at a sale in London in 1863, and over 30 paintings and drawings by John Brett. Between 1861 and 1866 he spent £40,000



Fig. 6.24 One of Alfred Morrison's pieces of Chinese porcelain displayed at Fonthill House.

Fonthill Estate Archives.

on porcelain alone; his purchases at the 1862 International Exhibition in London amounted to £7,500. These are very large sums indeed.

The Ashley Wood farmhouse may have used some of the finished stone from George Mortimer's woollen factory, which Alfred finally demolished. The builder appears to have been John Carder, employing 28 men and 2 boys and living in Fonthill Bishop. In the 1871 census he is described as Clerk of Works. But who designed the handsome building remains unknown.

For the interior of Fonthill House, Alfred engaged the architect-designer Owen Jones (whose dairy had *not* been built at Fonthill for James Morrison) and the London firm of craftsmen Jackson and Graham, whose work he had seen at the 1862 International Exhibition.¹²² Owen Jones (Figure 6.25) designed and Jackson and Graham made furniture, fabrics, carpets and also the entire fittings for the 'new room' at Fonthill.

This 'new room' was not, of course, new; it was most likely to have been the morning room built by Brandon, with its curved end providing the inspiration for



Fig. 6.25 Henry Wyndham Phillips, *Portrait of Owen Jones*, 1856.
3721, RIBA Collections.

the larger of a number of display cases. These cases of ebony inlaid with ivory were designed for Alfred's growing collection of Imperial porcelain; the doors, door cases and skirting panels were all in marquetry; a mirror was designed with a veneered frame of ebony inlaid with ivory; the room was completed with a set of six marquetry chairs and a table (see [Chapter 17](#), [Figure 17.11](#)).¹²³

The Marquess and Marchioness of Westminster and Theodora visited in the summer of 1864. Theodora was more interested in Alfred's horses, but suitably impressed by the display of porcelain.

He met us & took us up to his Stables to show us his horses of which he has about 26 or so! Some very handsome & all in perfect order. Hunters & thorough bred & one beautiful ... Irish pony – the most perfect little creature possible – he had them all out for us to see, & a magnificent scene of kicking & rearing there was, when 'Cornelian' just bought from Ld Stamford, was led

round! – After all these had been trotted out & we had looked at them also in their boxes he took us to his house & there showed us the most wonderful [sic] collection of Oriental China ever known, his house is filled with it, cabinets jammed full of it & each specimen perfect & exquisite – some glorious – enamels too – one piece of perfectly black china - really unique – such a collection in short, as never was seen, & never can be, any where else. It took us some time to see it all & he was most kind in showing us everything.¹²⁴

Not content with turning Fonthill House into a palace of art, Alfred acquired the lease in 1863 to a very large house in London, 16 Carlton House Terrace, a prestigious address. The team of Jones, Jackson and Graham then proceeded to decorate the ceilings, and design the furniture and furnishings.¹²⁵ The rooms rapidly filled with Alfred's collections.

Back in Fonthill, Alfred turned to another architect, George Devey (1820–86), to design a handful of unusual cottages and to embellish the grand northern entrance to the estate. But why Devey? According to Mark Girouard, Devey 'deliberately kept out of the main stream; he practiced in isolation in a secure little world of aristocrats and rich bankers'.¹²⁶ One of his early patrons was the 2nd Duke of Sutherland, who commissioned work at Cliveden, Trentham and Dunrobin from 1857 onwards. The Duke was the brother of the Marchioness of Westminster, so Alfred may have heard of Devey through his neighbours. From 1860 Devey worked for Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild at Mentmore; Alfred's competitive streak, combined with his concerns about social status, may also have encouraged him to approach an architect taken up by a Rothschild and a Duke.

Devey's personal interest in all his commissions led to his photographing many of his completed works, and some of these images have survived. 'Devey loved bricks and mortar, and to his delight in seeing a building photographed in the process of erection we owe the possession of many interesting representations of houses, still roofless and surrounded by scaffold poles.'¹²⁷

Devey's first commission in 1862 was to design a new cottage on the cross-roads to the south of the estate, close to Papworth's lodge and the Beckford Arms (Figure 6.26).¹²⁸ The result is a typical Devey picturesque thatched cottage, very similar to the South Lodge of Mentmore Towers, designed for Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild in 1868. 'Turnpike Cottages' Fonthill Bishop was a most unusual design (Figure 6.27), a row of four cottages, in a stripped, vernacular, almost Arts and Crafts style. Each dwelling had a living room and scullery on the ground floor; the range of offices behind contained four privies, two sheds and two ovens. The total cost of the project was £794, with Devey charging 5 per cent. His invoice sent in December 1864 described the work carried out:

Taking instructions for Row of Cottages: and 9 attendances at Fonthill Bishop – Staking out and arranging details with Mr Carder; also for walling and fences in connection with site, and giving directions generally – say 6 half

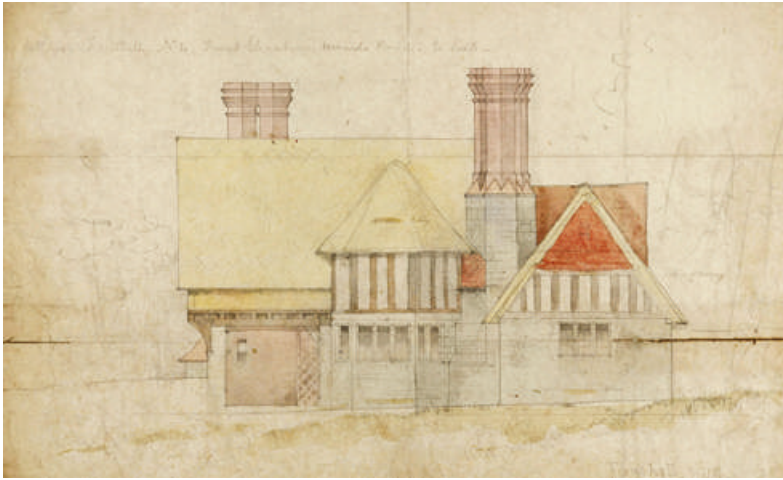


Fig. 6.26 George Devey, 'Design for cottage at Fonthill Gifford', front elevation. 9854, RIBA Collections.



Fig. 6.27 George Devey, 'Turnpike cottages, Fonthill Bishop'. Photograph, A22a, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.

days – Preparing a set of plans – elevations &c and superintending execution while in progress.¹²⁹

Alfred obviously paid promptly; Devey sent back his receipt for the sum dated 11 January 1865. Devey also designed a double cottage in Berwick St Leonard



Fig. 6.28 George Devey, 'Double cottage at Berwick St Leonard'.

Photograph, A44, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.

([Figure 6.28](#)): each dwelling had a living room, scullery and pantry on the ground floor and three bedrooms each above.

Devey's final work was on the archway and approach to the estate. Papworth had built a wall flanking the approach with a first sequence of piers; Devey was to create a much grander impact, to reflect the status of Alfred Morrison. The 'summary of valuation of Masons and other work' drawn up by John Harding on 7 July 1866 totalled £3,327.6s.4d, while another itemised account of the cost of work and materials totals £2,215.6s.5d, plus the mason's bill of £1,029.15s.¹³⁰ The work included supplying two large piers with sculptured terminals, a flanking wall with rusticated arches and balustrades on the north side of the lodge, and curved ashlar wing walls with balustrades to the east and west ends of the lodges. Devey's account book notes charges to Alfred on 2 September 1867 for £133.12s.3d and on 26 March 1877 for £37.13s.7d. These presumably apply to work at the archway ([Figure 6.29](#)).¹³¹

Alfred was a bachelor when he established himself on the Fonthill estate, turning Fonthill House and 16 Carlton House Terrace into palaces of art. On 11 April 1866, aged 44, he married Mabel Chermiside, daughter of the rector of Wilton; she was just 18. After a honeymoon on the Continent the couple settled at Fonthill and a temporary London home in Harley Street (Carlton House Terrace was unfinished). The Westminsters called but Theodora couldn't resist a snobbish comment about Mabel: 'very young very cheerful, invincibly goodnatured & quite as if she had had £50,000 a year all her life'. A few days later Mr Gladstone and



Fig. 6.29 George Devey, 'Work to retaining walls of north archway at Fonthill Bishop'.

Photograph, 6470, RIBA Collections.

Lady Herbert (from Wilton) came by train: the Herberts were close to Mabel's family in the Old Rectory, and Alfred a Liberal supporter if never an MP.¹³²

The Morrison's first child, Rachel, was christened in the new church at Fonthill Gifford on 28 April 1867 and Alfred presented the church with a font and pulpit. Alfred's collecting continued unabated, but he also considerably enlarged the estate at Fonthill. In 1868, he acquired land in Fonthill Bishop which the Kings (yeoman farmers at Fonthill) had bought from John Farquhar; in 1875 and 1876 he bought 2,205 acres of Great Ridge (now on the north side of the A303) from Edmund du Fane; in 1878 he bought 520 acres in Chilmark in an exchange of land with Lord Pembroke of Wilton; by 1892 he owned 1,360 acres in Tisbury alone. Cuttings in a 'scrapbook of agricultural press-cuttings 1882–1883' testify to the efficiency of the estate and the quality of both the sheep and the conditions in which they were kept. Alfred's manager, Mr Read, was quoted as saying 'we have not felt the depression which has prevailed of late years in many other districts and counties'.

Looking from Fonthill House across the lake stocked with swans to the deer park beyond, W. W. G., the author of 'Wiltshire Downs and Down Farming', was impressed: 'Fonthill House and its surroundings comprise one of the fine selections – the natural lake having been the centre of attraction – that our forefathers made for developing a large family domain.'¹³³ He was unaware the 'natural lake' had been formed by the Beckfords from a tributary of the River Nadder.



Fig. 6.30 The Saloon, Fonthill House. One of three galleries added by Alfred Morrison.

Photograph, BL 08782/003, by permission of Historic England Archive.

More cottages were built in Berwick St Leonard, Fonthill Bishop and at Ridge; additions were made to the South Lodge in 1884 and a new block of farm buildings (now the estate office) built in 1887. None however were as distinguished as those designed by Devey. Three large top-lit galleries were added to Fonthill House some time in the 1880s to provide more space for Alfred's collections (Figure 6.30). Photographs taken of these galleries remain the only images of the interior of the house. There are, however, a few recorded comments by neighbours. Madeline Wyndham, daughter of the Wyndhams of Clouds House, East Knoyle, wrote to her elder sister in 1885:

I suppose you know that the Morrissions live only about 6 miles from here [Clouds]. Mrs Morrison is very pretty and very delicate. She is always very smart, and you have never heard anyone talk so much, one flow of conversation ... Last Saturday they gave a party to which we all went. There was most beautiful music given in the picture gallery. Henry Holmes played the violin Mrs Hutchinson sang, quite beautifully, and Madame Haas played the piano.¹³⁴

The Duke of Westminster (the eldest son of Richard, Marquess of Westminster) was a friend of the Wyndhams, but he was not impressed by Alfred's collections when he called by in 1878:

Mr A is an eccentric individual with peculiar views on most things, one being never to give away a farthing in 'charity' – another to have 33 hunters valued at 300 apiece and never to ride any of them – another to rear 1000 pheasants and to shoot them all himself – another to denounce all art and artists except those of which he himself approves (and there [sic] are a queer lot).¹³⁵

Part six: The division of the Westminster estates in Wiltshire and Dorset

When the Duke of Westminster visited Alfred Morrison's Fonthill House in 1878 his mother the Dowager Marchioness of Westminster was still alive. Since being widowed in 1869, she and Theodora had lived at Motcombe and Fonthill Abbey. A few weeks after the Marquess's death, his son-in-law and trustee Sir Michael Shaw Stewart proposed that the younger surviving son Richard (who would eventually inherit the Motcombe estate) be immediately given the Stalbridge estate 'for his own ... Worth £9,500 a year plenty to do but also plenty done farms & cottages finished & town beginning.'¹³⁶ By early 1870 plans had been drawn up for a new house (again) in the park, as well as for a house for the agent Mr George Allen.

The agent's house, called Grove House (Figure 6.31) was designed by the London architect George Aitchison.¹³⁷ It is a most unusual house. Aitchison is now well known as the architect of the exotic 'Orientalist' house of the artist Sir Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy, in Holland Park, and Grove House has a similar stone balcony. Aitchison also designed a handsome schoolhouse with similar features in East Knoyle (close to both Fonthill and Motcombe) for Alfred Seymour. He exhibited a 'design for house at Stalbridge Park' at the Royal Academy in 1872 (number 1233), which may have been for the mansion rather than the agent's house. *The Builder*, however, was dismissive: 'small and unfortunately rather feebly-executed pen drawing ... wants more force and breadth of treatment to make it a successful work'.¹³⁸ Once more the decision was taken not to build in Stalbridge Park, possibly because Richard had limited resources (his father had left him an annual income of only £2,000 in addition to the Stalbridge estate) or was more interested in pursuing a political career, becoming Chief Liberal Whip under Gladstone and playing a major part in negotiations with Charles Parnell. He spent extended periods in Ireland and both his wives were from Irish families.¹³⁹ He did however continue the family tradition by initiating an extensive building programme in Stalbridge, including Westminster Cottages and Anglesea Cottages.



Fig. 6.31 Grove House, Stalbridge, photograph, Messrs Knight, Frank & Rutley, Sale catalogue, Town and Agricultural Properties Stalbridge and Bagber, 3/4 September 1918.

Grosvenor Estate, Adds 2576/8.

In 1886, after he broke from Gladstone over Home Rule, he left the Commons but was made Baron Stalbridge by way of compensation.

Meanwhile for the Dowager Marchioness and Theodora life at Motcombe and Fonthill followed a regular routine of good works, attending church, taking classes at the school in Motcombe, painting, reading, walking and fishing in Bitham Lake. Theodora's painting of the Abbey ruins ([Figure 6.32](#)) has smoke rather incongruously belching from the chimney added by the Westminsters. Now called the Old Tower Lodge, it was tenanted by a Chelsea Pensioner. Robert Burns Annandale, who was both bailiff and head gardener, moved into Lawn Farm, a model farm built by the Westminsters on the southern edge of the estate. He worked tirelessly to carry out the instructions of the Marchioness. She was sending him proposals for schemes even on a tour of Switzerland in 1874:

Zurich ... the country itself is beautiful a great deal of wood & cultivation & the gardens full of Lilacs & Flowers which has reminded me of Fonthill, where I have been thinking of a covered seat, of which I send you a rough sketch of a wooden seat – made of planks – I think it should be from 10 to 12 feet diameter & covered also with Planks – supported by a Pole in the middle & ½ screened from the Southern sun, by a wall of weatherboard, it might have poles to support the open half – or a low broad wooden seat inside the



Fig. 6.32 Lady Theodora Guest, née Grosvenor, *Old Tower Lodge, Fonthill Abbey*, 1877.

From a private collection in Somerset.

screened part the best place for it, after much consideration, as we want it near the House, & still to be shaded in the hot weather, would be between the Oak Trees opposite the house, & the Steps which descend from the Flower garden (in the centre) with its back, of course, to the midday sun – a little path could be mown to it in the grass – as it would be for summer use - & we might plant creepers over it, afterwards. I write at once – as it may take some time to prepare the Planks it must also have a wooden floor – I think you will understand my meaning.¹⁴⁰

The seat was completed in time for their summer sojourn at Fonthill.

Theodora's hunting took over her life in the winter months; she noted on 4 April 1871 being given the hunt buttons of the Blackmore Vale Hunt, an important occasion. She was also taking on the accounts for both estates, working closely with the new agent Mr Genge. Her organisational skills were formidable. The fete for all their tenants held at Fonthill across three days in June 1872 was a triumph

of organisation. An ornamental arch and tent were erected on the bowling green in front of Beckford's surviving tower. On the first day 348 attended, comprising tenants from Fonthill and Stalbridge with their wives and two children per family, also the Huntsmen and whips. They were driven up to the tower, then walked down to the new Abbey for a tour through the rooms and round Bitham Lake, back to the Tower for dinner served on three long tables in the tent with grapes and strawberries from the kitchen garden. Music for dancing was provided by two bands from Shaftesbury and Salisbury. The Motcombe tenants were entertained the next day with their wives or sisters. There was football, dancing and a tea in the tent of cold meat, cake, bread and butter, pies and ham. On the last day 70 school children came for tea and cold meat in the tower, then played games with India rubber balls.

A rather different reception was given to Disraeli, who stayed at the new Abbey in August 1874. Since being widowed the Marchioness had gradually lost confidence in the Whigs; she regularly saw the Conservative Prime Minister in London before inviting him to Fonthill. Theodora recorded the visit. He was given the 'Japan' room in which to attend to his dispatches, and told amusing stories at dinner though 'does not eat or drink much'. A morning of rain was spent in his room writing 'his business for his messenger who was despatched by the 1.5 train [to London]', but blue skies in the afternoon permitted his visit to Shaftesbury and Motcombe:

Drove up to the town stopping at Bennetts where a little crowd of the principal shop people was assembled & then to the Promenade to look at the view & then the church bells began ringing out of compliment & we got in again & drove to the Post Office & calling at Upcraft's went on to Motcombe [for tea] ... drove back by the Shafy [Shaftesbury] Lodge & straight up to the Tower, & along the avenues as far as the cross roads to give Mr Disraeli an idea of the place & he was delighted with it.¹⁴¹

The following morning Theodora drove Disraeli in the phaeton to Tisbury station, where a small crowd had gathered to cheer.

The income from the Marchioness's estates barely covered regular costs, as revealed by the accounts for the Wiltshire properties in 1871. Rents amounted to £5,000 but outgoings, including annuities, brickmaking, subscriptions, carpenters, masons, labourers, rates, taxes and repairs to the new Abbey, totalled £6,400. Consequently the Marchioness used her large personal income to improve the lives of her tenants. She gave the site and £2,000 towards an endowment fund for the Westminster Memorial Hospital in Shaftesbury (built by public subscription);¹⁴² she paid for almshouses in Shaftesbury in memory of the Marquess and supported the rebuilding of the Grammar School; at Motcombe she paid for a new school for boys and financed a reservoir.

There was more work too for T. H. Wyatt, whose personality undoubtedly appealed to the widow: he was 'absolutely devoid of all affectation and all

pretentiousness – without a word that glittered – full of simple sound sagacity and everyday information.’¹⁴³ In 1874 the Marchioness bought an estate of 580 acres near Faringdon in Oxfordshire and commissioned a brand-new house, Barcote, to be a country property for Theodora, after her mother died. Theodora, Wyatt, Mr Genge and Robert Annandale used the railway network to meet regularly at Barcote, inspecting the quarry, planning the house and kitchen garden (‘Annandale dug & dug & found a good soil at the top of the hill’) but also cottages. By August 1875 progress was being made. The Marchioness visited and found ‘the 8 cottages all beautiful inhabited & gardens full of flowers. The house quite wonderfully got on! Some of the windows of the lower story finished & all promising to be beautiful the site excellent.’¹⁴⁴

Then, to the surprise of her whole family, Theodora agreed to marry Merthyr Guest, son of Sir Josiah John Guest, the South Wales ironmaster who had died in 1850. Merthyr’s mother Lady Charlotte had married for a second time, to Charles Schreiber, her children’s tutor, and they lived close by at Canford Manor, Wimborne, in Dorset. Merthyr lived at Fifehead, only six miles from Motcombe, and the couple had met out hunting. Both were equally obsessed with the sport and all things to do with horses. When Merthyr’s sister Enid, wife of the famous archaeologist Sir Henry Layard, heard the news, she confessed in her diary ‘I do not know her at all – the Peerage says she is the D. of Westminster’s younger sister & 36 years of age.’¹⁴⁵

The Marchioness wrote to the Queen about the engagement:

after a very long attachment and devotion on his part of which she was ignorant till this summer. Indeed, her determination never to leave me had prevented such a subject entering her mind. But his deep devotion and constancy when she became aware of his feelings and the excellence of his character have touched her so deeply that she is now as much attached to him as he is to her; and most thankful I am to have the prospect of leaving her with such a Protector ... he intends they should live entirely with me so that I should not be separated from Theodora.¹⁴⁶

The wedding took place at Motcombe on 8 March 1877. Robert Annandale’s services were required to provide vegetables for the guests staying at Fonthill, but also flowers: ‘if you can force some Lilies of the Valley by [8 March] we propose that the Bridesmaids, 4 in number, should have Bouquets of White flowers with a Tuft of something scarlet in the middle, for which I suppose scarlet Geraniums will be most suitable – Rhododendrons would be too large.’¹⁴⁷ The Marchioness also sent the Annandales two tickets for the church service and transport to and from the ball.

Neither Theodora nor her new husband were particularly fond of the countryside around Barcote, so Merthyr bought Inwood, an estate close to Stalbridge, and proceeded to enlarge the house. From 1879 Inwood became the permanent home of the Marchioness and the Guests, the same year Theodora’s daughter and only

child Elizabeth Augusta was born. Barcote was sold in 1881 for £45,000, but visits were still made in the summer to Motcombe, until the death of the Marchioness in 1891 aged 94.

But what happened to the Fonthill Abbey estate? According to the Marquess's will, the property was to pass, at his widow's death, to their son-in-law Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, who was married to Lady Octavia. In 1879 the Marchioness speeded up the process, selling her life interest in the estate to Sir Michael for £100,000. Fortunately the property had been well maintained and the relatively new cottages in Fonthill Gifford provided good accommodation for the tenants. However the Shaw Stewarts were nothing like as rich as the Grosvenors. At the death of the Marchioness nothing more was left to Lady Octavia, leaving the next generation with serious financial headaches.

7

Fonthill in the twentieth century

Caroline Dakers

Part one: Death at the turn of the century: The Marchioness of Westminster's legacy

The final years of the Marchioness of Westminster were spent contentedly with her daughter Lady Theodora and husband Merthyr Guest (Figure 7.1) and their only child Elizabeth Augusta (she was known as 'Goody'), at Inwood and at Motcombe. However, the codicils she added to her will in 1881 caused a major rift between her children. She was determined to leave almost all her considerable personal property (the generous legacy of the Marquess) to Theodora, even though the family solicitor, Mr Trelawney of Boodles, expressed his dismay. He left a private note in his papers: 'Lady Westminster has lived with Lady Theodora exclusively since the late Lord's death, & the provisions for Lady T have been gradually increasing', but the discrepancy between Theodora's inheritance and that of her sisters was likely to be '30 times as much'. He calculated that Theodora might receive as much as £330,000 and wrote, in some distress, 'Lady W. very kind to me & at personal risk of offending her I must do my duty'.¹ The Marchioness's eldest son Hugh, now Duke of Westminster, and her son-in-law Sir Michael Shaw Stewart (the new owner of the Fonthill Abbey estate) also tried to stop her making such a will. She responded by dismissing Mr Trelawney, nicknaming him 'Mr Doodle', and engaging her own lawyer to defend her right to dispose of her property as she wished. The law came down on her side.

At her death in 1891, when it was revealed in her will just how little she had left her children, apart from Theodora, the Duke returned to the offensive; he suggested his mother's mental faculties were impaired and that Theodora had exercised undue influence. A private detective was employed to investigate his sister's character, including searching the parish registers to see whether she had an illegitimate child.² Friends of Theodora were dragged into the case: Merthyr Guest's sister Enid, Lady Layard, was asked to make a list from her journal of the 'dates of when we paid visits to Lady Westr as



Fig. 7.1 F. G. Cotman, *Lady Theodora Guest, Merthyr Guest, the Marchioness of Westminster and Lemon*, ca. 1882.

From a private collection in Somerset. Photograph © James Fennell (www.jamesfennell.com).

we have promised Merthyr & Theo to come forward as witnesses to prove that the old lady was in her right mind when she made her will in 1881. She certainly was quite clever.³ Finally, the Duke was forced to withdraw his accusations, whereupon Theodora increased the legacies to two of her sisters and focused, once more, on a married life devoted to foxhunting.

After the death of the Marchioness, her youngest son Richard de Aquila Grosvenor finally gained possession of Motcombe House and estate. Baron Stalbridge since 1886, in 1891 he also became Chairman of the London and North Western Railway, which brought in an annual salary of £4,000. The annual rental income from all his estates in Dorset including Motcombe and Stalbridge totalled some £27,000. However, he made two decisions which would eventually lead to the break-up of his entire estate: to build a new house and to stand surety for a friend in financial difficulties.

Soon after moving into Motcombe House, Baron Stalbridge was taken seriously ill with typhoid and ‘suspicion fell upon the drains of Motcombe’.⁴ Instead of installing a new drainage system, Stalbridge commissioned a very large and very expensive new house (Figure 7.2).

The architect was Ernest George, whose influential clients also included Stalbridge’s brother the Duke of Westminster. When presented in 1896 with the



Fig. 7.2 Motcombe House, 1895

Photograph by Bedford Lemere & Co., 53106, RIBA Collections.

RIBA's Royal Gold Medal, George Aitchison, President of the RIBA, commented 'to give a list of his works would be like Homer's catalogue of the Greek fleet at Troy'.⁵ In the 'quiet-Elizabethan'⁶ style, the mansion contained a 'faithful imitation of a medieval hall' with a minstrel's gallery.⁷ It cost around £60,000.

Stalbridge's second decision was even more expensive. He stood surety for the 4th Baron Sudeley of Toddington Manor, a fellow Liberal Peer, when he was in financial difficulties. When Sudeley was declared bankrupt in 1893, Stalbridge honoured his agreement to the tune of £100,000, but only by taking out a mortgage for the whole amount. Baron Rothschild and the Alliance Insurance Company advanced the money; his brother the Duke of Westminster stood surety for the payment of the interest and premium.⁸ The estate was consequently saddled with both a very large debt and the costs incurred in building and then maintaining the new mansion.

Stalbridge never recovered. In 1906 he moved out of Motcombe to a house in Bayswater, London, the 'wrong side of the Park'.⁹ He died in London in 1912 and his body was brought back for burial in Motcombe. His son, the 2nd Baron, then began to sell off parts of the estate to cover death duties and pay off the mortgage. By 1918 the entire Dorset estate of 13,500 acres had been reduced to 150 acres surrounding and including Motcombe House.¹⁰

Since acquiring the Fonthill Abbey estate from the Marchioness of Westminster in 1879, Sir Michael Shaw Stewart and Lady Octavia had made annual visits to the property. Lady Octavia involved herself in charitable projects in Hindon, including

founding a Church of England school and building a schoolhouse. Sir Michael's focus, however, was his Scottish property at Ardgowan in Renfrewshire. His family had been granted the lands and castle in 1403 by Robert III of Scotland and their baronetcy had been conferred in 1667 by Charles II for services rendered to his father. In the eighteenth century, the profits from sugar plantations in Tobago paid for a new mansion to be built at Ardgowan, designed by Hugh Cairncross, clerk of works to Robert Adam at Culzean Castle. Sir Michael was High Sheriff of Wiltshire, but he was also MP for Renfrewshire, Lord Lieutenant of the county and Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Scotland. He was offered a peerage but, according to his family, turned it down, as his wife, Lady Octavia, preferred to keep her position as the daughter of a Marquess and sister of a duke (the Duke of Westminster), a higher honour than that of Countess (the wife of an earl). She wanted to remain Lady Octavia Shaw Stewart, not Lady Shaw Stewart. She did though approve of the marriage of their eldest son to Lady Alice Emma Thynne, daughter of the 4th Marquess of Bath, owner of Longleat.¹¹

There is no inventory of Burn's Fonthill Abbey, nor any photographs of the interior, but the Shaw Stewarts added to the furniture and furnishings left by the Marchioness of Westminster (and not given to Lady Theodora). Sir Michael was a neighbour of the Dukes of Hamilton and visited Hamilton Palace in Scotland. From the extraordinary sale of the contents of Hamilton Palace (lasting from 17 June to 20 July 1882) he acquired eight paintings and two magnificent George III silver-gilt waiters. Of these, five of the paintings – including a Fragonard, a still life with flowers by Jan van Huysum and a Bellini *Madonna and Child* – and the silver-gilt waiters were from the collection of William Beckford, and all travelled south again to Fonthill.¹²

Ten years later, at the sale of the collection of the Earl of Dudley, Sir Michael acquired another Bellini and Murillo's *Vision of St Anthony of Padua*.¹³ St Anthony was William Beckford's patron saint. Christopher Maxwell has suggested Sir Michael's ambition in acquiring pieces from Beckford's collection, or with connections to Beckford, was probably strategic, to reunite the paintings with the Fonthill estate.¹⁴ Even Merthyr and Lady Theodora Guest at Inwood, perhaps with the support of the Marchioness of Westminster, were inspired to buy something from Fonthill at the Hamilton Palace sale, in their case the very large sculpture of the Laocoön, which was also carried down south.

The Shaw Stewarts also commissioned portraits, though there is no evidence they hung at Fonthill. Sir John Lavery painted Lady Octavia in 1889 (Figure 7.3); Frank Holl and Hubert Herkomer painted Sir Michael.

The Shaw Stewarts lived well. Lady Octavia was a keen gardener, acquiring 'spare' trees from her neighbours at Stourhead. At Ardgowan she insisted the white gravel paths be washed every day. Sir Michael died in 1903 and his eldest son inherited Ardgowan; Lady Octavia was left Fonthill for her life. She lived until 1921, for the most part alone with 14 indoor servants,¹⁵ while her second son and heir Walter and his wife Mary Beatrice brought up the next generation of Shaw Stewarts at Hays House, a few miles from Fonthill.¹⁶



Fig. 7.3 Sir John Lavery, *Lady Octavia Shaw Stewart*, 1889, sketch for a portrait. Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, 2030.

Her niece Eleanor or Nellie, daughter of Baron Stalbridge, provides the only account of the grand lifestyle inside the Abbey during her widowhood. Nellie was left nothing by her father and took the decision with her husband to emigrate to East Africa; a visit to Fonthill was intended to introduce her to the art of housekeeping:

Every morning, from the enormous kitchen garden, there arrived in the kitchen baskets of perfectly grown vegetables, which would be perfectly cooked by a Scotch cook and her staff consisting of a head kitchenmaid, second ditto, a scullerymaid and a still-room maid. The vegetables found their way with other dishes, six or seven courses in all, into the dining-room where my aunt Ockie and I were waited on by a butler and two footmen. Ockie nibbling perhaps at a wing of partridge.... Then there was the laundry with a staff of three laundrymaids, where each pillowslip was goffered by hand with a pair of tongs. Many housemaids were presided over by the housekeeper – I think the outdoor staff alone numbered seventeen. The waste of course was

enormous, but the goal of perfection was achieved. Even though I had no idea of what life in East Africa would be like, I had a strong feeling that the domestic economy at Fonthill would not prove to be a useful guide.¹⁷

Lady Octavia's extravagance and the lack of investment in the estate did not bode well for the next generation at Fonthill Abbey. On the other Fonthill estate, the Morrisons were also facing changes, including issues of inheritance following the death of Alfred Morrison in 1897. However, instead of downsizing, Alfred's eldest son Hugh planned to build another great house on the estate, to be called Little Ridge.

Part two: The legacy of Alfred Morrison

Alfred Morrison carried on collecting right up to his death. Like his neighbour Sir Michael Shaw Stewart he had bought Beckfordiana at the Hamilton Palace sale (see [Chapter 17](#)).¹⁸ He also commissioned catalogues of his autograph letters of famous men and women and lent paintings to exhibitions. He was included in Henry Jamyn Brooks's painting of the great and the good, *The Private View of the Old Masters Exhibition at the Royal Academy*, shown at the Academy in 1889. Three years later, his eldest son Hugh married into the aristocracy: Lady Mary Leveson-Gower, daughter of the 2nd Earl Granville (and a distant relation of both the dowager Marchioness of Westminster and the Duchess of Westminster) was his bride. Hugh also joined the Conservative Party and the Carlton Club: the Morrisons never returned to their radical Liberal affiliations. The estates of Chicklade and Berwick St Leonard were immediately conveyed to Hugh, plus £50,000; Alfred also provided his new daughter-in-law with a settlement of £50,000 as Earl Granville had died the year before in financial difficulties.

In 1895 Alfred had a major operation on his nose and stayed at the Italian Cottage in Tisbury, while an architect called Gordon carried out work at Fonthill House, including 'seeing about the drains'. He then in 1897 fell seriously ill of a 'painful and incurable malady'. The best doctors came down to Fonthill, including his old friend Dr Black, a fellow collector, and Dr Frederic Treves, famous for treating Joseph Merrick, the 'elephant man'. Hugh's diary entries are brief but poignant: he spent days and nights beside his father's bed or walking in the gardens with Mabel. On the night of 21 December Hugh sat up till 2. In the morning he 'got up again at 7 and found Father still alive – then went to dress and found that he had passed away at 8.15 just before I came downstairs'.¹⁹

Obituaries described Alfred's many-sided character: 'in London he was known as a man of high cultivation and an accomplished Maecenas, in Wiltshire he was spoken of as a model squire and a perfect country gentleman.'²⁰ Probate was just under a million pounds. The will, however, caused some consternation. Alfred had made no changes since his marriage in 1866, so Mabel, who was only 50 years

old, was given for her life Fonthill House and the surrounding 300 acres, the house in London, Alfred's entire collection (apart from those designated heirlooms) and the investment income from £150,000 stocks and shares.²¹

Unlike the Stalbridges and the Shaw Stewarts, the Morrises had no need to sell land to pay death duties; the estate remained intact. Just three sales at Christie's in 1898 of embroideries and rugs, gold rings and Greek vases, raised over £11,000. It appears, however, that Mabel not only considered she needed a larger income to maintain her lifestyle, but also that she intensely disliked many of the objects Alfred had acquired, including their house, 16 Carlton House Terrace, the palace of art richly decorated by Owen Jones. Further sales at Christie's and Sotheby's between 1899 and 1918 disposed of a large part of Alfred's collection, including most of his contemporary art, thousands of autograph letters, the London house and its unique furniture. Mabel downsized to Mayfair, with 13 rather than 16 servants.

She kept Fonthill House as her country home, but also travelled on the Continent with her unmarried daughters Katharine and Dorothy; her younger son Archie married in 1901 and moved away. Hugh and Lady Mary, assuming Mabel might live for another 30 years (she died aged 86 in 1933, two years *after* Hugh), consequently made the decision to build a new house on the estate, across the lake on Little Ridge, close to the cottage Papworth had designed over half a century before for one of James Morrison's gamekeepers (for an extended analysis of the building of 'Little Ridge' see [Chapter 18](#)).

Hugh chose as his architect Detmar Blow (1867–1939). He would have known of Blow's work through a number of local families. Blow had been a regular guest of the Wyndhams at Clouds since 1892 when he worked on the restoration of the tower of St Mary's, East Knoyle; he was also patronised by the Antrobuses of Amesbury, working from 1900 on Amesbury Abbey, the church and the estate, and at Stonehenge, which was owned by the Antrobuses. Influenced by John Ruskin, William Morris and Philip Webb (who designed Clouds House), Blow trained as both an architect and a stonemason. He was an idealist but his architectural practice was growing and he formed a partnership in 1906 with Fernand Billerey to cope with the flow of work. For the new house at Little Ridge, Blow carefully re-used stone from the ruined manor house at Berwick St Leonard to re-create a new building of convincing seventeenth-century appearance (Figure 7.4).

Hugh Morrison assumed that Little Ridge would pass to his wife after his death, but was forced by his brother to agree the property would be Lady Mary's only for her lifetime; it would then revert to the family estate. The legal agreement was stark: if Hugh and his wife continued to be childless the whole Fonthill estate would pass to his brother Archie and *his* heirs.²² Meanwhile the couple were both enduring years of unpleasant, sometimes painful, but ultimately successful treatment for infertility, so planning a new house was a welcome distraction.

Lady Mary later recalled: 'It was our own original genius that made us think of using the ruin – partly for the sake of preserving it as it would have required money



Fig. 7.4 The Manor House, Berwick St Leonard, re-instated as Little Ridge.
Photograph, Julian Smith, Fonthill Estate Archives.

spent on it to keep it together as a ruin – Afterwards we heard that Mr [Detmar] Blow was particularly good at that sort of date of architecture.²³ Lady Mary continued: ‘the moving the stones & rebuilding took some time as it was chiefly done by the estate men who took a great pride in handling the old stone tenderly so that quite a wonderfully small proportion were broken.’²⁴ The completion of the first stage (Figure 7.4) coincided with the birth of a son, John Granville (Figure 7.5). The next stage, the nursery wing, was added in 1907 and called the ‘John wing’ in his honour.

In 1909 Charles Morrison, the eldest surviving child of James Morrison, died. He had never married but had moved between his father’s house in Harley Street and Basildon in Berkshire, usually with his sister Ellen who outlived him by only a few months. He was a ‘statesman in finance’, amassing a fortune of almost £14 million.²⁵ After death duties had been paid, his surviving relations, including his nephews and nieces, were left very rich indeed. Hugh had already been given £125,222 of stocks in 1907 by Uncle Charles, immediately after his son was born, but now he received a further two-sixths of one-half of the residuary estate and absolute title to the estate on the island of Islay. His wife Lady Mary was left £10,000.²⁶

They went on a spending spree, commissioning two more buildings from Blow and Billerey. The new London house, 9 Halkin Street, was substantial. The Architectural Association visited in 1914, and declared it had ‘grandeur and refinement within’ and a plan of ‘dignity and spaciousness’.²⁷ The new wing at Islay House on the Hebridean island of Islay (James Morrison had bought the island in 1853) was enormous, and built in front of the additions made by William Playfair in the 1840s.



Fig. 7.5 Hugh and John Granville Morrison.

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

At Fonthill, the tenants were not forgotten. A Reading Room was opened in 1912 as an alternative to the public house. It opened every October (closing for the summer months), combining facilities for men and women. The subscription was one shilling a month, there was a coal fire, a daily newspaper, darts, cards and a three-quarter size billiards table. It was shared between the men's club and the Women's Institute, though not without some conflict.²⁸ Hugh built a similar reading room in Chilmark.

Little Ridge was also to be enlarged. Lady Mary was obviously intimidated by Detmar Blow and determined to research for herself. In June 1909 she visited Heale House to see what Blow was doing for the Hon. Louis Greville: 'I am going to seriously study the plans for the future building to-day & have my ideas more ship shape to confront Blow.' She also improved her knowledge of architectural history: 'I have been pegging away at plans & studying the pictures in Country Life

& Blomfield of the architecture of the period – We must undoubtedly make it the most beautiful house of modern times!²⁹

Meanwhile Mabel began to consider leaving Fonthill, apparently disappointed by the legacy she had received from Charles Morrison. Her daughter Katharine had married Sir Stephen Gatty in 1905 so only Dorothy remained. Mabel wrote a rather bitter and rambling letter to Hugh on 6 June 1909:

I write to warn you that my present intention is to give up Fonthill Jan 1st 1910. I should hand you over the house the heirlooms etc & then you will of course deal with them as you think fit – I shall warn Squarey & all the people in my employment will be given notice some time before & I shall make them a present on leaving ... This is no sudden resolve it has been my firm intention to do this had Dorothy married or as is now the case on your inheriting from your Uncle – I hope with all my heart you will pull the house I live in down – You have of course a perfect right to build yr house on any corner of the estate & I also never dispute yr right to prefer say the Jacobean style to the classical architecture – But I do grieve at two big houses within sight of each other. Then two gardens etc the spoiling of Fonthill which I love & the appalling waste of money. For years I have lived on the margins of debt & of debt incurred through [no] fault of my own but by my being placed in a position too large for my income – I tried to hide from Katharine & Dorothy how distasteful the life was to me but the bitterest thought was the uselessness of my sacrifice & the positively sinful waste of money! When I think of the thousands of pounds wasted, electric light, water supply galleries etc etc I wring my hands in sheer despair. You will I hope pull down the house & build a fine stone building across the Lake & make a drive under the wood in the deer park right up to Little Ridge. If you make a real bridge & a good road then you could ... I shall sell Lennox Gardens & if I have a house at all I shall have some tiny little inexpensive house which will require very few servants.³⁰

Nothing happened until 1912 when Dorothy married Stafford Northcote, Viscount Saint Cyres, only son of the Earl of Iddesleigh; then Mabel finally moved to Shawford, hardly a 'tiny little inexpensive house', but a country house with a small estate near Winchester.³¹

Hugh, Lady Mary, John and Peggy (their second child, born in 1910) took up residence in the old Fonthill House (the Pavilion) while Blow and Billerey began to enlarge Little Ridge. Pictures were restored, including Alfred Morrison's Goya and the two paintings by Antonio Joli of the earlier Fonthill House (owned by the Cottingtons and Alderman Beckford). Electricity was installed and more furniture ordered through John Walton & Co. Ltd. of Mere. With hindsight it is easy to view this final enlarging of Little Ridge, combined with building a house in London and a large wing on Islay House, to be excessive, a step too far. But in 1913 the Morrisons

at Fonthill were sufficiently wealthy to bear the costs and expected living costs; this was a 'golden age' for the family.

Then, in 1914, as Britain declared war on Germany, building work at Little Ridge was brought to a standstill. Fernand Billerey went to serve in France, and the Morrisons remained 'camping' at Fonthill House. At least Hugh was too old and John too young to fight. On the Fonthill estate, however, losses were born by the labourers and their families. By 1916, land girls and German prisoners of war were helping with the harvest.

Part three: Fonthill's First World War; the demolition of Fonthill House (the Pavilion)

For many country house owners, the period after the First World War meant down-sizing, selling up or demolition. Landowners, who might have lost fathers and sons in the war, were now faced with increasing taxation. An estate which had paid 9 per cent of its gross rents in income tax, land tax and rates before 1914 might be paying 30 per cent in 1919. Worse still, the Budget of 1919 introduced death duties of 40 per cent on estates valued at £2 million and over. However, rents had remained steady for years, in some cases even falling during the war, and many landowners remained reluctant to raise them sufficiently to cover increased taxes. It was not surprising, therefore, that with the dramatic increases in the value of agricultural land during and immediately after the war, many landowners decided to sell. Those with large estates disposed of outlying parts; a few gave up the country life entirely.³² The sales of land began on a wide scale during the final months of the war. By 1919 there was an avalanche of sales; by 1921 a quarter of England had changed hands, some 6 to 8 million acres. Few estates were affected as much as Fonthill: three houses were demolished between 1921 and 1972, but each for different reasons.

During the war the Morrisons had continued to live in Alfred's house by the lake. John Morrison later recalled the fire which broke out in April 1915: 'I remember on Good Friday morning being woken up with my room full of smoke to be rushed downstairs, passing the hot cross buns floating on the kitchen floor'.³³ The fire started in the servants' quarters, in the hot water apparatus beneath the linen room.

The fire was discovered about half-past three in the morning, and the occupants of the house having been aroused Mr Morrison's chauffeur was dispatched to Tisbury with a motor car to bring back the members of the Tisbury Fire Brigade ... on the arrival of the eight members of the Tisbury Brigade under the Captain (Mr George Lush) and the Sub-Captain (Mr Arthur Hibberd) [the hydrants installed in the house] were at once requisitioned.³⁴



Fig. 7.6 The demolition of Fonthill House (the old Pavilion).

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

Later in the night the Salisbury Fire Brigade arrived, pumping water from the lake. Flames burst through the roof of the servants' quarters to the rear of the house but the main part of the house was left intact and habitable; no one was hurt and Alfred Morrison's treasures were undamaged. After the war the builders resumed work at Little Ridge, completing the new wing by 1920. The final statement for the total cost of works submitted by Messrs Trollope & Colls. Ltd. on 31 October 1920 was for £83,327.1s.7d.

With Little Ridge completed, the old Fonthill House, the remaining Pavilion of Alderman Beckford's 'Splendens', was surplus to requirements. Hugh decided to demolish it (Figure 7.6). Trollope & Colls. were again employed, supervising the demolition company of H. Salsey & Co.³⁵ Mabel Morrison's 'Ranche', her 'retreat' on Great Ridge, was also demolished. John Walton & Co. of Mere moved the china, tapestries and other pieces from Alfred Morrison's collection up to Little Ridge before the sale of the building and the unwanted fixtures and fittings: the papers reported on 'Fonthill House, which next week will be sold literally in pieces ... as builder's material The Catalogue contains just four hundred lots including ... oak and mahogany doors, some of them inlaid ... bookcases, carved mantel shelves ... marble stairs, chandeliers.'³⁶ At the same time Hugh asked his trustees if he could sell some of Alfred's heirlooms and a list was drawn up. A massive steel and iron safe on a stand, by Zuloaga, was among the objects sold; also H. W. B. Davis's very large painting *A Panic* (Figure 7.7), which found its way to the Beverley Art Gallery.

The magnificent ivory and ebony cabinets designed for Fonthill House by Owen Jones were considered 'totally unsaleable', but a local Shaftesbury man



Fig. 7.7 H. W. B. Davis, *A Panic*, 1872.

Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

Robert Borley snapped them up for £45 (see [Chapter 17 Figure 17.11](#)). According to his descendants, Borley was born in about 1862, the illegitimate son of a maid employed by the Westminsters at Motcombe House. His father was reputed to be Richard de Aquila Grosvenor, future Lord Stalbridge.

According to his granddaughter Elspeth Huxley, Richard Grosvenor – known as ‘Dick the Devil’ – had spent an adventurous youth: ‘he had lived for a while with the Mormons in Salt Lake City, also with the Sioux Indians somewhere near the embryonic Chicago, and been present at the sacking of the Summer Palace in Peking in 1860. Returning home to settle down, he went, as tradition decreed, into politics, and as a Liberal represented Flintshire.’³⁷ There is no evidence Grosvenor acknowledged Borley as his son, but the boy was given a good start in life and by the 1890s he was running the Grosvenor Hotel in Shaftesbury; before the war he also ran the King’s Arms, a blacksmiths and various stables and stores in the town.³⁸

In 1918, the 2nd Lord Stalbridge sold his properties in Shaftesbury (most of the town), to a fictitious Mr White, actually Messrs. Gaskain and Benton, for £75,000. Borley and two others from the town then paid ‘Mr White’ £80,000 for the entire estate, ‘on behalf of the tenants’. Borley kept one of the largest houses, Barton Hill House, where he installed Owen Jones’s furniture from Fonthill.³⁹ There was no stopping Borley. In 1920 he acquired the Ashcombe estate from the 13th Duke of Hamilton (another aristocrat intent on downsizing), installing a gamekeeper to look after the game. In 1930 he would let Ashcombe to Cecil Beaton, who recalled Borley was ‘a large and prosperous elderly man without much imagination but with a sound practical sense’.⁴⁰

Meanwhile Hugh Morrison created a sports club on land immediately in front of the site of the old house: four tennis courts were laid out and later a cricket field and pavilion added. Part of the cricket field covered the site of the first Fonthill House. Hugh also decided to rename Little Ridge ‘Fonthill House’.

Paintings by Charles Geoffroy-Dechaume of Little Ridge, now called Fonthill House, were shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1925 and reproduced in *The Builder* (see Chapter 18, Figure 18.9). In 1927 Hugh successfully petitioned for a grant of arms and badge, adopting the motto *Prudentia Praetio Praestat* or ‘prudence before any thought of a reward’. And in 1928 his son and heir married an heiress, the Hon. Margaret Smith, daughter of the 2nd Viscount Hambleden.⁴¹

Hugh did not enjoy his finished house for long; he died on 5 March 1931. There was a flurry of sales to cover death duties, but once again Alfred Morrison’s collection proved a rich source of cash.⁴² An extraordinarily ornate and heavy table by Zuloaga was acquired for the Royal Collection and is now in Buckingham Palace. Lady Mary was left their London house, but this was sold after her death in 1935; since 1946 it has housed the Caledonian Club.

Hugh’s only son John inherited the Fonthill Estate and Islay, as well as lucrative properties in the City of London, with no financial embarrassments. He was able to indulge his passion for horses, becoming Master of the South and West Wiltshire hunt in 1934.⁴³ This was an unusual position to be in just before the outbreak of the Second World War (his uncle Archie Morrison had disposed of both the Basildon and Malham estates), and the contrast with his neighbours at Fonthill Abbey and Motcombe is striking.

Part four: Fonthill’s Second World War; the sale and demolition of the ‘new’ Fonthill Abbey

In 1921, following the death of Lady Octavia, her son Walter Shaw Stewart moved into the ‘new’ Fonthill Abbey designed by William Burn. He was 60 years old, burdened with death duties; his son Niel had died fighting in France in 1916. His wife had become a Roman Catholic and their new home saw immediate changes: the billiard room was turned into a chapel, equipped with Stations of the Cross and an altar; the Dudley *Madonna and Child* by Bellini was hung above the altar (Figure 8.7).

Parts of the estate were quickly sold to pay death duties. Hawking Down Farm in Hindon was sold to Colonel John Edward Heseltine⁴⁴ (this is the house reputedly built by William Beckford for his valet).⁴⁵ A further 97 properties in Hindon were sold in 1922, some to Hugh Morrison,⁴⁶ who also bought the Berwick House Farm with 240 acres in 1928. Walter also disposed of some of his personal property at Sotheby’s in 1927, including the second *Madonna and Child* from the workshop of Bellini, which had formerly been in the collection of William Beckford.⁴⁷ It is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.⁴⁸

Meanwhile Walter’s first cousin Hugh, 2nd Lord Stalbridge, disposed of the last part of his Dorset property. Motcombe House and its surrounding estate, ‘the most complete agricultural Estate ever offered for sale in Dorset, equipped with

exceptional buildings and cottages', was sold in 1925 to Messrs. Gaskain and Benton (the same pair who had bought Shaftesbury in 1918).⁴⁹ Their intention was only to make a profit, so the estate was put on the market again in 1929, this time divided into 97 lots. The sale particulars reported that if the lot containing Motcombe House 'is not sold as a whole it is proposed to divide it, demolish the mansion and sell the remainder in lots'.⁵⁰ At this point Charles Prideaux, who had set up a successful milk factory in Motcombe, came forward to buy the house, though it remained empty until the beginning of the war.⁵¹ Since 1947 Port Regis Preparatory School has occupied the house and park.

The Clouds estate, close to Motcombe and Fonthill, was also broken up. The owner Richard Wyndham survived the First World War (he had inherited the estate only because the direct heir was killed in 1914), but he was an artist and writer and had no wish to maintain an estate burdened with death duties. Messrs. Hucklesby and Bartlett acquired the property in 1936 (Hucklesby had been the underbidder for the Motcombe estate), dividing the whole estate into plots for development, from houses to petrol stations. Clouds House was sold with a few acres and part-demolished. John Granville Morrison acquired one of the farms.

Walter Shaw Stewart died in 1934, leaving the Fonthill Abbey estate to his widow Mary Beatrice for her lifetime. She was helped with the management of the estate by their son Michael, but on 13 July 1936 he was found dead only 400 yards from the Abbey 'with a gunshot wound in his side and a sporting gun near by'. He was only 31. The doctor at the inquest reported 'the muzzle of the gun must have been within a few inches of the chest' but did not believe the wound was self-inflicted.⁵² So death by misadventure was recorded as the verdict. Mary Beatrice's final action on the estate before the war was to build a recreation room in Fonthill Gifford.⁵³

John Harris has evocatively recalled the impact of the war on the countryside:

It is difficult to comprehend the country house scene after 1940, especially in southern England in the year leading up to D-Day in 1944. The whole physical structure of the country was in a state of mobilisation. Nissen-hutted or pre-fabricated camps sprung up in parks, cheek by jowl with the great houses. Gardens and landscapes were violated by assault courses and mortar ranges, or embellished with lorries and tanks. Barbed wire fortified old fences. Sentry-boxes sprung up at park entrances. Rooms echoed to alien languages.⁵⁴

Both estates at Fonthill were requisitioned by the War Office, a school was evacuated from London to Fonthill House (formerly Little Ridge) and the Morrisons moved into their agent's home, Pitchpenny House. Meanwhile the Wiltshire Yeomanry with John Morrison and every one of his sound horses were sent to Palestine, while

Mary Beatrice Shaw Stewart's son-in-law Brigadier Reginald Rimington was commanding the 3rd Armoured Brigade in North Africa.

Soldiers from the Pioneer Corps were among the first to be stationed at Fonthill. At the beginning of the war the Corps was the only British military unit in which enemy aliens could serve. These included a number of German and Austrian Jews who had fled the Nazi regime. The 2nd (Armoured) Irish Guards of the British Guards Armoured Division under the command of Brigadier Verney (Figure 7.8) occupied Nissen huts built on the Fonthill cricket field by 1942. Sandbags were stacked up against the archway to protect the stones from their tanks. In 1944 the 11th Armoured Division of General Patton's Third US Army, the Thunderbolts, took over the Nissen huts. A combat infantryman recalled 'walking the two miles from our camp to Tisbury to visit the pubs and attend church services, renting a bicycle to visit Old Wardour Castle, giving candy and gum to the children, throwing oranges to the children who lived in



Fig. 7.8 Covenanter tanks of the 2nd (Armoured) Irish Guards, Guards Armoured Division and their crews ready for inspection, Southern Command, 3 March 1942, Fonthill.

Photograph by Lt. Humphrey Spender, Imperial War Museum H17569.



Fig. 7.9 Miss Ironside's School at Little Ridge.

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

the Fonthill gatehouse as we marched past on manoeuvres, and dances with the girls of the village'.⁵⁵

The school evacuated to Fonthill House (Figure 7.9) had been founded in Kensington in 1920 by the charismatic Miss Irene Ironside. Detmar Blow's many-bedroomed house provided ample accommodation, prayers were said in the library, and a number of local girls attended as day-girls, including John Morrison's daughter Mary and two of Niel Rimington's sisters. Irene Ironside's nephews Robin and Christopher Ironside, both artists, visited during the war. Christopher Ironside's paintings of grottoes at Fonthill were shown at the Redfern Gallery, Cork Street in 1944. His contemporary John Piper was also painting Fonthill during the war (see Chapter 21 Figure 21.1).

John Morrison remained abroad, in the Near East, where the Yeomanry took Palmyra, and in North Africa, until 1942, when he was recalled 'at the singular behest of Churchill, to be the Conservative candidate for Salisbury'. His *Guardian* obituarist described his maiden speech in the Commons, delivered while wearing military uniform and

bewailing the conditions in which his troops lived. It was the only controversial speech of his political life, for it expressed a view of the conduct of the war which was antithetical to the views of the Government of the day. It showed a simplicity, and honesty, about Morrison which was in his nature, but which he was never after to display.⁵⁶

He served as Conservative Member of Parliament for Salisbury from 1942 to 1964.



Fig. 7.10 'New' Fonthill Abbey, ca. 1950.

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

Brigadier Rimington was less fortunate. Captured by the Germans in North Africa in 1941, he died of his wounds. His mother-in-law Mary Beatrice Shaw Stewart immediately made a will leaving everything in trust to her grandson: 'the Fonthill Abbey Estate consisting of the property known as Fonthill Abbey and the gardens grounds and lands attached thereto and her other lands and hereditaments situate in the Parishes of Fonthill Gifford, Hindon, Semley & Tisbury ... in trust for her grandson Niel William Rimington.'⁵⁷ She died on 11 September 1943 at Fonthill Abbey. Three years later, in the summer of 1946, Niel Rimington's trustees decided to sell part of the Fonthill Abbey estate to pay death duties. The maximum rate had risen to 65 per cent in 1940, with another rise in 1946. John Morrison was interested in the land and began to negotiate with the trustees.⁵⁸

The property for sale consisted of 350 acres, including William Burn's Abbey and stables, the two lodges also designed by Burn, Jerrards Farm, Fonthill Gifford Rectory and a few cottages in Fonthill Gifford built by Richard, Marquess of Westminster. Rimington would keep over 1,000 acres and the remains of Beckford's Abbey; also Stop Farm, which became his home. Morrison wrote from Islay to the estate agent G. N. Rawlence on the importance of Rimington keeping part of the estate:

Young Neil Rimington, who is the person really ultimately interested in the Fonthill Abbey Woods, is a very nice boy and I hope that his advisers will either advise him to keep a proper block which can be some good to somebody or to himself, or to sell it and not cut up the place into small strips which will not only fetch smaller prices from the money angle, but make it more complicated for him if he has to keep a portion of the woods. At least this is

what I feel in the matter and I think his Uncle, who is staying with me, feels the same although he is not a trustee.⁵⁹

Rawlence, however, described the mansion, gardens and rectory as ‘unsaleable’ and Morrison was inclined to agree:

The purchase of Fonthill Abbey itself would appear to be certainly buying rather a white elephant, though I appreciate that it fits into the general scheme. What, however, is not mentioned is what it is proposed to do with the remainder of the Fonthill Abbey woods, i.e., do the trustees intend keeping this in the meantime for young Neil Rimington, or selling it piece-meal to all and sundry. I think this has a bearing on any decision that I may make.⁶⁰

The trustees’ valuation of the property came to over £36,000 but they agreed to sell to Morrison for £31,000: ‘appreciating the advantage of allowing the Land to pass into hands that will protect the amenities, and which will in all probability protect the timber as well, they are disposed to accept a price somewhat below what they believe to be the true market value.’ Rimington’s ‘future pleasure in the property’ would be enhanced ‘by not having to fell timber drastically and by having affected a neighbour to neighbour sale’. According to the Fonthill Estate Archives it would appear the final price agreed on 15 July 1947 was £30,190.15s minus any timber sold.⁶¹ At virtually the same time, in September 1946, 3,000 acres, 13 farms and 70 cottages on the Wardour estate were sold for £78,000; the following year the ‘New’ Wardour Castle was sold to the Jesuits and its contents disposed of at auction.

But what was Morrison to do with the white elephant that was Burn’s Abbey? The family company, Fonthill Estates Ltd., commissioned a report which found the stable block and two-storey wing could conceivably be turned into housing, ‘for a middle-class type of tenant at fair rent’. However, it was concluded that there was no alternative to demolishing the mansion: ‘The market for middle-class flats in the main block would not outlast the present scarcity.’ Even if the whole property was let to a school or ‘other suitable institution’ it would mean that ‘sooner or later the property comes in hand again, in a not greatly improved state’.⁶² Morrison dithered and the property deteriorated further.

Rawlence and Squarey were approached on 18 November 1950 by a Mr H. W. Pook, who was already negotiating a lease of Amesbury Abbey (another white elephant) and wondered if Morrison ‘might be interested in considering a financial interest in a Limited Liability Company which might be formed for the purpose of exploiting Fonthill Abbey as an Hotel’.⁶³ Morrison was advised against. The following year the mansion was advertised in June in *Country Life* ‘to be let unfurnished on Lease. Imposing mansion 29 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, 7 principal reception rooms, modern drainage, garden and grounds 4 ½ acres’.⁶⁴ There were no enquiries until a Mr Cameron from Shaftesbury visited in August with the idea of converting it into a preparatory school. He decided it was too small.

Another two years passed, then the idea of converting a smaller portion of the house into flats for workmen was considered, only to be rejected as being almost as costly as building new dwellings; also the site was too far from the nearest village to be attractive. The same year, 1952, Morrison's eldest son and heir James married Clare Barclay and Burn's Abbey was proposed as their home. A report by a firm of surveyors was pessimistic: 'there are numerous cases of dry rot ... it is possible we may have a completely gutted shell to deal with ... We are of opinion that the whole scheme is going to be very costly and we do not consider that the building will have any character. We also feel that future maintenance costs will be high.'⁶⁵

The newlyweds were given Hawking Down Farm at Hindon, which Morrison had bought, conveniently, in 1946.⁶⁶ Hines of Gillingham were contracted to demolish the mansion. This was part of a nationwide trend, as Giles Worsley has summarised:

surprisingly few houses were demolished in the immediate years after the Second World War, possibly because of the difficulty of obtaining building licences. Five houses are recorded as lost in 1945, six in 1946 and 1947 and seven in 1948. Then the floodgates opened. Sixteen houses are recorded as lost in 1949 and 1950, twenty-three in 1951 and thirty-five in 1952. In 1955, thirty-eight houses are known to have gone ... Just under 300 houses are recorded as having been demolished during the 1950s.⁶⁷

Parts of the mansion found their way legally (and illegally) to other properties. Lord Cranborne was interested in the stone steps on the terrace to use in the restoration of his own steps at the Manor House, Cranborne. Hays House, formerly a property of the Shaw Stewarts and Grosvenors, bought balustrading and the gate posts, which 'would complete a suitable entrance such as existed before the war'.⁶⁸ Much of the stone, however, was pushed down into the basement. The groups of statuary by Raymond Smith remained, ghostly reminders of the gracious life led by the Marquess of Westminster and his family. Niel Rimington continued to occupy the ruins of Beckford's Abbey and the adjoining cottage, known as the 'Kennels', with his main home at Stop Farm. The altar and Stations of the Cross from the chapel in the former billiard room found their way to the new Roman Catholic church in Mere, but the Bellini *Madonna and Child* remained in Rimington's possession.

Part five: The demolition of Little Ridge

Throughout the twentieth century the Morrises at Fonthill continued to be supported by the wealth accrued by James Morrison in the 1830s and 1840s, and also by the collections of Alfred Morrison, which satisfied the demand of death duties. Their position was very different to their immediate landed neighbours. From 1955

John Morrison also maintained a powerful position within the Conservative Party as Chairman of the 1922 Committee. One of his obituaries summed up his unusual position: 'his political power – depended on three things. The first was his immense personal wealth, accumulated over three generations. The second was his total lack of interest in ministerial office. The third was his simple conviction that, in politics, what he felt was right.'⁶⁹ He was believed to be the richest man in the House of Commons, exercising power behind the scenes. During the Suez Crisis (1953–7) he was a member of a group of MPs who lobbied for the use of force to uphold British interests in Egypt; in 1963 he was part of a group supporting Alec Douglas-Home over R. A. Butler as leader of the party. After Douglas-Home lost the election in 1964, Morrison was given a hereditary peerage and moved to the House of Lords as Baron Margadale of Islay: 'it was a recognition that his time had passed'.⁷⁰

Between 1965 and 1967, Christie's disposed of several pieces from Alfred Morrison's collection,⁷¹ but the end of the 1960s was the new Lord Margadale's nadir: 'rampant inflation, falling production, collapsing land prices, rising unemployment; tax on investment income at 98 per cent; a sliding stock market; Capital Gains Tax, Capital Transfer Tax, Value Added Tax, and to crown everything the threat of a Wealth Tax'.⁷² In 1970 he was presented with a large document laying out his financial situation and a plan 'for Lord Margadale to continue to live in a similar way as far as it is possible without having to worry to what age he may live To plan for future generations to continue to enjoy the benefits of Fonthill and Islay without having to live off capital.'⁷³ His assets were valued at £1,283,000; his income was £19,000 but after tax only £6,500; his personal expenditure was over £59,000 per annum. The warnings were dire: 'If Lord Margadale continues to live at the same rate it will only be a matter of a few years before his capital has been reduced to zero ... Were Lord Margadale to be run over by a bus tomorrow morning, his Estate would carry Duty at the rate of close to 80%'.⁷⁴

Various suggestions were made, for example 'as Lord Margadale no longer plays Polo it is not necessary for him to pay for the keep of Polo ponies'. Others were more dramatic, including selling a large part of Alfred Morrison's collection, and demolishing the house designed by Detmar Blow, to replace it with a much smaller house that would be cheaper to maintain and run. These proposals were finally accepted and the house was demolished.

The chosen architect to design a smaller Fonthill was Trenwith Wills, working in practice with his wife Simonne Jinsenn (see [Chapter 18](#)).⁷⁵ Wills's first estimate for a new house on the site was drawn up in May 1971. It came to a total of £112,000 including demolition.⁷⁶ He wrote to the County Planning Officer for Wiltshire 'to enquire as to the position regarding his proposed demolition of Fonthill House with a view to re-building on the same site a house in keeping with present day standards of running costs and convenience. The present house is quite uneconomic to maintain and of a design and size rendering it unsuitable for conversion, letting or sale.'⁷⁷

The County Planning Office expressed no objection in a letter to Wills dated 9 June 1971. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1968 required owners of listed buildings wishing to demolish or alter them to seek permission; however, the house was not listed. Therefore, the planning officer wrote 'I see no reason why the present building should not be demolished'. He also added that although building a replacement house on the site was 'contrary to the County Council's policy ... I feel sure that this is a case where such a proposal would be allowed as the exception to the rule'. He wrote a personal note to Lord Margadale repeating his opinion.⁷⁸

However, the case was then taken up by Detmar Blow's son Jonathan, who provided notes for an article in *The Times*. The historical associations of the core of the house were emphasised: it was, Blow wrote, the Jacobean manor of Berwick St Leonard 'used by William of Orange in 1688 on his progress to London'. Also Detmar Blow had 'used the direct labour of local yeoman farmers who ... then included magnificent craftsmen who, reluctant to work far from their small holdings, exercised their hereditary skills as masons, carpenters and plasterers only when there was building work fairly close at hand'.⁷⁹

Lord Margadale was robust in his response. The building work had been done by Trollopes; their Clerk of Works was a Mr Ovenden, with Detmar Blow and Mr Billerey as the consulting architects. The manor house in Berwick St John was 'gaunt roofless and derelict', and the local labourers employed were not farmers but 'elderly Estate Tradesmen'. Trenwith Wills added his recollections, from the period just before the war when he had worked at Fonthill for Blow and Billerey, writing to Lord Margadale on 25 November 1971:

It is, of course, absurd for the Blow family to suggest that a house of the magnitude of Fonthill was built by a lot of farmers in their spare time. To the best of my recollection the General Contractors were Messrs. Trollope & Colls and I well remember that the Clerk of Works was a man called Ovenden. Admittedly Detmar Blow was the instigator of the design, but the actual hard work was done by his partner Mr Fernand Billerey with a team of 15 assistants of which I was one.⁸⁰

Both Lord Margadale and Trenwith Wills were guilty of half-truths. The original construction of Little Ridge was by direct labour, with only the later phases built by more conventional procurement methods. These hand-crafted origins underpinned Little Ridge's credentials as an important Arts and Crafts house.⁸¹

On 19 December Sir Nikolaus Pevsner weighed in as Chairman of the Victorian Society, suggesting the wings might be pulled down but the centre kept. His exchange with Lord Margadale does not reflect well on either party, Pevsner mis-spelt Lord Margadale's name twice, then refuted his suggestion that he had no personal knowledge of the house, referring Lord Margadale to his account in the Wiltshire volume of *The Buildings of England*. Lord Margadale in return confessed

to not having a copy so Pevsner sent him a Xeroxed copy (the book was out of print). Pevsner was invited to visit but did not take up the offer.

The Victorian Society's application to the Department of the Environment for spot-listing was rejected, the Department later claiming in an article in *The Times*, 'it had been informed that the house was completely burnt out by a fire and had been substantially rebuilt after the First World War'. However 'it is now clear that there was a misunderstanding, and in the course of the telephone conversation [with Lord Margadale] the two houses became confused ... It now seems there would have been a strong case for spot-listing.'⁸²

Lord Margadale had a way of conveniently ignoring the whole story of Little Ridge. Writing to another enthusiast, the founder of the Building Survival Trust, he insisted 'it was not a Historic Building as it was only completed in 1921'. His attitude was clear: he should be able to demolish his own property whenever he chose. And the muddle over which Fonthill House should be spot-listed was convenient. Undoubtedly at least the oldest central section of Blow's house could and should have been saved. But he stuck to his main argument that 'no architect could make the existing shell into a reasonable, habitable and economic proposition, and plans which were drawn up for this purpose proved unworkable'.⁸³

As a postscript to the sorry affair, in November 1972 Lord Margadale was asked by a friend to give to the Victorian Society appeal. He refused:

quite frankly I do not feel like supporting them. If they want to interfere with other people's business, they should at least take the opportunity to come



Fig. 7.11 Demolition of Fonthill House.

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

and see me when asked, rather than merely listening to some hippies with a grouse. I offered them an interview, but never heard a word from them.⁸⁴

Julian Smith was commissioned to photograph Fonthill House before much of the contents were sold and the house was demolished.

The sales of the contents revealed the many treasures acquired by Alfred Morrison. Christie's held 13 sales in 1971, the largest on 1 and 2 November at Fonthill: *The Remaining Contents of Fonthill House, Tisbury, Wiltshire ... English and Continental Furniture, Works of Art, Tapestries, Textiles and Carpets, Porcelain, Glass, Silver, Objects of Vertu, Pictures, Drawings and Engravings, Books and Household Furnishings*.⁸⁵ Geraldine Norman, writing in *The Times*, compared the two-day sale to the 37-day sale of Fonthill Abbey. Though a 'pale imitation', she identified the attraction of the occasion lying 'in the echoes of the great although eccentric collector Alfred Morrison'. The eventual sale of 711 lots made £89,122. The house was then demolished (Figure 7.11), apart from the kitchen wing.

On 15 October 1974 the owner of a country house wrote to the architectural historian John Cornforth: 'I am afraid the game is up, and that's all there is to it. Nothing can supplant the use for which the houses were built, however imaginative. We have been incredibly lucky to catch the tag end of it all, and struggle as we may there is no going back.'⁸⁶ This was not quite accurate. The following chapter will chart the recovery of Fonthill and the building of not just one but four new Fonthills.

Out of the ruins

New houses at Fonthill

Caroline Dakers

The demolition of Detmar Blow's Little Ridge took place shortly before Roy Strong's ground-breaking exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, *The Destruction of the Country House 1875–1975*. The exhibition opened in 1974, the year Harold Wilson's Labour Government proposed a wealth tax. Strong wrote:

the threatened Wealth and Inheritance Taxes if applied to historic house owners will see ... the end of a thousand years of English history and culture, as pell-mell the contents are unloaded into the saleroom, the houses handed over to the Government or demolished. I can't tell you the horrors looming unless one fights and intrigues at every level behind the scenes.¹

Strong's exhibition was 'deliberately staged to wring an emotional reaction from visitors'.² The designer Robin Wade created a centrepiece, the 'Hall of Lost Houses', which resembled 'a neo-Classical portico crumbling under the impact of a wreck-er's ball'.³ Strong recalled:

the impact on the public was overwhelming, for they alighted upon it turning a corner, having been wafted along by an opening section on country-house glories. And then they came face to face with this. Many was the time I stood in that exhibition watching the tears stream down the visitors' faces as they battled to come to terms with all that had gone.⁴

An editorial in *The Observer* described the exhibition as 'the most emotive, propagandist exhibition ever to grace a public museum's walls'.⁵ The campaigning group SAVE Britain's Heritage was formed the following year and a plethora of books on country houses were published, including Mark Girouard's bestseller, *Life in the English Country House*, in 1978. Clive Aslet's *The Last Country Houses*,

published in 1982, focused on houses built between 1890 and 1939, ‘the last monuments to a vanishing age’; Detmar Blow’s Little Ridge (now one of the ‘lost’) was included.

The history of the country house in Britain is, however, much more complicated, as this book has already shown through tracing the fortunes of the buildings on the Fonthill estate. Aslet’s book was followed two years later by John Martin Robinson’s *The Latest Country Houses*, a robust rebuttal to Aslet’s thesis. Robinson traced the construction of hundreds of houses built after the Second World War; mostly Neo-Georgian, they included the new Fonthill House designed by Trenwith and Simonne Wills. The demolition of three Fonthills between 1921 and 1972 provided material for the narratives revealed in the exhibition. Detmar Blow’s Fonthill was ‘one of the last country houses in England to be deliberately demolished’.⁶ But the building of a new house at Fonthill within the footprint of Little Ridge was part of a very different narrative: the staying power of many older families and the continuing desire of the nouveau riche to own a country ‘seat’, even if this involved building a new house.

The new Fonthill House

Trenwith Wills was an interesting architect for Lord Margadale to choose, with a direct link back to Detmar Blow; he had joined the office of Blow and Billerey and worked at Fonthill before the First World War. He survived the Gallipoli campaign but his health was permanently damaged. In the 1920s he joined the office of Lord Gerald Wellesley, remaining until 1943 when Wellesley became the Duke of Wellington. Wills worked on his own until 1949 when he was joined by Simonne Jinsenn, whom he married in 1951.⁷ They carried out many commissions restoring and remodelling country houses, including rebuilding the dome of Castle Howard, burnt while the house was occupied by a girls’ school during the Second World War.

Wills’s first estimate for a new house on the Fonthill site was drawn up in May 1971. It came to a total of £112,000, including demolition.⁸ Simonne Wills then took over the design of the new house after her husband Trenwith died the following year. The elevation sent to Lady Margadale on 16 January 1973 was Neo-Georgian (Figure 8.1); the intention was to build a comfortable, modern house reflecting the reduced income of the family. The final cost had risen to £210,000.⁹

The not inconsiderable remains of Alfred Morrison’s collection were dusted down and re-arranged in the new rooms. Further ‘downsizing’ of the family’s assets involved selling Islay House in 1985 to Captain Thomas Friedrich, the retired Top Gun in the United States Navy; a flat was maintained in London, but the estate office in London was closed and all the estate papers were brought back to Fonthill.



Fig. 8.1 New Fonthill House completed.

Photograph, Fonthill Estate Archives.

Upper Lawn Cottage by Alison and Peter Smithson

The attraction of the rural retreat for middle-class *townies*, particularly from London, was underway well before Trenwith and Simonne Wills designed Fonthill House for Lord Margadale. While the Willses designed a conservative mansion for a Conservative grandee, the avant-garde architects Peter and Alison Smithson created their own avant-garde ‘permanent tent’ on part of the Fonthill estate previously owned by the Shaw Stewarts and, before them, stretching from the Marquess of Westminster all the way to William Beckford. As is shown in Amy Frost’s piece on the house in [Chapter 19](#), the Smithsons were strongly aware of the connection to Beckford, and the view from the cottage to the location of the old Abbey ([Figure 8.2](#)) was significant to them.

The Smithsons transformed a ruined labourer’s cottage which had been part of Upper Lawn Farm into a modern pavilion. The farm and surrounding land had been included in the Wiltshire estate built up by the 2nd Marquess of Westminster around his new Abbey, but it was sold by Walter Shaw Stewart in 1924 as part of his ‘downsizing’ measures. Though the Smithsons were informed by modernist ideals, William Beckford’s ruined Abbey drew them to the location, as did the dream of building a retreat from their professional life in London. They described the Pavilion as ‘a romantic vignette of a rural play-life of week-end hermits, in a hermitage that is an unassuming permanent-tent’.¹⁰



Fig. 8.2 Upper Lawn. Penultimate weekend, view [of Fonthill Abbey Woods] from casement. 1982, P. Smithson.

Smithson Family Collection.

The Smithsons occupied the cottage from 1960 through to 1982, thus overlapping with the demolition and new build at Little Ridge. Ironically they left in 1982 when they were ‘disturbed’ by the arrival of Londoners weekendending in the farmhouse next door. Other professionals wanted to share in the experience of escaping to the countryside, and one such was the successful textile and fashion designer Bernard Nevill.

The stable block by William Burn

The remnants of William Burn’s Abbey, designed for the 2nd Marquess of Westminster and demolished by the 1st Baron Margadale, were given a new lease of life in the late 1970s. The stable block had a final use as a post-war staging point for Polish refugee workers saving for their emigration to America, but was then abandoned to nature (Figure 8.3). In 1977, however, as a further stage in his economic recovery, Lord Margadale sold the semi-ruined stable block and some of the surrounding land for £35,000 to the designer Bernard Nevill.¹¹

Nevill (born 1934) studied fashion at St Martin’s School of Art and taught fashion and textile design at St Martin’s, the Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art. In the 1950s he designed costumes for stage and for films, including *Genevieve* (1953) and *The Admirable Crichton* (1957); in 1960 he became



Fig. 8.3 William Burn's stable block, 'New' Fonthill Abbey.

Photograph supplied by Tim Reeve.

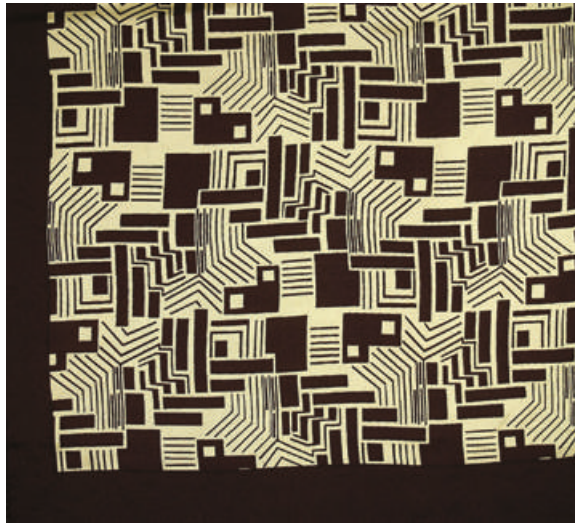


Fig. 8.4 Bernard Nevill, 'Corbusier', from the Jazz range for Liberty.

Liberty.

consultant designer for Liberty, eventually rising to Design Director. He revolutionised Liberty's traditional prints through his influential designs, including the *Islamic* range (1963) and the *Jazz* range (1964). 'Corbusier' from the Jazz range (Figure 8.4) was worn by David Bowie.



Fig. 8.5 The interior of Bernard Nevill's home within Burn's stable block.

Photograph supplied by Tim Reeve.

Interviewed for the Victoria and Albert in 2006, Nevill revealed his main passion 'was in buying old buildings. I was a founder member of buying for architectural salvage.' His London home was West House, Glebe Place in Chelsea, designed by Philip Webb for the artist George Price Boyce. The interiors were used with little alteration as the London home of the lascivious homosexual Uncle Monty in the cult film *Withnail and I*. In West House and at Fonthill, Nevill amassed a mixture of valuable and value-less furniture and furnishings, paintings and *objets d'art* (Figure 8.5). Whenever a large house was being demolished or its contents sold, he was there 'to pick up the pieces, long before it was fashionable and always for a song. "I know that I was born too late," he said with a tinge of regret. "I bought all these things, not because they were cheap but because I am a Victorian."¹² At Fonthill, Nevill also cleared away scrub from Nesfield's Victorian terrace and opened up the paths through the trees. His architectural salvage provided chimneys, fireplaces and stairs.

Visiting in 1984, the cultural historian Patrick Wright discovered:

the artificial green world built by William Beckford in the late eighteenth century was being carefully re-established (if only in an old stable court) by Bernard Nevill, the designer of Liberty's fabrics who appears to have moved from the evocative (and doubtless also lucrative) world of reanimated William Morris patterns to become the custodian of English exotica in the more tangible form of culturally resonant real estate.¹³

Economic recovery for the country house

The 1st Baron Margadale of Islay died in 1996. The following year, John Martin Robinson commented in a programme on television titled *The Aristocracy: Survival of the Fittest*:

All the great families are richer now than they were any time this century. Estates are much more viable economic units than they were in the late nineteenth century ... Just to take Chatsworth, it's a much more vibrant economic force now than it was in the 1890s. The house is in much better condition, and better displayed, better arranged, has far more works of art in it than it had in the 1890s.¹⁴

Country estates close to Fonthill found new owners. Pythouse, once the home of John Benett, who tried but failed to acquire the Fonthill Abbey estate from John Farquhar in the early nineteenth century, was sold in 2007 to Jan Murray, founder of PC World. The Groves' house at Ferne Park, owned briefly after the First World War by the Duke of Hamilton (a descendant of William Beckford) was demolished in the 1950s, but a new Neo-Palladian house designed by Quinlan Terry was built on the site for Lord Rothermere. 'New money has resumed its primordial role as the elixir of the English country house.'¹⁵

The Fonthill estate is now (Figure 8.6) in a very different economic condition to the 1960s when the 1st Lord Margadale was forced to take such drastic action. The



Fig. 8.6 Fonthill House, 2016, Fonthill Estate Archives.

surrounding area is also benefiting economically from the arrival of a contemporary art gallery, based in the Morrisons' tithe barn at Place Farm, and a plethora of small businesses operating out of converted estate buildings at Fonthill and Berwick St Leonard. Cottages dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are being restored and modernised, and new estate cottages are once more being built, some still occupied by local families with links to the estate. Pieces from the collection of Alfred Morrison are sold, occasionally, to pay for death duties, for repairs and improvements. As Alastair Margadale (the 3rd Lord Margadale) himself says,

major investment has been made in improving and converting existing agricultural property for use as commercial and residential buildings, as well as building agricultural, residential and commercial property from scratch. As well as converting the thirteenth century tithe barn (some 65 metres in length) into an art gallery, a cow dairy complex for 450 cows built in the 1970s has become the major west country distribution hub for a national drinks business. More people are now employed on the estate than in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶

Building on the site of William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey

Niel Rimington, descendant of the Shaw Stewarts and the Grosvenors, continued to live in Stop Farm, Fonthill Gifford, after his trustees sold much of his estate to John Morrison (the future Lord Margadale). When Rimington died in 2009, he was living in a small cottage behind the Lancaster Tower (the surviving part of Beckford's Abbey). He left treasures which had been acquired for Fonthill by both William Beckford and Richard, 2nd Marquess of Westminster. The sales revealed the complex provenance of paintings, china, silver and furniture. A painting by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *A Lady and her Maid Chastising a Spaniel*, had been bought by William Beckford in Paris in 1788–9, possibly from the artist. It hung in Fonthill Splendens, in the dining-room of Fonthill Abbey and in the back drawing-room of Beckford's house in Bath before joining the collection of his son-in-law the Duke of Hamilton in Scotland; at the Duke's sale in 1882 it was acquired by Sir Michael Shaw Stewart and brought south again to Burn's Abbey. Bellini's *The Madonna and Child in a Landscape* (Figure 8.7) had been acquired by Sir Michael Shaw Stewart from the collection of the 2nd Earl of Dudley, and also hung in Burn's Abbey. This was the Bellini which Rimington's Roman Catholic grandmother hung above the altar in the billiard room in the 1920s; towards the end of his life Rimington hung it over the kitchen stove in his cottage.

Rimington's estate (some 1,500 acres), including the Lancaster Tower, was also sold. The new owners, Stephen and Benetta Morant, had to deal, immediately, with urgent repairs to the Tower and other buildings, engaging specialist advisors and craftsmen. Their plan to build themselves a new house involved lengthy



Fig. 8.7 Giovanni Bellini, *The Madonna and Child in a Landscape*.

© 2010 Christie's Images Limited.

discussions with interested parties, especially English Heritage. There can be few sites in the country more sensitive than this. Finally agreement was reached to build a house close to the Abbey, using the same Chilmark stone. The architect was Mark Watson, a partner in Watson, Bertram & Fell of Bath. By connecting the new house to the Marquess of Westminster's 'cloisters', a link was formed from the new through to Beckford's Abbey (Figure 8.8).

The Morants also began to work on other parts of the estate, reinvigorating the overgrown American Garden, reclaiming Beckford's paths, rides and vistas and planting new rhododendrons in place of the invasive ponticum and laurel. The Great Western Avenue has been restored to its original width, the old sawmill has been rescued and many of the features formed by the Marquess of Westminster, including his Pulhamite works, have been made safe. The Morants admit they have embarked on a 'lifetime project', but they are happy to be custodians of the topography, the trees and the history. By coincidence, their names, Morant and Nisbet, also share a past with the Beckfords. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Morants, like the Beckfords, owned plantations in Jamaica, while the Nisbets were plantation owners in Nevis.¹⁷



Fig. 8.8 Johnny Morant, *Fonthill*.

Private collection.

Building on the site of William Burn's 'New' Fonthill Abbey

Soon after the death of Niel Rimington, Bernard Nevill became seriously unwell and he took the decision to sell both his London and Wiltshire houses.¹⁸ His unfinished home within Burn's Fonthill Abbey stables was purchased by a local family with the intention of building a country house incorporating Nevill's (Figure 8.9).

The Wiltshire architect T. F. H. Reeve has been employed to design the new mansion and a plan devised to restore the surrounding land. The stone used for Burn's Abbey has been excavated from the cellars into which it was pushed when the mansion was demolished; some of this stone has been dressed for use in the new house (Figure 8.10). These stones are literally part of *Fonthill Recovered*.

After the Marquess of Westminster acquired part of the Fonthill estate in 1844, he proceeded to demolish and clear away the ruins of Beckford's Abbey, leaving only the Lancaster Tower. Some of the stone would have been used by his architect William Burn for the 'New' Abbey. William Beckford had himself used stone from his father's house 'Splendens' for the lower sections of his Abbey. While Alderman Beckford quarried new stone for 'Splendens' he also used materials from the old Fonthill House, which he bought from Francis Cottington and which had only been part-damaged by fire in 1755. Consequently, it is more than likely that some of the rough stone now being used to form a new house at Fonthill can be traced back to the very first house of the Mervyns in the sixteenth century.



Fig. 8.9 Bernard Nevill's home, Fonthill Abbey Stables.

Photograph supplied by Elspeth Beard, photograph by Bernard Zieja.



Fig. 8.10 Stones removed from the basement of William Burn's 'New' Fonthill Abbey.

Photograph © Caroline Dakers.

Part Two
The essays

The geophysical survey west of Fonthill Lake

David Roberts

In November 2016, the PAST Landscapes team¹ undertook magnetometry and resistivity survey in fields west of Fonthill Lake, in order to attempt to locate the first stately home on the Fonthill estate, built by Sir John Mervyn, and its redeveloped form, occupied by the Cottingtons and Alderman Beckford (see OS map Figure 1.1; see also [Chapter 3 Figures 3.8, 3.15, 3.18 and 3.20](#)).

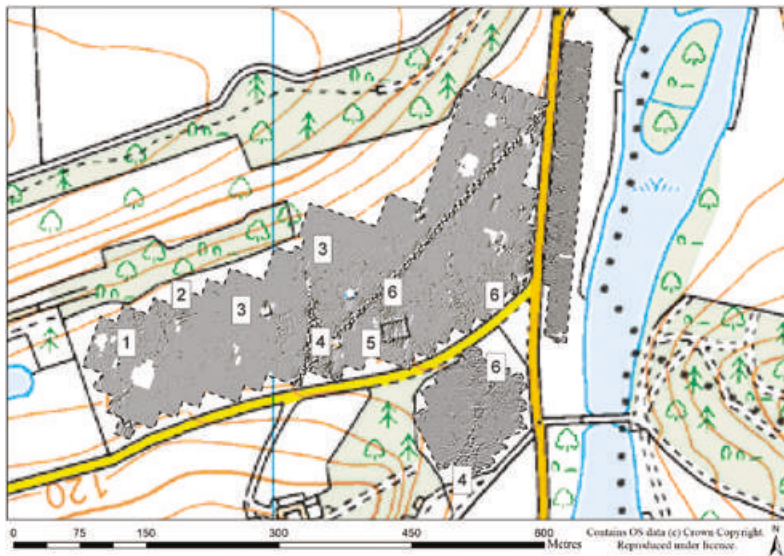
Magnetometry survey

Magnetometry measures the magnetic field of subsurface deposits, allowing deposits with enhanced magnetic properties such as ditches, rubbish pits and hearths to be differentiated from less magnetic geological layers. Resistivity survey measures the electrical resistance of subsurface deposits; ditches are more conductive and less resistant than geological strata, as the soil contained therein is moister, whereas walls are considerably less conductive and more resistant, as their stone prevents the easy flow of electricity.

The magnetometry survey covered most of the modern cricket field, a long transect of the lakeside field running north from immediately east of the cricket pitch, and most of the large field running west up the dry valley west of the lake, north of the cricket pitch (see [Figure 9.1](#)).

The earliest features demonstrated by magnetometry were the fragmented remains of the ploughed-out banks of a later prehistoric or Roman field system. Like many others in the area, the field system consisted of fairly small rectangular fields separated by fairly broad banks, and would have been used for a mixed agricultural regime. A trackway down the centre of the dry valley running west from the lake may also have originated in this period.

The magnetometry also showed a large spread of disturbed ground with raised magnetic response across the south-eastern quadrant of the large field. In



- 1 Curving garden wall built by William Beckford
- 2 Site of cottage built by James Morrison
- 3 Remnants of late prehistoric/Roman field system
- 4 Modern pipelines or drains
- 5 Rectangular structure c. 30m x 20m possibly railings
- 6 Areas of increased magnetic response

Fig. 9.1 Minimally processed annotated greyscale plot of magnetometry results, David Roberts.

the western side of this area a series of very high magnetic responses form a rectangular structure. This may be a building, an iron-reinforced structure within a larger building, or an external feature surrounded by iron posts or railings. Without further archaeological investigation it remains a mystery.

Further west a separate series of raised magnetic responses in the base of the valley hints at another fairly large structure, possibly the site of the church demolished by Alderman Beckford. A rectilinear group of responses at the northern edge of the field matches the location of a cottage built by J. B. Papworth for James Morrison, shown on Alfred Morrison's 1878 estate map. A series of curving features matches precisely to the location of the curved wall at the eastern end of the kitchen garden formed by William Beckford and shown on estate maps from 1822 and also 1878 (see [Figure 9.2](#)). Finally, a series of modern pipes or drains run across the field in several places.

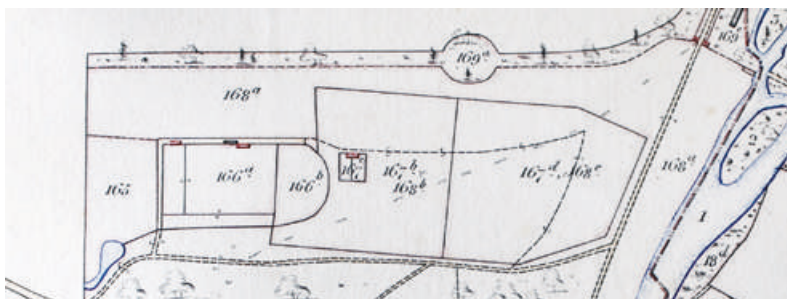


Fig. 9.2 Detail from 1878 estate map of Fonthill, showing cottage (167c) and garden wall (around 166b) located by magnetometry survey.

Fonthill Estate Archives.

Resistivity survey

Resistivity survey is more time consuming, and therefore our use of this method focused on the north of the cricket pitch and south-east of the large field, where magnetometry showed most activity (Figure 9.3). The resistivity survey revealed rectilinear high-resistance anomalies across most of the survey area, all on a similar alignment. The highest resistance anomalies represent substantial walling, with the broader high resistance spreads of material likely to be rubble. These features coincide with the large area of raised magnetic response highlighted by magnetometry; the rectangular structure revealed by magnetometry also fits neatly within the areas of structural remains. The corner of a large, separate building was found at the northern edge of the survey area, possibly with buttresses given the shape of the anomaly. Other high-resistance features were found in a narrow strip adjacent to the lake, and likely represent a lakeside wall and a possible small building.

Overall, these results mean that the southern part of the earliest Fonthill House is very likely to be located across the northern edge of the cricket pitch and the woodland immediately east, with the bulk of the building in the south-east quadrant of the large field, probably stopping slightly short of the base of the dry valley.

The multi-phase nature of the house and its robbing for stone and building material for Fonthill ‘Splendens’ means that the survey results do not match precisely to the available documentary evidence, but the overall alignment and character of the anomalies accord well with evidence from the paintings of ca. 1754; in particular see Chapter 3 Figures 3.18 and 3.20.



- 1 Large area of structural remains including walls and rubble
- 2 Possible garden features, walls
- 3 Large structure, possibly buttressed
- 4 Square ended building
- 5 Possible structure
- 6 Lakeside wall

Fig. 9.3 Annotated colour-graded plot of resistivity survey results, David Roberts.

The survey has also highlighted the longer-term occupation of the valley, showing its early agricultural use in the later prehistoric and Roman periods, and demonstrating the existence of remains of later structures such as the cottage, other buildings and several garden features.

10

The landscape of Fonthill

Min Wood

‘Nature has been liberal to Fonthill’ wrote William Beckford to Humphry Repton, rebuffing the suggestion that he should be engaged to give landscape advice.¹ He was right. The south-west corner of Wiltshire with its rolling chalk downs surrounding rich valleys, watered by gin-clear streams, would without any interventions beyond the ‘fold, tackle and plough’² of generations of farmers offer as attractive scenes as any to be had in lowland Britain. It is remarkable even by the standard of the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which it lies. While our associations and sense of place are often keyed into buildings of the kind described elsewhere in this book, geology is the mother of the landscapes which surround them. It provides the opportunities for, and imposes the limitations on, different forms of land use, on architects, and on would-be improvers. It is geology that determines the availability of building materials, here the out-cropping of Purbeck series freestone, and with that the local vernacular and the architecture of the grander houses. It is geology which governs where and how lakes can be made and where great houses can be built. It is geology that dictates where land can be cultivated and where woodland should take precedence.

The land

At Fonthill, invisible at a distance, is a narrow seam of fertile greensand, interspersed with small areas of clay, freestone and ironstone. This threads its way along the edge of Salisbury Plain and the chalk downs, allowing rhododendrons, camellias, wood sorrel and other calcifuge plants to grow a short distance from places where the plants and flowers of the alkaline downs, like wild thyme, scabious, bee orchids, old man’s beard and juniper flourish. It is along this seam that some of the county’s best-known parks and gardens are threaded like jewels. To Bowood, Longleat, Stourhead and Wardour must be added Fonthill.

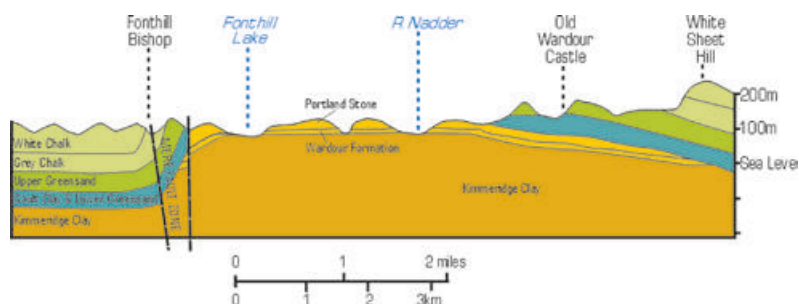


Fig. 10.1 Geology of the Vale of Wardour.

© Isobel Geddes and the Wiltshire Geology Group.

The geology in the vicinity of Fonthill is particularly complicated. It lies in the area of the Mere Fault. A huge upheaval of the earth's crust, centred on the Mediterranean some 60 million years ago, gave rise to the Alps and lifted up different deposits of rock as far away as Britain. Along the great fault lines this created a patchwork of soils as different rocks and sediments were brought to the surface. In the Nadder Valley this meant, according to Isobel Geddes, that 'the Chalk forms the rounded hills of the downs along either side, with the Greensand below producing ridges either side of the valley of the River Nadder, flowing from its source in the Greensand hills near Shaftesbury to cross Jurassic limestones, sandstones and clays as it makes its way eastward towards its confluence with the Wylve near Salisbury'.³ A diagram by Geddes illustrates what happened as a result of wind and weather working on the exposed strata ever since (Figure 10.1 and Chapter 2, Figure 2.1). The darker green represents the Upper Greensand. If the section was taken a little to the west it would show the hill behind Splendens and the land within Beckford's Barrier as being two of those greensand ridges (Figure 10.2).

Looking north from Fonthill Bishop to Knoyle Corner Terrace over Hindon the open chalk downs predominate; in the distance is the woodland on the clay cap of Great Ridge. The view southward from Hawking Down shows the fields of the open chalk down giving way abruptly to the greensand along the line of the Terrace. Beyond the Terrace are the more heavily wooded ridges on the greensand of Fonthill. In 1797 the Terrace was bare; ⁴ there would have been clear views of the landscape on either side.

Early history

Long before 1560, early human interventions had already done much to shape the pattern of settlements in the area (see Chapters 2 and 3). By 1086, Fonthill Gifford, in which nearly all of Alderman Beckford's 'Old Park' and William Beckford's Abbey grounds now lie, was recorded in the Domesday survey as having seven ploughlands. It was held by Berenger Giffard who had taken over as Lord at some time



Fig. 10.2 View looking south from Great Ridge towards Fonthill Abbey Woods.

© Jon Stone.

after 1066 in the Norman redistribution of property after the invasion. Fonthill Bishop was in the hands of Wakelin, Bishop of Winchester, another Norman, related to William the Conqueror. This parish also had seven ploughlands.⁵

These figures imply that each settlement, had, even by then, something in the region of 800 acres of ploughable land. Some idea of the productivity of agriculture in the wider area during the Middle Ages can be judged from the size of the Abbess of Shaftesbury's fifteenth-century Tithe Barn at Place Farm, Tisbury. The fertility of the land is recognised in the name Berwick St Leonard, a parish entwined with the history of the two Fonthills. Berwick or Bawick is the Saxon for 'barley field', a grain important for brewing.

There is no information as to how those who occupied the land in the parishes of Fonthill Bishop, Fonthill Gifford, Berwick St Leonard and Hindon gardened before 1560, or whether they set out to make any aesthetic improvements to the landscape through planting, but it can be safely assumed that they enjoyed the well-stocked gardens and orchards necessary for civilised life.⁶ This essentially utilitarian approach to gardening was accompanied by the keeping of livestock to provide milk, eggs, clothing and meat. A fish pond would have been an essential component of any substantial manor, not least to meet the statutory requirement to keep 'fish days'.⁷ Such a pond, with its island refuge for wildfowl, can be seen in the earliest surviving painting of Fonthill House (Figure 10.3). By 1566, Sir John Mervyn is said to have had a park, a lake, a heronry, woodland, an orchard, a hopyard, a dairy and pasture for sheep and cattle. By 1633 a vineyard had been added to the estate.⁸ Practical considerations would have determined the site of the early houses at Fonthill; reasonable gradients, cultivable land and access to water

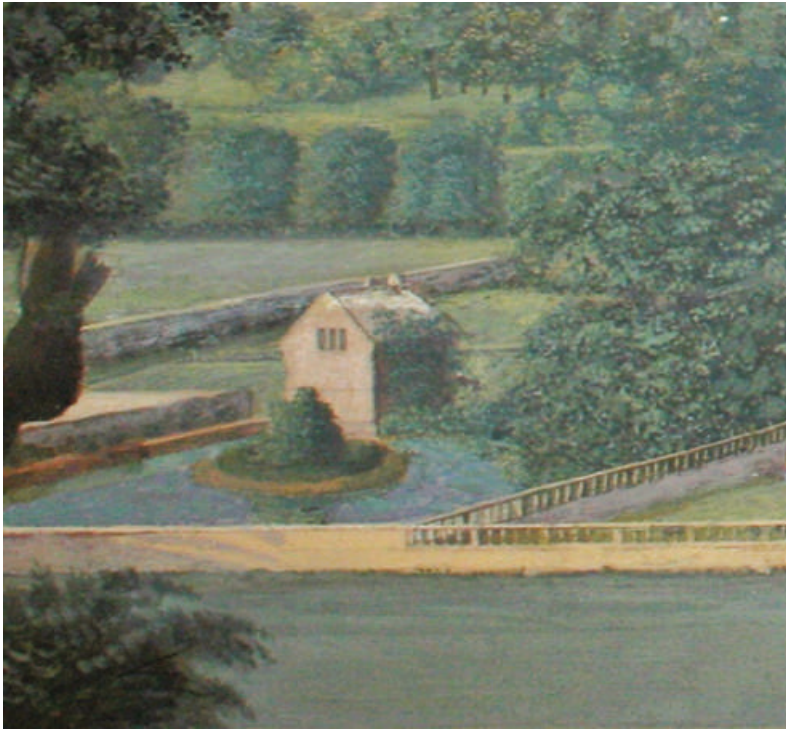


Fig. 10.3 ‘The fish pond’, detail from Robert Thacker, *Fonthill House*.

Private collection, photograph © Heather Norville-Day.

supplies, probably from the tributary of the Nadder and the side stream, now culverted, flowing down from the west.

The Cottington years

It seems that the Cottington households before and after the Restoration, as disclosed by the estate map of ca. 1666, brought a degree of art to the laying out of landscape. The core of that map may be usefully compared with the layout of Sayes Court, Deptford, the home of John Evelyn, in 1673, its parterres contained in regular enclosures (Figures 10.4 and 10.5). Similarly, the early gardens at Longleat and Wilton, although more elaborate, followed the same general model with its genesis in Italian style.

The seventeenth century was a hectic period for the study of horticulture in England.⁹ The Oxford Botanic Garden was founded in 1621, the Chelsea Physic Garden in 1673. There were a spate of horticultural publications. Gerard’s *Herball* had been published in 1597, followed by John Partridge’s *Paradisi in sole paradisus*

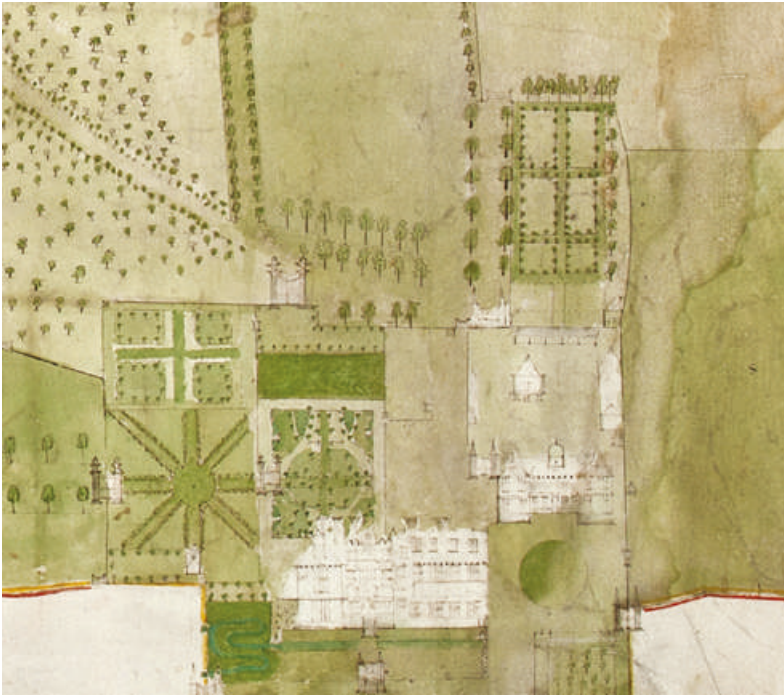


Fig. 10.4 Detail from Fonthill estate map, ca. 1666.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

terrestris in 1629, and later his *Theatrum Botanicum* in 1640. John Evelyn's *Silva*, which includes his discourse on earth, *Terra*, was published in 1675. Eating habits also changed during this period with meat from domestic animals overtaking the wild sourced ingredients central to the medieval diet. Out went wild boar, lamprays and even cormorants;¹⁰ in came roast beef, pork and lamb, for those who could afford them.¹¹

An item of particular interest on the Cottington estate map is the dumbbell-shaped feature set apart from the main gardens of the house, apparently on higher ground, and therefore more nearly on pure greensand (Figure 10.6). This may have been a 'coronary garden'¹² where rare introductions and exotic plants could be grown, as well as a vantage point from which to survey the house and immediate grounds (but see Chapter 3 for alternative uses). It consisted of a straight length of terrace with circular elements at each end. John Evelyn illustrated a similar shape for a 'coronary' garden in his unpublished manuscript *Elysium Britannicum*, written many years before his death in 1706 (Figure 10.7). Later, a rather larger dumbbell was made at Oatlands (by then no longer a Palace), drawn by John Rocque in 1736, so this kind of approach to design could not have been altogether uncommon.¹³



Fig. 10.5 From the plan of Sayes Court, John Evelyn, 1653.

© British Library Board, Add MS 78628A.

Fonthill was one of two country houses owned by Lord Cottington: the other was the remains of Henry VIII's Hanworth Palace, near Hounslow. In 1629, three years before he bought Fonthill, Cottington wrote to Lord Strafford about the improvements being made at Hanworth (see [Chapter 3](#)). New research based on girth measurements suggests that one of the cedars at Fonthill may date from

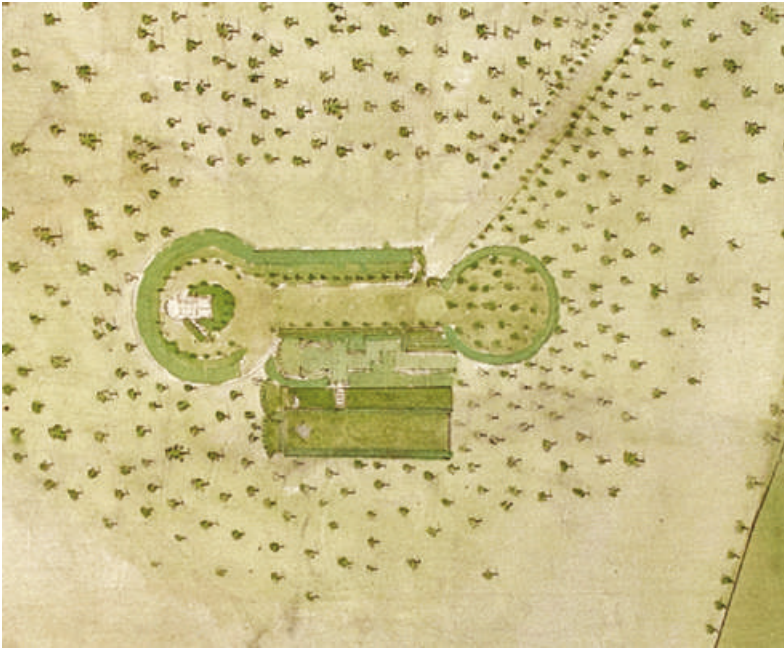


Fig. 10.6 The 'dumbbell', detail from Fonthill estate map, ca. 1666.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

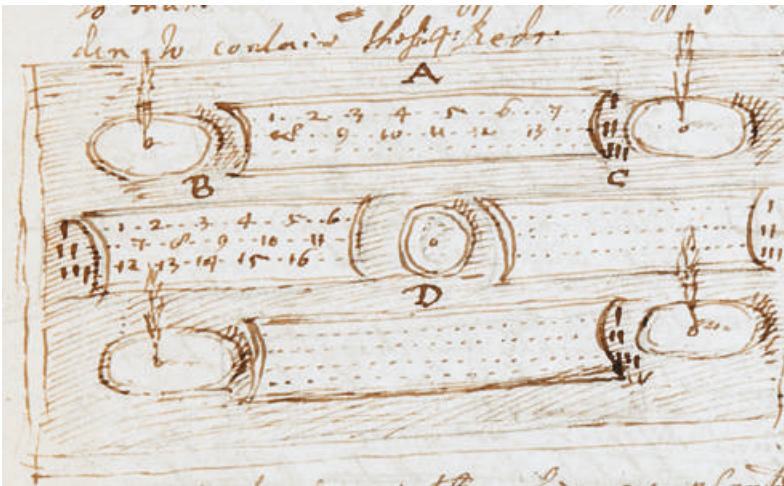


Fig. 10.7 Sketch for a coronary garden, John Evelyn, *Elysium Britannicum*.

© British Library Board, Add MS 78342-78344.

Cottington's time and therefore be one of those grown from cones brought to England by Edward Pocock¹⁴ in either 1635 or 1640. Pocock certainly gave cones to his brother, who was the chaplain at Wilton, where some were then planted.¹⁵ The dating of trees from girth measurements is notoriously difficult due to their varying growth rates. However, if the suggestion is correct, it would confirm that Cottington had a serious interest in gardening and was keen to take part in the introduction of new species to the English landscape (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.14](#)).

The Cottington estate map of ca.1666 shows both the 'old' and 'new' park at Fonthill. The Italian-inspired enclosed gardens of the kind provided by Isaac de Caux for Wilton are located in the Old Park. The extended avenues in the new park are similar to avenues favoured by the Mollet family of France. André Mollet, a disciple of Le Notre, worked in England after the Restoration; his commissions included forming avenues in St James's Park, in London in 1660–5.

By the time George Lambert painted Fonthill in 1740, the Cottingtons had swept away the Italianate gardens (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.15](#)) and the open park had been brought right up to the house. What appears to be an avenue of limes can still be made out to the south of the house (and left side of the painting). In the painting of Fonthill now attributed to Antonio Joli, commissioned by Alderman Beckford only a decade later, even the avenue to the south has been dismantled (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.18](#)). John Phibbs has written: 'avenues were still regarded in the mid-18th century as European and, still worse, French ... their removal would make the nice political and nationalist point that English grassland was so smooth and well drained that one did not need avenues to get across it'.¹⁶

Alderman Beckford

The Alderman has been described as a cultural chameleon, cultivating ostentation to further his social and political objectives while actually enjoying a rather more simple life himself.¹⁷ His stroke of genius, and lasting contribution to the Fonthill landscape, was to expand the small tributary of the Nadder into a lake, a process later repeated, even more ambitiously, by his son so that it would have the appearance of a river. The draining of the lake in 2015 to allow dredging has revealed how small the stream running through the Old Park would have been. An extensive sheet of water of the kind achieved by the Alderman brings the sky down to light up the valley in a remarkable way: when the water receded that light was lost. In summer the Nadder flowed only as a small stream, albeit sufficient to power the mill below. Spurred on perhaps by Henry Hoare's achievements at Stourhead, the Alderman filled his park with a rotunda, a temple, a new church built as an eye-catcher, an archway and a five-arched bridge. These appear in the two paintings of Fonthill commissioned by the Alderman and now attributed to Antonio Joli (see [Chapter 3 Figures 3.18](#) and [3.20](#)).

William Beckford

William Beckford's early years were spent at Fonthill. Forbidden by his mother to play with other children, or to be educated at a school, Beckford would either laze by the lake, dreaming up stories, or make his way to Lawn Farm to be close to nature: 'the bleating of my sheep and the lowing herds in the deep valley of Lawn Farm ... these happy scenes of my childhood'.¹⁸ Perhaps this was the early start of a drift away from participation in society. Just as landscapes are governed by their geology so questions of taste and the attitudes of landowners are conditioned by their experiences and associations.

Alderman Beckford did try to embark on the translation within a family of great wealth into political power and influence, a process demonstrated so effectively by the Pitt family. With the Earl of Chatham as one of his closest friends, and his son's godfather, the Alderman must have had dreams of Beckford following that path. His son made an effort, putting on the most extravagant of society occasions for his 21st birthday and attempting a spell as a Member of Parliament. He engaged first John Soane and then James Wyatt to improve 'Splendens' along Neo-classical lines, and removed some of his father's more extravagant features from the park, including the bridge, the rotunda and the temple. William Colt Hoare was making similar changes at Stourhead.¹⁹

With marriage to Margaret Gordon in 1783 he was brought as close as he would ever come to the life of a typical landed gentleman. Then in 1784, disaster struck. Whatever happened with 'Kitty' Courtenay at Powderham Castle, Beckford was forced to leave the country with his wife and baby daughter Margaret.

They settled in Switzerland, a country Beckford had learnt to love as a teenager in the company of the celebrated Huber family who had taken him under their wing.²⁰ He had discovered new ways of independent thinking far removed from his mother's strict Presbyterian influence, and was also much influenced by the ideas of the poet and painter of pastoral scenes Salomon Gessner. After an idyllic few months at the Tour de Peilz, a château on the lake a short distance from Vevey, Beckford's wife died on 13 May 1786 following the birth of their second daughter Susan Euphemia (later to become the Duchess of Hamilton). In *Letter I* in the 1834 version of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* Beckford gives an indication of the extent of his love for his wife as he describes his feelings on ascending Mt Salève in Savoy, just south of Geneva.

Except a sickly gleam cast on the snows of the Buet, not a ray of sunshine enlivened our landscape. This sorrowful colouring agreed but too well with the dejection of my spirits. I suffered melancholy recollections to take full possession of me, and glancing my eyes over the vast map below, sought out those spots where I had lived so happy with my lovely Margaret. On them did I eagerly gaze – absorbed in the consciousness of a fatal, irreparable loss.



Fig. 10.8 Defensive wall at the Ile St Pierre.

Photograph © Min Wood.

Grieving his loss, and with his two children removed to England, Beckford found some comfort at the Ile St Pierre in the Lake of Bienne. There, his companion Lettice saw that Beckford was ‘strangely soothed amid the fascinating scenes which often stole him from himself’.²¹ This would not have been just a pilgrimage to a landscape as such, but a rendezvous with the spirit of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who as an outcast himself had described how he had found release on the island from ‘the calamities of every kind’.²² From Rousseau’s *Julie*²³ Beckford would have already been drawn to the idea of an Elysium in which wildlife were the true inhabitants and humans but visitors. In addition, the authorities in Berne had recently erected a wall of freestone round the island to prevent its soft soil being eaten away by waves on the lake (Figure 10.8). This had a striking resemblance to the lower part of the Barrier which Beckford would erect at Fonthill (Figure 10.9).

Those notions must have slowly worked on Beckford as he toured various parts of Europe over the next few years. While his experiences in Portugal had a strong influence on his choice of architectural style, his time at Sintra does not seem to have been a very creative period of his life and the key elements in the landscape at Monserrate appear to have been put in place by its owner Gerard de Visme.²⁴ Switzerland and Savoy were to have a greater influence on William Beckford’s ideas about landscape and nature.

In 1795 he sent orders to James Wyatt to begin the construction of the Barrier wall to enclose some 560 acres between Stop Beacon and Hinkley Hill. This is an area similar in size to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, London, put together. The wall was no ornamental feature, however; rather a wall ‘finished with a strong, painted paling, inclined outwards as a *chevaux de frize*,²⁵ which runs entirely round



Fig. 10.9 Stone wall forming the base of William Beckford's Barrier.

Photograph © Min Wood.

the top of the wall in order to secure this favourite inclosure from all intrusion',²⁶ a function it fulfilled with great success for nearly 30 years.²⁷

It is evident that, at this point, he had no clear idea what to do within the Barrier, except to create an Elysium of his own making, perhaps with some sort of hermitage and limited accommodation.²⁸ Although the greensand, with its ability to grow a wide range of plants, is a gift to the place-maker, it was not very satisfactory for farming, not least because of the steep gradients where streams had cut into it over centuries. However, it was a much more interesting site than the Old Park in which to build a new mansion. It was this area that Henry Meister must have explored in 1797, albeit being kept away from the site of the Abbey,²⁹ then under construction. Even allowing for Meister's romantic hyperbole the visitor today will recognise what he found.

Towards the close of the day we were attended by curricles drawn by little horses ... They conveyed us rapidly along this maze of hill and wood; one-while descending with us into a deep valley; another time, mounting us up high hills from whose tops we descried immense prospects, extending over several counties, and bounded either by the sea or sky.³⁰ These views were changing to a new country, and I thought myself in turns in Switzerland, in France, in England, and in America; now I fancied I saw a charming landscape by Paul Potter,³¹ another time a noble view by Claude Lorraine.³²

By the eighteenth century the makers of grand houses had become much less dependent on natural constraints when choosing sites. Water could be pumped

and productive gardens, with their hothouses belching smoke, set well away from the houses they served. If the Alderman had taken notice of that he might never have built Splendens where he did, in a damp location on a site too small for the bulk of the building, a fault noted by several visitors.

The destruction of ‘Splendens’ by Beckford and his abandonment of its park show his intention not only to create something new but also to expunge the past. His son-in-law, the Marquess of Douglas, begged him to keep the house. He replied with vehemence:

You will forget the old palace of tertian fevers³³ with all its false Greek and false Egyptian, its small doors and mean casements, its dauberries à la Casali, its ridiculous chimney-pieces and its wooden chalk-coloured columns, without grace nobility or harmony. No, my dear Douglas, I cannot honestly regret this mass of very ordinary taste, and in my circumstances I believe I have performed a fine prudent act.³⁴

It was this decision, more than anything else, that settled the general character of the wider landscape of Fonthill as seen today (see [Chapter 1](#), [Figure 1.1](#)). The light and open airiness of the ‘orphaned’ park to the former ‘Splendens’ stands to the east of the Hindon to Tisbury road. To the west are the darker shades of the Abbey grounds. Both can be said to be of the English Landscape Style³⁵ but they are set at the polar opposites of that genre. They are displayed as neatly as if they were two contrasting pages of an open book with the spine represented by the road from Hindon to Tisbury. They are both included in one entry for Fonthill in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens,³⁶ although it is along that road that ownership of the land was to be divided early in the nineteenth century (see [Chapter 5](#)). By the 1840s, James Morrison owned the Old Park, and the Marquess of Westminster the Abbey grounds.

The road from the Archway to the Beckford Arms, and the public path network, running close to the lake for much of its length, reveal to all who pass a landscape of the kind often taken as being by ‘Capability’ Brown. In fact, while there are the expected lake, grass and cedar trees, the Old Park lacks the signature clumps of trees and enclosing belts of Brown’s work. There is no evidence of Brown having been involved at Fonthill, nor indeed of his Catholic contemporary Richard Woods who worked at Wardour.³⁷ Nonetheless, the Old Park needs little explanation, as it meets the general consensus about the sort of place often described as the English Arcadian dream, combining art with good husbandry. Beckford’s landscape within the Abbey Barrier was to be quite another matter. Being subject to no rights of way it remained largely unseen by the public for over 200 years, apart from visits that the Grosvenor family permitted their tenants and neighbours. It was made to serve one man’s needs and to be an Elysium for his home. It is *sui generis*, something only of itself.

Beckford was a shrewd judge of ‘landskip painting’, devoted for a time to his ‘Altieri’ Claudes, declared by him to be ‘the finest landscapes in the world’.³⁸

However categorisations such as ‘picturesque’ and ‘sublime’, with their foundations in the visual world, miss their mark as a satisfactory description of Fonthill within the Barrier, even if each of these words is to be found in Beckford’s vocabulary. The only pictures Beckford can be said to have created were the glades and openings framing views of his Abbey, which he encouraged artists – including Turner – to paint time and time again. This was, to some extent, an exercise in self-congratulation rather than one of picturesque expression. In 1816 he wrote to Gregorio Franchi ‘Ah, if the Marquis [of Douglas] was here, how he would love these perspectives through the woods, terminated by the now truly imposing mass of the Abbey with all its towers’.³⁹ He made no attempt to match landscapes imagined by Claude or Poussin in his planting or land-shaping, as is sometimes claimed for other sites such as Stourhead. The facades of Castletown, his cottages in what is now Newtown, said to be built in imitation of a distant view of Ludlow Castle, were not an exercise in making something ‘picturesque’. Rather, they were a spur to the imagination in the same vein as Sanderson Miller’s sham castle at Hagley, conjuring up, as Horace Walpole suggested, ‘the true rust of the Baron’s wars’.⁴⁰

We cannot look to Beckford himself to explain his making of this landscape. Despite the huge volume of his correspondence and notes, horticultural references are very few. When he does refer to the landscape, he often expresses frustration. References such as ‘the monotony of these eternal dense dark woods wearies me to the extinction of every spiritual faculty’⁴¹ are balanced by phrases such as ‘The weather is favourable for walking and the walks are divinely beautiful – roses everywhere, *azareiri* covered by flowers, cloud-mountains in the air gilded by the rays of the sun, the most brilliant effects of chiaroscuro, stranger than I ever more remember having seen, and due to the recent drought.’⁴² This changefulness can be found even within a single passage: ‘the new garden [the Kitchen Garden] makes a great effect because of its unusual arrangement [but] the drought which breeds and encourages millions of vermin and insects has almost destroyed everything’. ‘The andromeda [*Pieris japonica*] is doing fairly well and so are the American plants [but] that rogue Milne [the gardener] says that he has some magnificent magnolia shrubs, but I doubt it, like everything else he tells me.’⁴³ That ambivalence does not disguise Beckford’s evident pride in the landscape he had created, and genuine interest in plantsmanship.⁴⁴ His love of flowers was such that he would spend an hour or so each morning flower arranging when at Fonthill.⁴⁵

But there was something more; at the heart of his character was a need to weave stories, as much for his own satisfaction as anything else. Meister described him as an ‘enchanter’; Laurent Châtel in his detailed study of Beckford’s Orientalism writes of him as an ‘invisible Fabulist’, an unseen storyteller.⁴⁶ Just as his veneration of St Anthony of Padua underpinned his religious beliefs and the over-elaborate quarterings on his imagined arms satisfied his hankering for an ancient lineage, so too his planting in this period of his life provided the setting for his vision of the Abbey as a place of contemplation. Here he could enjoy dreams of his happiness

in the Alps and satisfy his desire for his own Elysium fashioned in the spirit of Rousseau.⁴⁷ The magic was woven round the make-believe Abbey itself, standing high on the hill much like a Disneyland castle, in contrast to the real abbeys of Tintern, Fountains, Rievaulx and Valle Crucis which lay, largely hidden, in valleys.⁴⁸ It was indeed 'a dream that must end in a heart-rending sigh'.⁴⁹

The overriding quality of the landscape within the Barrier is *naturesque*,⁵⁰ the result of a process of improvement hand in hand with nature rather than by the imposition of a predetermined plan.⁵¹ It was a place in which Beckford could live in harmony with nature and other inhabitants of the natural world to which he refers in his writing. Some steps he took were fairly conventional, such as the enlargement of Bitham Lake and the creation of inlets and other points of interest on its banks, and the making of the Norwegian hut as a resting place on the south-western side of the Barrier. His rose garden and the herb garden for his dwarf servant near the Abbey, the extensive walled garden for vegetables, fruit and flowers, even the Chinese garden, might be expected as features of the gardens of any substantial country house at that time.

Beckford was not a pioneer in the cultivation of recently introduced plants from abroad, at that time principally from America. His Great-Uncle Charles Hamilton at Painshill and his Uncle Julines Beckford at Stepleton House had both been enthusiastic purchasers of such material, not least from John Bartram of Philadelphia, sometimes working with Peter Collinson in London who dispatched boxes of mixed species to his English clients from before 1740.⁵² At Thorndon Hall, Lord Petre planted out no less than ten thousand 'Americans' raised from Bartram-collected seeds as early as 1740.⁵³ There is no evidence Alderman Beckford received such plant material for 'Splendens' and by the time Beckford was making his Elysium between 1795 and 1821 introductions from America were largely being handled through London nurserymen. His own 'American Ground' was not unique; indeed neighbouring Wardour Castle had its own.⁵⁴

Beckford's genius for planting lay in rather a different direction. First there was his rejection of the formal avenue. While he was not alone in this, what is different was the way in which Beckford went about it.⁵⁵ The so called Great Western Avenue, 100 feet wide and leading to the west door of the Abbey, was not composed of straight lines of the same species. Rather, the approach was lined by irregularly spaced examples of different species, interspersed with 'spiry topped' conifers. It is no surprise that Beckford would favour grass paths and rides, softened by a liberal covering of moss, kept in trim by workmen at night so as not to disturb his daytime walks: what does surprise is the extent of them. They are reckoned, including the drives outside the Barrier, to have amounted to 40 km.⁵⁶ Included in that is the terrace of some 5 km that runs along the ridge from Fonthill Bishop to Knoyle Corner. From this the Old Park, Beckford's walled garden and the Abbey could be seen to the south, and to the north Hindon and the chalk downs rising up to the woodlands of Great Ridge. A massive bridge took the terrace over the road between Hindon and Tisbury.

Most of the paths are still evident on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map of 1877. What can be read from that close network of paths, some only a few metres apart, is not only that they were necessary for traversing the steeper slopes, but that they would also provide the best possible opportunity to observe nature, and its changes, from every angle. Beckford's network was much more than the 'circuit' which became such an important feature of the gardens of the long eighteenth century. When Beckford had a whim to open up a new path, even late in the day, he would expect it to be open for his use next morning, involving a hasty summoning of reinforcements from Hindon to complete the task during the night.

To that network Beckford brought his preference for planting introduced ornamental species in *by-scenes*, discrete glades with different characters within the wider landscape. Within those scenes his objective was to make the introduced seem as if they grew in natural communities with the native species in a way that anticipated Robinson's seminal book *The Wild Garden* by nearly a hundred years.⁵⁷ However, these *by-scenes* were not intended to assume any prominence in the overall appearance or impression of the landscape. They should be come upon as a surprise.

In 1816, after indulging his taste for the romantic for over 20 years, Beckford added an aesthetic delight in the useful to his earlier achievements. It had always been part of his approach to include a number of substantial open glades in his planting. Some, like the foreground to the American Garden, were necessary to establish the separate identity of a particular plantation, others to allow longer views; a third category were large enough to be used for agriculture. It was to these that Beckford turned his attention.

I am very occupied in making myself a kind of farm in the very interior of the sacred Enclosure; I will have grain in abundance and admirable pastures. I begin to see that one can ally the useful with all that is most piquant in garden landscape. My gardener [Vincent] is excellent: we eat grapes worthy of Fontainebleau and cardoons like those at the Palais-Royal; despite the rottenness of our odious climate they bring me sound and flavoured truffles.⁵⁸

These areas are cross-hatched on the plan of the estate drawn by John Rutter (see [Chapter 4 Figure 4.22](#)).

William Beckford created no grottoes within the Barrier. Stone could have been brought from a number of quarries close at hand; however, the likelihood is that Beckford was setting himself apart from his former life at 'Splendens'. The formation of the Alpine Garden to the east of the lake was probably for the enjoyment of his daughters, who, when returned to his care after the death of his mother, were under the instruction of Lettice, who possibly lived in a cottage behind the Beckford Arms. Beckford could, however, have placed the larger stones which

can be found on the route down from the Abbey to Bitham Lake, and around its shores, either as viewpoints or as reminders of craggy Alpine scenery he had once enjoyed. Associated with most of these are old yew trees which may have been planted to provide the stones with a sense of place (Figure 10.10). These stones can be distinguished from the later work by James Pulham as they are stabilised, one on another, not by the mortar Pulham used but by small slivers of stone known as 'galettes'. This must remain a matter of speculation, as must the reason for the tumble of rocks, with a carefully made stairway, below the dam which impounds the extended Bitham Lake. These may have been put there to prevent overflows and erosion or have had some additional ornamental function.⁵⁹ The most authoritative near-contemporary reflection on Beckford's achievements in the landscape is that by John Claudius Loudon, the influential publisher of the *Gardener's Magazine*, written after a visit in 1835.⁶⁰

After selling Fonthill Abbey and his surrounding estate in 1823 Beckford turned his back on the Gothic and the naturesque, taking with him only his fascination with plants, and some apple trees. With his faithful gardener Vincent, he landscaped a ride from his house in Lansdown Crescent, Bath to his Tower on top of the down with astonishing rapidity. All thought of Rousseau and the wildness of nature was set aside. It was as if the ideas of his youth and middle-age had been played out and he had become an observer of a distant landscape rather than a participant interacting with nature. From his tower he could gaze out over the Severn Valley and reflect on the coming of a new industrial age.⁶¹



Fig. 10.10 Rocky 'outcrop' stabilised with galettes.

Photograph © Min Wood.

The Marquess and Marchioness of Westminster

After his purchase of the Fonthill Abbey estate in 1844, the Marquess of Westminster focused on thinning trees while deciding where to build his new house (see [Chapter 6](#)). The option of rebuilding at the Abbey site was rejected, but it took nearly 20 years before the new Fonthill Abbey, designed by William Burn, was completed. Burn was joined by William Nesfield, whose wide terraces and elaborate parterres anchored the landscape. Their idea of the ‘picturesque’ lay in the medium and distant view rather than in enveloping glades and groves. A generous walled garden was also set well away from the house while the Lancaster Tower, the surviving part of Beckford’s Abbey, was transformed into a garden pavilion and viewing platform with some small ancillary accommodation. A bowling green was created and cloistered alcoves made for shelter and enjoyment.

To create an agreeable way up the steep slope to the Old Abbey from the site of Burn’s new house, the firm of James Pulham was engaged to form a ‘Rocky Pass and Cliffs’.⁶² A pond adjacent to the American Ground, fed by a spring, perhaps augmented by water pumped from Bitham Lake to serve the old Abbey, was adapted as a reservoir to provide the water, when required, to cascade down the ‘waterfalls in a rocky stream’, another Pulham feature ([Figure 10.11](#)). Some idea of the effect of such a stream can be seen in grounds at Carpenders Park, Watford, where a later example of such a feature made by the firm, in this case with artificial rocks, has recently been restored ([Figure 10.12](#)).



Fig. 10.11 Pulham’s ‘Rocky Pass’.

Photograph © Min Wood.



Fig. 10.12 Pulham's stream at Carpenders Park (restored).

Photograph © Neil Hamilton.

This recreation for family and guests was a far cry from the quiet contemplation preferred by Beckford. But the Marquess's Fonthill was closer to the 'status gardening' of Alderman Beckford, and a full-scale flight from the English Landscape tradition. Monumental statuary pieces announced the return of ostentation to the Marquess's estate. His plantings of the latest hybrid rhododendrons were not confined to by-scenes, or mixed with native species but were set out en masse in the open areas to the north of the American Ground, which conveniently faced the new house.

The Morrisons

At the Old Park estate James Morrison was also emphasising his status (see [Chapter 6](#)). He commissioned John Buonarotti Papworth to enlarge the Pavilion and the surviving western service wing of 'Splendens' and to add flanking walls to the archway. The grottoes of the Alderman and William Beckford were restored and oversize urns were set either side of the cascade at the north end of the lake, to be visible from the Pavilion ([Figure 10.13](#)). Papworth also designed a formidable landing stage below the Alpine Garden and played with the possibilities of using outside Coade stone figures in the landscape.⁶³

Essential to any status garden is the provision of amusements for the visitors who were so important to generating a reputation for wealth, and hopefully, good taste.⁶⁴ This was the aim of the Alderman, the Marquess of Westminster, James Morrison and, to a lesser extent, Morrison's son Alfred. William Beckford was



Fig. 10.13 Outsize urns in James Morrison's Old Park.

Photograph © Min Wood.

largely friendless, save for his close staff, which may explain why there were no lodges, pavilions or grottoes within the Barrier; this is an important factor explaining the striking difference between the character of the Old Park and the Abbey grounds.

Twilight and revival

For much of the twentieth century a dark shadow hovered over the British countryside and the landscapes of its great estates. Fonthill was no exception (see [Chapter 7](#)). For political, economic and strategic reasons the only uses of land in the countryside which were encouraged were agriculture, mining and forestry. The open landscape of the Old Park, as with others of a similar kind, when not requisitioned for temporary military camps, could be easily and profitably maintained by good grazing practices, and so came through to the end of the century in some sort of reasonable order. Beckford's Elysium on the other hand, as with other wooded landscapes throughout Europe, fell into the hands of foresters keen on mono-cultural block planting for maximum yield. This was a process encouraged by governments who were then largely unsympathetic to heritage assets in general and historic landscapes in particular. The subtlety of the old Abbey grounds was all but lost. Trees encroached on the Great Western Avenue, the continuous cover of mixed plantations was abandoned, glades were planted over or encroached upon, forestry tracks were made in place of gentle paths. The extensive rock-work by Pulham had not only been hidden by the untamed growth of the rhododendrons,

but all memory of it had been forgotten. The only positive legacy of that era is that some of the older conifer stands, when well thinned, have begun to assume a sort of majesty of their own. The division of the Abbey estate after the Second World War meant that the opportunity for co-ordinated management of the whole was lost.

However, in 1978, Bernard Nevill bought the surviving stable block of Burn's new Abbey, together with the surrounding land (see [Chapter 8](#)). He took the first steps toward restoring the flavour of Beckford's work. Glades were reopened, and by careful clearing of the understorey the character of individual trees could be appreciated once again. By 'harvesting' some balustrading from Spye Park, also designed by Burn, and installing it on the site he also had an eye for the work in the nineteenth century of the Marquess of Westminster.

Nevill's work has been extended in the twenty-first century by the owners of both his part of the estate and the old Abbey estate. Beckford's paths and glades have been cleared, the general shape of the American Ground has been located, the Great Western Avenue restored to its former width, the ruined Abbey released from encircling thickets and the long views over Cranborne Chase opened up. The imprint of the Marquess of Westminster has also been respected where appropriate, particularly by attending to and strengthening the hybrid rhododendron plantings, stabilising the Pulham stonework and looking after some of the introduced plants, such as the *Davidia involucrata* in the American Ground.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The Fonthill landscape, in one shape or another, has given delight through all the cultural, economic and political changes of two millennia. It has progressed from a landscape of utility to be joined by art. The courtly garden was superseded by the birth of the English Landscape style. The Rococo and the status garden arrived only to be overtaken by the high romanticism of Beckford's Abbey grounds. Between 1795 and 1823 in the Abbey grounds the style hovered briefly at the pinnacle of the relationship between art and nature, before the arrival of a new merchant class made status and entertainment, again, an imperative. The landscape bears the scars of the repressive attitudes toward the countryside and heritage born of the carnage of the Great War and the social and political turmoil that followed. It was not until the 1980s that a new respect was generated for the made landscape.

The early paintings of Fonthill

Jeannie Chapel

Paintings of country houses can be found in private collections all over Britain, their subject matter confirmed by their location. Few have either titles or signatures, though they may have been painted by talented topographical artists. This short chapter focuses on five paintings, perhaps the only surviving paintings, of the first Fonthill House, owned by the Mervyns, the Cottingtons and, briefly, by Alderman Beckford; also one painting of the Alderman's second Fonthill House, 'Splendens', commissioned by his son William Beckford.¹

There are many images of Fonthill Abbey, among which those by J. M. W. Turner are particularly noted.² However, given the idyllic site, the landscape surrounding Fonthill, the notoriety of its various owners and the lavish spending incurred in the building of the houses and their interiors, it is surprising that there are not more known paintings of the earlier Fonthill houses. Among the six paintings discussed here, 'Two or three paintings of former Fonthills, of the dates of 1566 and 1755' were recorded in the Gallery Cabinet at Fonthill Abbey by a visitor in August 1823.³ They were in the company of some of the best of Beckford's Old Master paintings and antique bronzes. However, in 1823 no artists' names were attached to five of the paintings, and they have, over time, been given incorrect or confused provenances, associated with other artists and given conflicting dates. For instance, in the nineteenth century one of Lambert's views of Fonthill was thought to be of Dulwich College, and the other, in 1900, was attributed to the landscape painter, Richard Wilson (1712/13–82).

The first painting of Fonthill House by Robert Thacker (d. 1687)

The first painting of Fonthill House, signed *R. Thacker*, is thought to have been executed in ca. 1684, and is in a private collection ([Figure 11.1](#)).⁴

Robert Thacker was an obscure artist, and principally an engraver. John Harris considers him to have been 'one of the most important topographical artists



Fig. 11.1 Robert Thacker, *Fonthill House*, ca.1680.

Private collection, photograph © Heather Norville-Day.

of his day', and notes that 'he may have been a Wiltshire man'.⁵ Very little is known about him as a painter or engraver; it is not known even if he painted in oil. He was described as 'a tolerable mathematician, an excellent contriver for draining of waters, as also for the drawing of prospects, landskips, etc.', and as an inhabitant of London.⁶ On the other hand, he may also have been confused with a contemporary, Robert Theaker, who died in or around 1687, the same year as Thacker, and who was known for his publication of 1665, *A Light to the Longitude*.⁷ It is assumed, in this case, that it was Robert *Thacker* who signed the painting of Fonthill.

From December 1673 until 1676 Thacker was employed and paid £60 a year by the Board of Ordnance to draw 'drafts of the city of Tangier which pleased the King, the Duke of York and the said Master General of the Ordnance'.⁸ A large engraved wall map of the city was published in 1675, on which he described himself as 'Roberto Thacker Designer to the King', that is, an engraver for Charles II. In 1681 Thacker advertised for subscribers to enable him to engrave his drawings of the map of Tangier.⁹

Among Thacker's work are his drawings for the 12 engravings of the interiors, exteriors and landscape views from the newly opened Royal Observatory, Greenwich. These were commissioned in 1676, by the mathematician and patron of astronomy Sir Jonas Moore (1617–79), etched by Francis Place (1647–1728) and dedicated to the King, to commemorate the opening of the Observatory. The series was never published and the engravings are very rare.¹⁰ Thacker drew Salisbury Cathedral in four parts, engraved on a large plate. He also executed a set of 11 views of Longford Castle, near Salisbury, which, although undated, are of ca. 1680, and were engraved by Nicholas Yeates (fl. ca. 1669–86) and James Collins (fl. 1675?–1717). Two of these illustrate *A View of the Castle from the Garden* and *A View of the*

Porter's Lodge.¹¹ They are described by John Harris as possibly the earliest architectural drawings published in England.¹² In 1680 Thacker, while drawing with Francis Place on the Isle of Wight, was arrested on suspicion of spying. The case was dismissed and the following year he sought subscriptions to engrave the drawings he had made there.

The only other known painting by Thacker to date is a view of Longleat House in Wiltshire, of post-1684, signed *R. Thacker Pinxit*. This is in the collection of the Marquess of Bath, and has presumably hung at Longleat since it was painted. It is comparable to the view of Fonthill, gouache and watercolour on paper glued to a panel, and bears a similar signature.¹³ It depicts the east front of Longleat House and the great parterre, the garden newly laid out in the 1680s for Thomas Thynne, 1st Viscount Weymouth (bap. 1640 d. 1714) by George London (d. 1714) and Henry Wise (1653–1738), who worked there from 1683 to 1694.¹⁴ It is, of course, possible that other such views of country houses by Thacker, perhaps also in Wiltshire, survive in private collections.

Thacker died on 2 January 1687 of a sore throat, described as the 'french pox', at the Crown Inn, Oxford, and was buried the next day at the west end of St Martin's Church, near the font. He was aged between 40 and 50. Both the inn and the church were demolished in 1890.

The painting of Fonthill House is made up of several sections of handmade laid paper glued to a wooden panel. There is, for example, an incomplete watermark, possibly of ca. 1610–20, on the piece of paper in the upper region of the image. In ca. 1666 Francis Cottington Esq. commissioned an estate map with elaborate gardens surrounding Fonthill House (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.10](#)): in Thacker's painting, with a date range of ca. 1680–7, the trees are seen to have grown considerably, as would be expected. Charles Cottington was then owner of Fonthill House.

Alderman Beckford bought the Fonthill estate from Francis, 2nd Baron Cottington, in 1744/5. His purchase included Fonthill House, its furniture and paintings. Thacker's painting must have survived the fire which destroyed part of Fonthill House in 1755, and was later hung in the Alderman's new 'Splendens' (see [Chapter 4](#)). In 1801, it was described as 'Another very ancient painting, in distemper, of Fonthill, in the time of Sir John Mervin, who died in 1566', hanging in the upstairs 'corridor or gallery' at Fonthill House ('Splendens');¹⁵ it was by then in the collection of the Alderman's son William Beckford. The date 1566 was repeated by James Storer, who described the picture hanging at Fonthill Abbey in the dressing room hung with drawings, one of which was 'of the ancient manor house as it appeared about the year 1566'.¹⁶ 1566 was the year Sir John Mervyn of Fonthill died; however, the date has nothing to do with the date of the painting, which includes additions to Fonthill carried out by Lord Cottington in the 1630s. In 1823 the picture hung in an anteroom off the Oak Library at the Abbey, described there as 'A view of a still earlier mansion' and 'a painting preserved at the Abbey,

purporting to be a view of it in 1566, when it had perhaps recently received such additions as excited a desire of representing them pictorially'.¹⁷

There is uncertainty about the provenance of the painting after it hung in the Abbey. It may have been bought by John Farquhar, and was later owned by the Morrises who acquired part of the Fonthill estate in 1829 (see [Chapter 5](#)). At some point the signature was misread and a label added to the frame with the name 'P. Mecker', who appears not to have existed.

An engraving of the painting, entitled *View of Fonthill Antiquus*, was made by Storer in 1822,¹⁸ and another published by Sir Richard Colt Hoare in *A History of Modern Wiltshire: Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* in 1829. The plate, II, is dated January 1828.¹⁹ It differs in some details from the painting, for instance the addition of two figures in the foreground, differences in the foliage and a lack of trees flanking on both sides.

Two paintings of Fonthill House by George Lambert (1699/1700–1765)

George Lambert was a landscape and scene painter. Two paintings by him of Fonthill House are known: one is dated 1740, the other, which is not dated, may be of a slightly earlier date. The provenances of both pictures have been confused until relatively recently.

The larger, entitled *Fonthill Redivivus, Wiltshire*, is now in the Government Art Collection ([Figure 11.2](#)).²⁰ It shows the house as seen from the hill to the east. The painting was presumably commissioned by Francis, 2nd Baron Cottington of Fonthill, who sold the estate to Alderman Beckford in 1744/5. This may be the painting noted by John Britton in 1801 hanging in Fonthill 'Splendens', 'a large and fine Landscape, by Lambert, representing Fonthill as it appeared in the year 1740; the figures by Hogarth'.²¹ It was also possibly the painting which later hung at the Abbey, in the Duchess of Hamilton's Chamber, described as 'A large painting of the old Fonthill Mansion'.²² It was included in the sale at Fonthill of 1823, marked at eight guineas, and appeared again, at the Fonthill sale of 1825, as a 'View of Fonthill' by Lambert.²³ Thereafter it was in Ireland, in the collection of Mervyn Wingfield, 7th Viscount Powerscourt (1836–1904), of Powerscourt, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. In 1900 it was sold as *Fonthill, Wilts.* by 'R. Wilson', that is, the landscape painter, Richard Wilson (1712/13–82), for £1.6s.²⁴ In 1965 it was purchased by the Ministry of Works from the collection of 'A. Lassen.' However the identity of the building was at this time lost; it was described as an 'Unknown House'.²⁵ John Harris identified it in 1966, and it was included in the William Beckford exhibition in Bath.²⁶ A drawing of the view is in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, executed by an unknown artist at some time between 1800 and 1810, and has an inscription which records that it was in the Abbey (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.16](#)).²⁷



Fig. 11.2 George Lambert, *Fonthill House*, 1740.

Government Art Collection, 7074.

Elizabeth Einberg considers that the trees in the foreground of this painting, the two figures in the left-hand corner, and much of the sky and shrubbery were added later. She also considers that the further group of figures are closer to the work of William Hogarth (1697–1764), although it is very unlikely that they were painted by him. These additions are conceivably by a later hand, which was a practice not unusual in works by Lambert. They were possibly painted by Lambert's pupil and assistant, the landscape and scene painter John Inigo Richards (1730/31?–1810). Richards also worked as a picture restorer, and may have been involved with the paintings because they were damaged in the fire of 1755.²⁸

The second view of Fonthill House by Lambert was possibly painted slightly earlier, in ca. 1736–40 according to Einberg, and is now in a private collection (Figure 11.3).²⁹ John Rutter published an engraving of the painting in 1823.³⁰ As noted above, the provenance of this picture and of the other painting of Fonthill by Lambert have been confused.

This painting was also presumably commissioned by Francis, 2nd Baron Cottington for Fonthill House. It was acquired by the Alderman and hung at 'Splendens' before being taken to the Abbey by William Beckford. It is most likely to be 'The old Fonthill Mansion, Haymakers in the Fore-Ground'³¹ by an anonymous artist that was included in the Fonthill sale of 1825. By later in the nineteenth century it was in the collection of the patron and collector Mrs Charles



Fig. 11.3 George Lambert, *Fonthill House*. View of house from the north.

© Christie's Images Limited.

Beatty Alexander, formerly Harriet 'Hattie' Crocker (1859–1935) of New York, the daughter of Charles Crocker (1822–88) of San Francisco, one of the builders of the Central Pacific Railway. The painting was then thought to be a view of Dulwich College by Paul Sandby (bap. 1731, d. 1809). It remained with the family until 2001, when it sold for £71,950³² after being identified as of Fonthill House.

Elizabeth Einberg has again suggested that some of the foreground shrubbery and trees, the upper part of the sky, and the standing figure in the foreground may be by another, and later, hand. Again that was not unusual for Lambert, and the technique of these additions is very close to that of his pupil and assistant, John Inigo Richards.³³ She likewise considers that the main group of figures in the foreground are stylistically what she terms 'Hogarthian'. In her view, it is possible that these additions were made either as a result of damage sustained in, or after, the fire of 1755. It is also possible that the two pictures by Lambert were originally of the same size, displaying a similar ratio of building to landscape.

Two paintings of Fonthill House now attributed to Antonio Joli (ca. 1700–77)

These two views of *Fonthill House* (Figures 11.4 and 11.5) were formerly attributed to Arthur Devis (1712–87) and to his half-brother, Anthony Devis (1729–1816).³⁴ Now, however, they have been attributed to the Italian artist Antonio Joli (ca.



Fig. 11.4 Attributed to Antonio Joli, *Fonthill House from the north-east*.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.



Fig. 11.5 Attributed to Antonio Joli, *Fonthill House from the south-east*.
Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

1700–77). They are assumed to have been commissioned by Alderman Beckford and are now in a private collection.

Joli, who worked as a scene painter in Venice, is mostly known for his views of Venice, Rome and Naples and for *capricci* paintings. He was, in all probability, in

contact with Canaletto in the mid-1730s Venice, where he learnt to paint in his style. Joli is described as a skilled scene painter for the theatre, and also a view painter, whose style imitated that of Canaletto.

Joli lived in London from 1744 to 1748 or 1749, where he painted a number of topographical views of the Thames and Whitehall. He was also commissioned by the Swiss impresario Johann Jakob Heidegger (1666–1749), a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to George II, to paint landscapes of various views around the world from published engravings for the hall of Heidegger's house at Number 4, Maids of Honour Row in Richmond, Surrey. The paintings are framed panels, and are still in situ.³⁵ In 1744 Joli painted two small paintings, of Paris and London Bridge, for Canaletto's major patron in the 1740s Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond (1701–50). In ca. 1747/8, he also painted a set of five overdoor views in collaboration with Canaletto, who was working in England from May 1746 to at least 1755, for Philip Dormer, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773), at Chesterfield House, London.³⁶

Four paintings of Rome by Joli were included in the sale of the contents of Fonthill 'Splendens' of 22 August 1807: *View of Monte Cavallo*, *View of Porta del Popolo*, *View of Castle of St. Angelo and St. Peter's* and *View of the Capitol*.³⁷ These had presumably been commissioned by the Alderman for Fonthill. He also owned a number of works, certainly at least four, by Canaletto, which were inherited by his son William Beckford; some of these appeared in his later sales.³⁸ One, for instance, *The Riva degli Schiavone, Venice*, a major work of ca. 1734–5, is now in Sir John Soane's Museum, London. Another, a *Capriccio of Roman and Venetian Buildings*, hung in Beckford's house in Bath. He claimed in 1838 that it was genuine, as 'this painting and several others that I have were got directly from the artist himself by means of the English Consul at Venice'. Joseph Smith (1673/4?–1770), was appointed Consul in Venice in 1744, and remained there all his life.³⁹ He was also a book collector and a seriously important patron of the arts and particularly of Canaletto, from whom he commissioned and purchased a considerable number of works.

During his time in London Joli produced pendant paintings on a large scale, as did Canaletto, whose style he had clearly adopted. The paintings of Fonthill can be compared to Canaletto's two views of *Badminton House, Gloucestershire* (Figure 11.6), which were probably painted in the summer of 1748.⁴⁰ The comparison of style is also clearly demonstrated in Joli's *An Extensive View of Westminster from Lambeth*, of ca. 1750 (Figure 11.7), in the Bank of England Museum, which is an almost exact copy (although smaller) of Canaletto's view of the same subject, *London: The Thames and City of Westminster from Lambeth*, of ca. 1746–7, in the Lobkowitz Collection in the Czech Republic.⁴¹

The identity of the artist of these magnificent paintings of Fonthill was lost from an early stage. These idealised landscapes, staged with various activities in detail, hung first in the Cottingtons' old Fonthill House (see Chapter 3), presumably in the south front wing as they survived the fire of 1755. At 'Splendens' they



Fig. 11.6 Canaletto, *Badminton House*, 1748.

© Duke of Beaufort.



Fig. 11.7 Antonio Joli, *Westminster from the River*, ca. 1750.

© The Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

hung in 'a corridor or gallery' upstairs and were described in 1801 by John Britton as 'Two other views of the same mansion and its environs, in 1753, as improved by the late Mr. Beckford previous to the fire'.⁴² In 1812 Storer recorded them in the

small lobby at Fonthill Abbey and described them as ‘two views of the edifice that was burnt at Fonthill in the year 1755’.⁴³

The paintings remained in the Abbey until the sale of 1823, when they were described as ‘A pair of Views of the first Fonthill Mansion’ from the anteroom and chamber.⁴⁴ The view looking south towards Tisbury was engraved as *Fonthill redivivus Ao 1755* for Hoare’s *A History of Modern Wiltshire* published in 1829.⁴⁵ Their history thereafter remains a mystery until they were acquired by Alfred Morrison, owner of part of the Fonthill estate from the 1850s. By Morrison’s death in 1897, they were hanging in the Morning Room of Morrison’s Fonthill House, actually the old Pavilion of ‘Splendens’ (see Chapters 6 and 7).⁴⁶ They were then described as a ‘view of a mansion, with river, bridge and wooded hills – in a panel’ and a ‘view of the same mansion, with winding river in the foreground – in panel’.

Fonthill ‘Splendens’, painted by Hendrik Frans de Cort (1742–1810)

Alderman Beckford commissioned his new Fonthill House (‘Splendens’), but it was his son William who commissioned Hendrik de Cort to paint views of the house (Figure 11.8).

Hendrik de Cort was born and studied in Antwerp. He was probably employed by William Beckford to work at Fonthill soon after his arrival in England in ca.



Fig. 11.8 Hendrik Frans de Cort, *Fonthill House*, 1791.

Image of the painting by kind permission of the trustees of the Walter Morrison collection held at Sudeley Castle.

1790, and was a regular visitor there until ca. 1807. Beckford described him as ‘that Fleming de Cort (half-beast, half-knave)’.⁴⁷ He built up a successful practice painting views of country houses and worked for a number of important patrons. He made preparatory wash drawings of Fonthill for Beckford, six of which are known and were possibly part of the collection of 18 de Cort drawings listed in the inventories for 20 Lansdown Crescent, Bath.⁴⁸ Beckford also owned a number of other paintings by de Cort, such as *A Tombe of Asserius*, and views of Salisbury and Exeter Cathedrals.⁴⁹

The view in oil of *Fonthill Splendens* by de Cort is now in the collection at Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire.⁵⁰ The painting is signed and dated *H. De. Cort, Antwertpiensis, 1791*. It has a label pasted on the back, apparently in the artist’s hand, in Latin, which translated reads

*The Fonthill Mansion / That which he was able to accomplish by his Genius
and his own good right hand, / To the Most Noble, Most ingenious Lord, /
Lord William Beckford. / The Judge, Cultivator and Patron of the Liberal
Arts, / Henry De Cort dedicates, / A native of Antwerp, Painter of the royal
French Academy, and of the most serene Prince of Condé, 1791.*

It was exhibited as *View of Font-hill in Wiltshire* that year at the Royal Academy, with another view by de Cort of *Berwick Church, Font hill Bishop, Wiltshire*.⁵¹

The painting was seen in the Abbey in the Picture Room by a visitor to the Abbey, in August 1823. The painting led him to reminisce on the old Fonthill House, of which he wrote ‘that beautiful, and comfortable, aye, and hospitable abode’.⁵² The painting was included in the Fonthill sale in 1823, as by de Cort, of a *View of Fonthill Mansion, as erected by the late Alderman Beckford, on the verge of the Lake in the Park, after the destruction by fire of the ancient mansion, purchased by him with the estate*, and marked at £23.12s.6d.⁵³ It appeared again in the 1825 sale as *The Fonthill Mansion, as erected by the late Alderman Beckford, after the destruction by fire of the Ancient Mansion*.⁵⁴ It seems not to have been sold and is probably the ‘View of Fonthill – de Cort’ listed as hanging in the small library at 20 Lansdown Crescent Bath in September 1844.⁵⁵

The painting was subsequently acquired by James Morrison, who bought part of the Fonthill estate in 1829 (see [Chapter 6](#)). Morrison later also bought Basildon Park in Berkshire, which became his main country residence from 1844, and the painting hung there in the Octagon Room. Gustav Waagen visited Basildon in 1854 and described the painting as being by Richard Wilson, ‘the view of some particular locality – richly wooded and hilly with a piece of water, with a country house near it. On canvas. Of great truth, and carefully painted in a clear silvery tone.’⁵⁶ The painting was inherited from James by his eldest son Charles, and subsequently passed to Charles’s nephew Archie, to his children, and then, by marriage, to Sudeley Castle.⁵⁷

In 2010, de Cort's painting of Fonthill 'Splendens' was confused with his *Capriccio Landscape with a Ruined Abbey, the Coast Beyond*, the latter described (incorrectly) as being from the collections at Fonthill and Hamilton Palace.⁵⁸ Most recently a number of drawings by de Cort of Fonthill have been sold at auction (see [Chapter 4 Figure 4.13](#)).

The Cottington and Bradshaw burials in Westminster Abbey

Susan Jenkins

The Cottingtons

Francis, Baron Cottington and his wife Anne were buried in Westminster Abbey, Anne before and Francis after the Civil War and Commonwealth. They share a monument (Figure 12.1), described in the 1924 inventory of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments as:

a combined sarcophagus and wall-monument, ascribed to F. Fanelli, of black and white marble with bronze enrichments. The shaped sarcophagus stands on a high panelled pedestal and has in front a tablet and achievement-of-arms; on the sarcophagus is the reclining effigy of a man [Lord Cottington] on a rush mattress and having lace collar, knee-breeches and gown of office; the back-piece has an eared inscription-tablet, and is flanked by pilasters supporting an entablature; above the latter is an oval recess surrounded by a wreath and containing the bust of Lady Cottington; it is flanked by trusses supporting a pediment.¹

The erection of the monument was undertaken in two phases. The first phase saw the construction of Anne's funeral monument, following her death on 22 February 1633/4, aged 33. This was commissioned by her husband, who probably also intended this as his future burial place.² On 18 July 1634, Cottington signed a contract with Hubert Le Sueur, Charles I's court sculptor: 'for the work of a great tomb, to be made and set up at the Abbey Church of Westminster', for which he paid £400.³ The contract does not specify the materials used, but the monument has been described by Le Sueur scholar Charles Avery as 'an elaborate affair ... its architecture being carried out largely in black touchstone [sic], while a bronze bust of Lady Cottington was set in a roundel above and ensconced in an *aedicula* of mannerist design.'⁴



Fig. 12.1 The tomb of Lord Cottington and his wife in its present state.
 By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.



Fig. 12.2 The portrait bust of Anne Cottington by Hubert Le Sueur, forming part of the Cottington tomb.

By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

Recent inspection of the bust of Lady Cottington (Figure 12.2) reveals that it is made of bronze, although early sources seem confused about its material.⁵ John Dart, for instance, writing in 1723, describes it as ‘a Busto of white Marble in a circular Frame of gilt Brass; and on a Table of the same an Inscription, informing you, that it was erected to Anne Lady Cottington, Baroness of Hanworth, &c’.⁶ Nearly a century later, Ackermann recorded that, ‘In a circular frame of gilt brass, is the bust of this lady [Anne Cottington] in white marble’, although an illustration shows it looking decidedly dark in tone.⁷ A few years later, J. P. Neale asserted that the bust of Lady Cottington is ‘of gilt copper, but assuming the appearance of bronze from the effects of time.’⁸

Shortly before the execution of Charles I, Francis Cottington left England (see Chapter 3). In 1650 he was in Spain with an embassy to raise money for Charles II, and died ‘piously and catholicly’ in Valladolid on 19 June 1652, where he was buried in the Jesuit English College.⁹ In his will he requested a burial ‘without any pomp or splendour’ and that his body ‘be placed in a sepulchre on deposit in the church of the English College of this city in the chapel or place my executors shall choose and remain deposited there until our Lord so disposes the affairs of the Kingdom of England that my body may be translated to it by my nephews and heirs...’¹⁰ He also requested that up to 2,000 masses be said for his soul. As Cottington’s children predeceased him, he had left his goods and estates in England in the care of Lord Francis Seymour, to be divided between his ‘catholic orphan’ nephews, Francis and Charles, the sons of his elder brother Maurice.¹¹

Cottington's estates passed to his nephew Francis, who died in 1665, then to his great-nephew Francis who died in 1666 and finally to Charles Cottington, another great-nephew. In 1676, in pursuance of his great-uncle's wishes, Charles Cottington contacted the English College in Valladolid via an agent for the college, Father John Newport, requesting permission 'to bring the bones of his uncle to England'.¹² Father Newport's letter to the Father Rector of the English College explained that 'he assumes [the College] will have no objection because he [Lord Cottington] was only placed there on deposit'. It fell to Charles Cottington, therefore, to arrange for the repatriation and re-burial of his uncle in Westminster Abbey, together with the adapting of the existing funeral monument in St Paul's Chapel at the north-east end of the ambulatory.

The second stage of the monument's construction consequently took place following the retrieval of Cottington's bones. According to the Abbey's Burial Register, he was re-buried at Westminster Abbey on 24 June 1678, although the inscription on the monument records that 'his [Lord Cottington's] body was brought & here interr'd by Charles Cottington Esqr. his nephew & heire, An.Dni. 1679'.¹³

Dart's description and engraving of 1723 (Figure 12.3) show Lady Cottington's monument with a section at the foot 'raised like a Table, of black and white Marble, on which, resting on the Left Arm, is the Effigy of Francis Lord Cottington'.¹⁴

In an unpublished manuscript in Westminster Abbey Library, sculpture expert John Physick describes it as 'a floor standing table monument supported by 6 Ionic columns' (although illustrations suggest that they were plain pedestal columns).¹⁵ Physick also argues that the gilded bronze ornament surmounted by a grotesque masque, which is positioned beneath it, was probably lowered from Lady Cottington's monument when the two were put together.¹⁶

Cottington's effigy depicts him reclining on a rush mattress, wearing a gown with a lace collar, knee breeches and large rosettes on his shoes. The style of dress and relative youthfulness of the sitter's face are similar to portraits made of him in the 1630s, an anachronism perhaps suggestive of conservative clothing adopted during his residence in Spain.¹⁷

The reclining effigy has previously been attributed to Florentine sculptor Francesco Fanelli (1577–after 1657?).¹⁸ Fanelli is known to have worked in England from around 1632–40 but experts now believe it is more likely that Charles Cottington commissioned the effigy in the 1670s based on a painting of Cottington dating from the 1630s, which would explain his wearing the earlier costume. The identity of the sculptor is unknown, although the effigy has been attributed to Cibber.¹⁹ One critic has suggested that 'the marble effigy of his Lordship is an unfortunate later addition of no merit and disturbs the deliberate austerity of effect that artist and patron had originally contrived'.²⁰ Whatever the quality of Lord Cottington's effigy and whoever the sculptor, the monument as a whole, which was presumably designed by Hubert Le Sueur, has considerable architectural grandeur.



Fig. 12.3 Engraving of the Cottington tomb in the early eighteenth century.

Taken from John Dart, *Westmonasterium or The History and Antiquities of The Abbey Church of St Peters Westminster*, vol. 1 (London: n.p., 1723), 182. By courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

Important alterations to Cottington's monument took place in 1825, when the Dean and Chapter agreed to install a large monument to the engineer James Watt in St Paul's Chapel. The Abbey's Chapter Minutes for 6 April 1825 record the order that:

leave be given to erect a monument to the late James Watt by Mr Chantrey in the Chapel of St Paul and to alter the situation of the Monument of Sir Giles D'Aubegny and to place the recumbent figure of Lord Cottington's monument on the Sarcophagus as proposed by C.H. Turner Esq. Chairman of the Committee for Erecting the Monument and that the fine required is one hundred and sixty guineas.²¹

The table with columns and baroque swagged cherubs on which Cottington had hitherto reclined was thus removed and the monument assumed its current aspect.

Ultimately, the statue of James Watt was considered to be too large for St Paul's Chapel and it was removed in 1960 and subsequently re-sited to the Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. At the same time, the Surveyor of the Fabric, Stephen Dykes-Bower, instructed the repair and redecoration of Cottington's monument. His report for 1962 records:

Beyond putting back missing ornaments, the existence of which was shown by Dart's engraving and confirmed by faint marks discernible in the marble itself, this did not amount to much. But the engraving served to indicate how the black marble was relieved by gilding. It has been impossible to repeat the full scheme owing to an alteration, apparently unrecorded, in the form of the monument: Lord Cottington's white marble effigy was originally lower down and rested on an arched table in front of the main structure. This at some time was removed and the figure lifted to its present level where it cannot properly be seen. The change accounts for the centre lower portion not being of black marble like the rest of the monument, but merely faced with plaster, painted to simulate marble.

Dykes-Bower went on to remark that: 'When the two candlesticks on the top, of which only the triangular metal bases survived, have been recreated as Dart showed them, the monument will be complete.'²²

Two years later, his Surveyor's Report recorded that: 'the two gilded candlesticks on the top of the Cottington monument in St Paul's chapel are new. When those shown in Dart's illustration disappeared is not known, but Fanelli's design was manifestly incomplete without these essential features.'²³ It seems likely that Dykes-Bower commissioned the regilding of Lady Cottington's portrait bust, consistent with his interventive redecoration of many of the monuments in the Abbey.

John Bradshaw

John Bradshaw lived in the Deanery at Westminster Abbey from January 1649 until his death aged 57 on 31 October 1659.²⁴ During the Commonwealth, the Abbey was run by a 'Committee for the College of Westminster' which was set up on 18 November 1645. Bradshaw oversaw Abbey affairs in his role as Lord President of the High Court of Justice following the death of the Royalist Dean John Williams in 1644.

Daily services in the Abbey took on a different aspect during the Commonwealth, as soldiers were on duty in the church to suppress dissent at their more puritanical style.

One contemporary source celebrated:

Where as there was wont to be heard, nothing almost but Roaring-Boyes, tooting and squeaking Organ-Pipes, and the Cathedral Catches of Morley, and I know not what trash; now the Popish Altar is quite taken away, the bel-lowing Organs are demolisht, the treble or rather trouble and base Singers, Chanters, or inchanters, driven out; and instead thereof, there is now set up a most blessed Orthodox Preaching Ministry... and for the gaudy, gilded Crucifixes, and rotten rabble of dumbe Idols, Popish Saints, and Pictures where that sinfull singing was used, now a most sweet assembly, and thicke throng of Gods pious people... O our God! What a rich and rare alteration! What a strange change is this indeed!²⁵

Oliver Cromwell died in September 1658 and his funeral took place in the Abbey on 23 November 1658, with the ceremonial trappings of royal burials. Contemporary diarist John Evelyn described the 'superb funeral of ye Protector. He was carried from Somerset House in a velvet bed of state drawn by six horses ... Oliver lying in Effigie in royal robes, and crown'd with a Crown, sceptre and globe, like a king.'²⁶ His funeral bier was set up at the east end of the Henry VII (Lady) Chapel where it was visited by members of the public.

President John Bradshaw died the following year and on 22 November 1659 he was buried close to Cromwell in the same vault as his wife Mary, who had pre-deceased him.²⁷ He was interred in what is now known as the Ormond vault in the Royal Air Force Chapel. The site is marked by a vault stone installed by Dean Stanley in 1866 (now covered by a carpet), which reads:

IN THIS VAULT WAS INTERRED
OLIVER CROMWELL 1658
AND IN OR NEAR IT
HENRY IRETON, HIS SON-IN-LAW 1651
ELIZABETH CROMWELL, HIS MOTHER 1654
JANE DESBOROUGH, HIS SISTER 1656

ANNE FLEETWOOD
 ALSO OFFICERS OF HIS ARMY AND COUNCIL
 RICHARD DEANE 1653
 HUMPHREY MACKWORTH 1654
 SIR WILLIAM CONSTABLE 1655
 ROBERT BLAKE, ADMIRAL 1657
 DENNIS BOND 1658
 JOHN BRADSHAW 1659
 (PRESIDENT OF THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE)
 AND MARY BRADSHAW, HIS WIFE
 THESE WERE REMOVED IN 1661

Charles II returned from exile in May 1660 and was crowned in Westminster Abbey on 23 April 1661. Some months earlier, on 4 December 1660, the House of Commons had voted that the bodies of Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw should be exhumed from the Abbey and hung at Tyburn to coincide with the 12th anniversary of the execution of Charles I (30 January; see also [Chapter 3](#)). Pepys recorded the parliamentary vote that the regicides ‘should be taken up out of their graves in the abby [sic] and drawn to the gallows and there hanged and buried under it’.²⁸ The Lords approved the vote on 8 December and on 26 January 1661 the bodies of Ireton and Cromwell were removed from the Abbey and taken to the Red Lion Inn at Holborn.²⁹ The Abbey’s Treasurers’ Accounts for 1661 record a payment of £10.15s. for ‘Removing the Reb[el] Corps[es]’.³⁰ Bradshaw was exhumed a few days later, on 29 January, a delay apparently caused by the fact that he had not been embalmed and his body was ‘green and stank’.³¹ Another eye-witness, Samuel Sainthill, described in even more gruesome detail how:

The odious carcasses of O.C., Major General Ireton, and Bradshaw were drawn in sledges to Tyburn... C in a green-seare cloth, very fresh embalmed; Ireton having been buried long, hung like a dried rat, yet corrupted about the fundament. Bradshaw in his winding sheet, the finger of his right hand and nose perished having wet the sheet through; the rest very perfect, in so much that I know his face.³²

John Evelyn’s diary entry for 30 January 1661 describes how:

This day (O the stupendious and inscrutable judgments of God!) were the carcasses of those arch rebels Cromwell, Bradshaw the Judge who condemn’d his Majestie, and Ireton, sonn-in-law to ye Usurper, dragg’d out of their superb tombs in Westminster among the Kings, to Tyburne, and hang’d on the gallows there from 9 in ye morning till 6 at night and then buried under that fatal and ignominious monument in a deepe pitt; thousands of people who had seene them in all their pride being spectators.³³

The corpses were hung in chains on the gallows at Tyburn during the day, then beheaded at sunset. The heads were set on pikes at Westminster Hall, where Samuel Pepys saw them on 5 February 1661, 'set up upon the further [south] end of' Westminster Hall with Bradshaw's in the middle, apparently 'set above the part of the hall where he had presided in 1649 over the regicide court' (see Chapter 3 Figure 3.7).³⁴ The bodies were buried in a common pit, not in St Margaret's Churchyard, which was consecrated ground, but in the garden of one of the houses on the north side of the Abbey. This may have been the prebendal house that adjoined the west side of the north transept, which had formerly been the Abbey's sacristy.³⁵ Bradshaw's wife, who was also dug up, was given a decent burial in St. Margaret's.

No further records survive to establish the location of the disinterred bodies and it is unlikely that they will ever be found. Sightings of their spirits have been detected however, if credit is given to rumours that Bradshaw's ghost walks from his small room in the south-west triforium of the Abbey on the anniversary of Charles I's execution.

13

The wealth of the Beckfords

Sidney Blackmore

'There thou too, Vathek! England's wealthiest son,
Once form'd thy paradise ...'

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto I, xxii

Even before Byron described William Beckford as 'England's wealthiest son', the family's wealth, derived from their Jamaican plantations, had been the subject of comment and legend. The founder of the dynasty, Peter Beckford, Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, was said to have had a strong-box in which 'the larger part of a million in cash was discovered hoarded up'.¹ His son, Speaker Peter Beckford, 'lived to be the richest Subject in Europe ... his money in the banks and on mortgage is reckoned at a million and a half'.² And Alderman Beckford's extravagant dinners for the City, and his comment, after a fire at Fonthill, that he had the odd fifty thousand pounds somewhere in a drawer which he imagined would be enough to build it up again,³ seemed to be evidence of the family's Croesus-like wealth.

The family's main income derived from the sugar trade. This meant that political events, natural disasters, even the loss of cargoes en route from the Caribbean to Europe caused considerable fluctuations in what ready money was available. Control of plantations was particularly difficult for absentee landlords who had to rely on the enterprise and integrity of their agents both in Jamaica and Europe. Understanding the extent and fluctuations of the family's wealth provides an insight into their ownership of Fonthill and the building work undertaken on the estate. The Beckfords, like other slave-owning families, made a significant impact on British cultural life which has only recently been subject to detailed study.⁴

Governor Peter Beckford (1643–1710)

The founder of the dynasty was Peter Beckford, baptised in Clerkenwell in 1643, who reached Jamaica in the early 1660s. There is uncertainty about his early years;

he was possibly a seaman, and might have had family ties with Richard Beckford, a London merchant who had Caribbean interests, and whose brother Thomas became an Alderman and Lord Mayor.⁵ By 1667 he owned a half-share in a sugar plantation, and later acquired 900 additional acres in the parish of Clarendon. In the mid-1670s he was in possession of over 4,000 acres. He played a prominent part in Jamaican politics, being elected to the island's assembly, and was later island secretary. Active in the militia, he was commander of the forts, defended Port Royal from the French, joined the expedition to Hispaniola in 1795, and was wounded at the French stronghold of Port de Paix.

Peter Beckford died of a heart attack on 3 April 1710, when on his way to the Assembly House; he was fearful that his son's life was in danger, during an attempt to unseat the younger Peter as Speaker. At his death he owned 20 estates and some 1,200 slaves. Burke, in delineating the ancestry of the nobility and gentry, was able to show that among Beckford's descendants were five representatives in noble houses.⁶

Speaker Peter Beckford (1672/3–1735)

As with many dynasties, the second generation's wealth increased on the firm foundations laid by the founding father. The family's holdings increased under Peter Beckford the younger, who inherited the bulk of his father's Jamaican and English estates. Educated in England, he was called to the bar in 1695, and then returned to Jamaica where he became increasingly influential as a planter, politician and banker. He was a member of the House of Assembly, serving as Speaker from 1707–13 and again in 1716. He was Controller of Customs and was accused by Lord Archibald Hamilton, Governor of Jamaica, of profiteering from his position.⁷ Through purchases and loans he increased his power base. His inventories list over one hundred individuals and firms who owed him some £135,000, and he added over 2,000 acres to his holdings to create a total of 17 plantations and five pens for livestock.⁸ He owned 1,669 slaves and at his death in 1735, the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that he was worth £300,000.⁹

Alderman Beckford (1709–70)

In his will, Peter Beckford bequeathed his English property to his eldest son Peter (d. 1737), and the Jamaican estates to his younger sons. It was William, the second son, educated in England, who later studied medicine in Leiden and Paris, who returned to Jamaica in 1736 to settle his father's estate and protect his interests and those of his younger brothers.

William quickly became involved in island affairs after being elected to the Assembly. However, he was forced to return to London in the summer of 1738,

when his mother commenced legal proceedings over her husband's and eldest son's estates.¹⁰ He returned to Jamaica in 1740, and in the following year a family settlement was reached whereby William would receive the Clarendon estates and his three brothers property in the west of the island.¹¹ His determined, ruthless business sense led to him taking control of plantations on the grounds that interest had not been regularly paid by the mortgagees.

Back in England in 1744 he advanced in English society, purchasing the Fonthill estate in 1745 for £32,000, by means of a mortgage, which he later paid off by the sale of land in Jamaica.¹² Two years later he secured a parliamentary seat for Shaftesbury. Beckford's involvement in politics continued through his election as an Alderman for the City of London in 1754, as MP for London in 1754, and twice as Lord Mayor in 1762 and 1769/70.

In 1754 land held by the family in Jamaica totalled 42,075 acres, of which William held over 22,000 and his three brothers some 20,000. The value of sugar from his estate in 1752 was £12,900.¹³ By the mid-1750s he was the greatest landowner on the island.¹⁴ Beckford was also able to make money through subscribing to government loans, which required only a 10 per cent initial payment after which the stock could be traded at a profit. He was on the list of those who subscribed in 1759 for an allocation of £100,000.¹⁵

His Jamaican land holdings increased in 1762 when he seized the valuable Drax Hall estate from a defaulting debtor. At the same time he increased his English properties. With a mortgage of £31,000 he bought the Witham Friary estate in Somerset. He later acquired the Eaton Bray estate in Berkshire. He then obtained a £25,000 mortgage from his Wiltshire neighbour Henry Hoare and transferred the Witham mortgage to Hoare's Bank.¹⁶

When he died, on 21 June 1770, Beckford was the hero of the hour; a statue was erected to him in London's Guildhall and commemorative medals issued. In his will, as well as providing for his widow and young son, he recognised his eight natural children, leaving them each £5,000.¹⁷

William Beckford (1760–1844)

Robert Drysdale wrote of his eight-year-old pupil William Beckford that 'He is of a very agreeable disposition, but begins already to think of being master of a great fortune ...'.¹⁸ One of the myths that haunted William Beckford was that his father had left him a million in cash, and the income of a hundred thousand a year. Although he had considerable wealth, his income was much less than that recounted in the popular story. Beckford had extravagant, expensive taste, especially as a collector and in the creation of Fonthill Abbey, but was often constrained by lack of ready cash; he was at the mercy of the quarterly payments from his Jamaican agents, and frequently in despair over his lack of money.

In his will, Alderman Beckford appointed executors who were also to be guardians to his children during their minority. Problems over the administration of the Jamaican estates, including charges of abuse and mismanagement, resulted in Mrs Beckford removing her son's guardians and having him made a ward of Chancery. One of the main points of contention arose from a provision in the Alderman's will that all produce shipped to London should pass through Collett, Evans & Co., a partnership which Richard, one of the Alderman's illegitimate sons, had joined in 1771. It was felt that the firm and Richard Beckford were exerting too much influence on affairs. Mrs Beckford wrote to Sir William Hamilton that her son should return from Naples some months before his coming of age, as 'the best part of his property in the W.I. [West Indies] now very ill managed' and he might lose 'many, many thousands' by not being back before that time.¹⁹

Beckford initially had an income estimated at about £20,000 from his Jamaican estates and some £7,000 from his English property. Tax returns made for the year ending April 1800 show an income of £45,000, but 1799 was a boom year for sugar, being higher than previous years.²⁰

Unlike his forebears, Beckford was an absentee landlord. He never visited Jamaica, and on the one occasion when he set off for the island he travelled only as far as Lisbon, where he disembarked, declaring 'no one ever embarked even for transportation with a heavier heart. The more I hear of Jamaica I dread the climate.'²¹ Beckford's Jamaican interests were plagued by a series of court cases in which claimants sought repossession of some of the plantations which had been seized by his father and grandfather as a result of outstanding mortgage payments. The litigation often extended over many years. The case of *Campbell v. Beckford*, involving four plantations claimed by the Alderman in 1743, ran for 42 years until the parties finally compromised with Beckford paying (at least) £20,000 in settlement. Earlier, he lost two valuable plantations: Esher in 1801, and Catherine Hall in 1807.

Beckford's affairs were managed for many years by the Wildman brothers, described as 'the most successful of Beckford's fleecers'.²² Thomas Wildman had assisted Mrs Beckford with the Chancery case, but once her son came of age, his brother James Wildman became the agent in Jamaica and Henry the West Indian agent in London. Thomas remained Beckford's solicitor until his death in 1796. Among other dubious activities, the Wildmans misrepresented the value of plantations when transferring them to their own ownership in settlement of Beckford's debts. They also succeeded in obtaining his parliamentary seat at Hindon.

Beckford wrote to Lady Craven early in 1790: 'One of my new estates in Jamaica brought me home seven thousand pounds last year more than usual. So I am growing rich, and mean to build Towers'²³ Four years later he would begin work on the creation of Fonthill Abbey, which would over-stretch his pocket for some 23 years. The creation of Fonthill Abbey was an addiction. 'I do not drink, I build', he wrote to his friend and agent Gregorio Franchi,²⁴ and like an addict he

would attempt to conceal from lawyers and others the work in progress when they visited the Abbey to check on his financial affairs.

His Jamaican income ranged from £4,000 to £8,000 a year during the period 1807 to 1821; returns from his English property were around £6,000. Fluctuations in his income and the need to reduce his overdraft meant that Beckford was from time to time forced to sell parts of his collection. The famous Altieri Claudes were sold for £10,500 in 1808, having been purchased for £6,825 in 1799.²⁵ Drawings by Alexander Cozens were sacrificed in 1805;²⁶ books were sold in 1804, 1808 and 1817²⁷ and the contents of his London house in Upper Harley Street were sold in 1817.²⁸ Fonthill Splendens was stripped of its contents and the building materials sold in sales in 1801 and 1807.²⁹

Beckford's youngest and favourite daughter Susan married the Marquess of Douglas (later 10th Duke of Hamilton) in 1810, but in the following year her father was embarrassed as he could not pay the money (possibly her annual allowances of £2,000 from his Jamaican estates) due to her husband. Despite Beckford's pride in being fêted as the owner of Witham Friary when visiting the Grande Chartreuse, he was forced to sell the 2,300 acre estate in 1811. Delay of the payment greatly distressed Beckford: 'For me everything is buried in the tomb of Witham ... I'm almost losing hope, my brain is in ferment. Around me I see nothing but ruin in a thousand shapes.'³⁰

Throughout the period 1810 to 1819, Beckford spent time walking through his woods marking trees to be sold for timber. Often the resulting cash would be used by George Hayter, the Fonthill clerk of works, to rush off to buy materials needed for the Abbey's construction. On one occasion, 500 trees had been marked at Witham. Beckford noted: 'thank God, it all sells very fast and at the best price', and added the ironic observation that the timber 'goes where – to Jamaica!'³¹

He attempted to cut his expenditure: 'without house, carriage, or splendour I'm spending £100 a week', he wrote from London in January 1819.³² And a few weeks later: 'The weekly expenses continue as usual – £100 more or less ... from time to time there are large accounts £38 for wax candles ...'.³³

In October 1822, Beckford was able to announce 'a great piece of news: Fonthill is sold very advantageously. I am rid of the Holy Sepulchre.' Having paid his debts, estimated at £99,500, and invested some £25,000 to meet an outstanding legal claim on lands mortgaged to Speaker Beckford in 1733, he was left with £175,000 to invest in a Government Life Annuity and French funds, the former yielding 10.5 per cent.³⁴ He wrote, 'For twenty years I have not found myself so rich, so independent or so tranquil'.³⁵

Following the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape, compensation was paid to slave owners. William Beckford claimed for 660 slaves on four Jamaican estates and was awarded £12,803.³⁶ Thus even abolition brought an unexpected bonus – a reminder of the long shadow cast by the origins of the family's wealth.

The landscape at Fonthill

An assessment of the grottoes and their builders

Michael Cousins

Alderman Beckford's early works at Fonthill

The part played by Alderman Beckford in the development of the park at Fonthill is typically overshadowed by the later works of his son, particularly the move westwards relative to the site of Fonthill Splendens and the building of Fonthill Abbey and its surrounding new park. It is not the intention here to focus on the latter, but rather the Old Park, as it is called, and the contributions there of Beckford, father and son.

For Britain, the eighteenth century heralded major changes to tastes in, and commentary on, gardening. Indeed, as a follower of the formal fashions brought over from the Continent at the start of the century, the middle period saw Britain leading the landscape revolution, particularly with the appearance of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and his contemporaries. This outdoor evolution typically went hand-in-hand with the prevailing trend of building new houses in the Classical style, and vice versa.

At the start of that new century, the Fonthill estate was owned by Francis Cottington (made 1st Baron Cottington in 1716), and upon his death in 1728 it passed to his son, also Francis. It may have been during his tenure that the house, with its stable block, received an early-Georgian remodelling, before Alderman Beckford acquired the Fonthill estate.¹ John Loveday of Caversham, a prolific traveller and observer, noted in 1738 during his tour of Wiltshire: 'In a bottom Mr Cottington has a very large old Seat of Stone at Fonthill [...] many Workmen are now employed about It; Sure this Gentleman has a considerable Estate at Blewberry in Berkshire.'²

Two paintings by George Lambert, one certainly of 1740,³ show this altered house (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.15](#)), but the extent of Cottington's interest in the garden and park appears limited: the earlier gate lodge east of the house (as depicted

in Robert Thacker's painting; see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.8](#)) had gone by this time, to be replaced by a pair of gate piers closer to the road, as had a slender canal that lay between the gate lodge and the house, running north–south, which appears to have been filled in. To the south of the house lay a flat lawn, east of which Cottington built a tetrastyle, pedimented garden temple in the middle of a raised terraced walk, also on a north–south axis. Cottington sold the estate to Beckford in 1744/5.⁴ While Beckford's subsequent work on this house is reasonably well recorded both visually and in writing, his work on the park has received little attention, but it was clearly a contiguous development.

The changes in garden design that flourished in the early eighteenth century in England seemingly bypassed Fonthill – Charles Bridgeman's schemes, for example, typified by geometrical patterns, long walks and radiating avenues, amphitheatres and elaborate parterres found considerable acceptance elsewhere, but not here. Indeed the decline of such layouts approximates with the time when Alderman Beckford's design for Fonthill gained momentum, in the incoming natural style, of which Stowe ably demonstrates the transition. Elements of Bridgeman's work were gradually done away with, and replaced first with William Kent's Elysian Fields and Alder Valley in the 1730s, followed by the Grecian Valley formed by the head gardener in the 1740s, one Lancelot Brown. A shallow valley is an apt way to describe the principal part of Fonthill's Old Park.

One of the Alderman's first acts, presumably set in motion before travelling to his plantations in Jamaica, was ostensibly philanthropic in nature, with the building of a new church (see [Chapter 4 Figure 4.3](#)). On his return from Jamaica, he set about other works. Col. James Pelham, cousin of Thomas Pelham-Holles (1st Duke of Newcastle), wrote of a visit to Claremont by, among others, 'Two M.^r Beckfords that are brothers to my Lady Effingham', noting one 'has a Plantation on Jamaica, his Seat here is I think in Wiltshire where he is making fine Gardens &c. I never see a Man in Such Extacies as he was with Claremont, they were all prodigiously pleased with every thing.'⁵ Beckford's 'fine Gardens' were visited four years later by the peregrinatio Richard Pococke, then archdeacon of Dublin:

Beyond the park & opposite to the Grand front, Mr Beckford has built a Church, on the plan of Covent garden which is a good termination of the prospect.

There is a large lawn that way & plantations to the west, an open Temple on the Side of the hill; & an open rotundo is building higher up on the hill; To the east is a broad serpentine river with a very handsom bridge of free Stone built over it of three arches, with a Stone Baluster. To the north is a grand gateway near the village, from which there is a gravel walk to the Grand front about a furlong in length.⁶

Pococke's description, and our understanding of the park at Fonthill, is enhanced by two paintings of the scene about the house around this time, now attributed to Antonio Joli (ca. 1700–77; see [Chapter 11](#) and [Chapter 3 Figures 3.18](#) and [3.20](#)).⁷

The Alderman's activities were extensive. The creation of an artificial 'serpentine river', by damming a length of the Fonthill stream, a tributary of the River Nadder, is in itself a significant feat. Running parallel to this was a slender water course, almost a leat, which widened just south of what was actually a five-arch bridge; at this point a sham rustic bridge with a spectacular cascade was used to manage the overflow, or spill of the main water, a feature used in other parks like Wotton and Stowe.⁸ In reality, the 'serpentine river' didn't flow anywhere: the southern end of this water terminated at a pond head with the leat merging into the original stream again.⁹ The former public road was conveniently moved to the other side of the water from the house, rejoining the original route via the bridge. Here a narrow tunnel passed under the road, allowing private passage to the southern part of the park, circling back via the rustic bridge-cum-cascade (Figure 14.1). Passage from Fonthill Bishop to the north, therefore, was by one of two routes: the public road running east of the water over the aforementioned bridge (although there was a turnoff via a ford to reach Fonthill's outbuildings), and, for visitors to Fonthill Splendens, the private road through the magnificent gateway.

The garden-temple shown in the two Lambert paintings was presumably still extant at the time of the Alderman's acquisition of Fonthill.¹⁰ It would have acted as a suitable stopping or resting point during a walk, or from which to view the house and water. When Pococke visited Fonthill in 1754, and as depicted in the two Joli paintings, he described 'an open Temple on the Side of the hill'. Close examination of these paintings suggests that the original building seen in Lambert's view was taken down, and perhaps re-used as part of a new building on gradually sloping ground, nestled in a backdrop of trees, further away from the main house. Hence



Fig. 14.1 Detail from Antonio Joli (attributed), *Fonthill House*, showing the sham bridge and cascade.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.



Fig. 14.2 Detail from Antonio Joli (attributed), *Fonthill House*, showing the 'open Temple' and the rotunda.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

by ca. 1754 a prostyle portico fronting a five-bay structure can be seen in Joli's view, possibly planned as part of the garden work that was being undertaken in 1750.¹¹

South-west of the house, at the highest point of this wooded sloping ground, was another temple. This building has previously been described as a pagoda, and so it appears in a later engraving taken from one of the two Joli paintings.¹² Closer examination of the paintings, however, indicates an open columned structure, almost certainly the rotunda noted by Pococke, albeit with a more conical-looking roof than a dome (Figure 14.2) – this would date the paintings to 1754, unless the artist was asked to add the feature before its construction, hence the atypical form of the roof might be his notion; or, it was painted in later.¹³ Facing the house across the water to the east, deliberately set back on rising ground and paled off, was an equestrian statue on a monumental plinth (Figure 14.3). It is a feature that has received little commentary (see Chapter 3 for a suggestion even that it was not in fact ever built); it is quite enigmatic, and totally apposite to the character and flamboyance of Beckford senior.¹⁴

This then was the Alderman's Fonthill. Following the destruction of Fonthill House by fire in February 1755 he was freed from any vestigial constraints carried down through the constant remodelling of the original building and its surroundings. But he seemed in no hurry about its replacement: five years after the

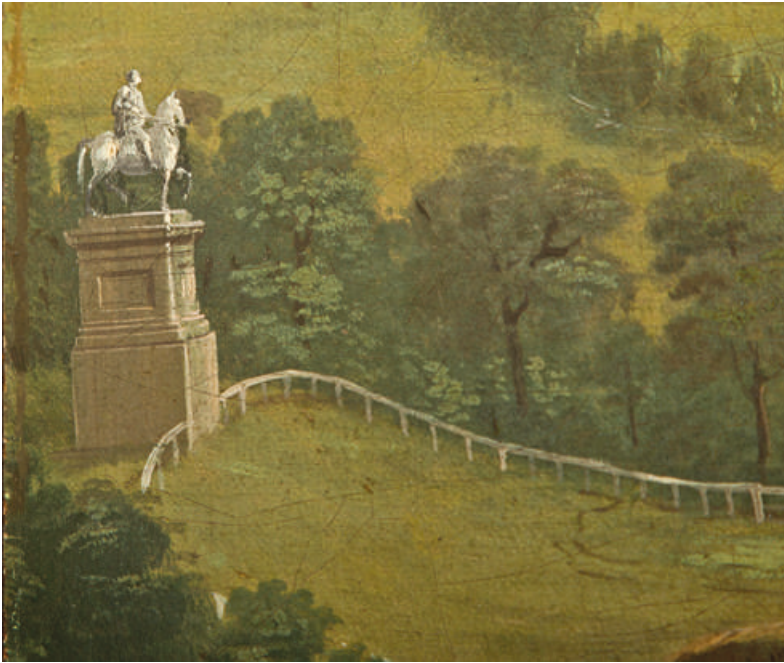


Fig. 14.3 Detail from Antonio Joli (attributed), *Fonthill House*, showing the equestrian statue.

Private collection, photograph © Jon Stone.

fire Philip Yorke remarked of the new house, ‘the shell ... is finished but no part of the inside fitted up’.¹⁵

While creating the new Fonthill ‘Splendens’ in sumptuous Palladian style, a combination of frivolity and rustication emerged in the park.

There has been much speculation as to when the grottoes at Fonthill (Figure 14.4) were created, and by whom. It becomes quite clear from two previously unpublished contemporary accounts that Alderman Beckford, and not his son, was responsible for those rockworks to the west of the river, as well as confirming that he instigated other features (such as the boathouse; Figure 14.5).

The first description, made by Edward Knight junior (d. 1812), the eldest son of a leading Midlands ironmaster, dates to 3 or 4 July 1761:

Fonthill – Beckford’s Rustic Gateway — New-House 140 by 650 __Coll.^{de} 10 pairs of P.^s join the house & offices. — Ionic Port. 4 P.s 16 In Diam^r __Int.ⁿ 4..6–5..9–4..6 behind a room 14 by 28 – View of the Water, Bridge &c. Shrubry ab 3 Miles round — Subterraneous passage – Umbrella Seat – Rockwork — Church — Doric Rottond 8 P.^s 22 In. D.^r Interc.ⁿ 5..3_3 mutules – view to the House, water, lawn &c __Boat_House & Rockwork.¹⁶

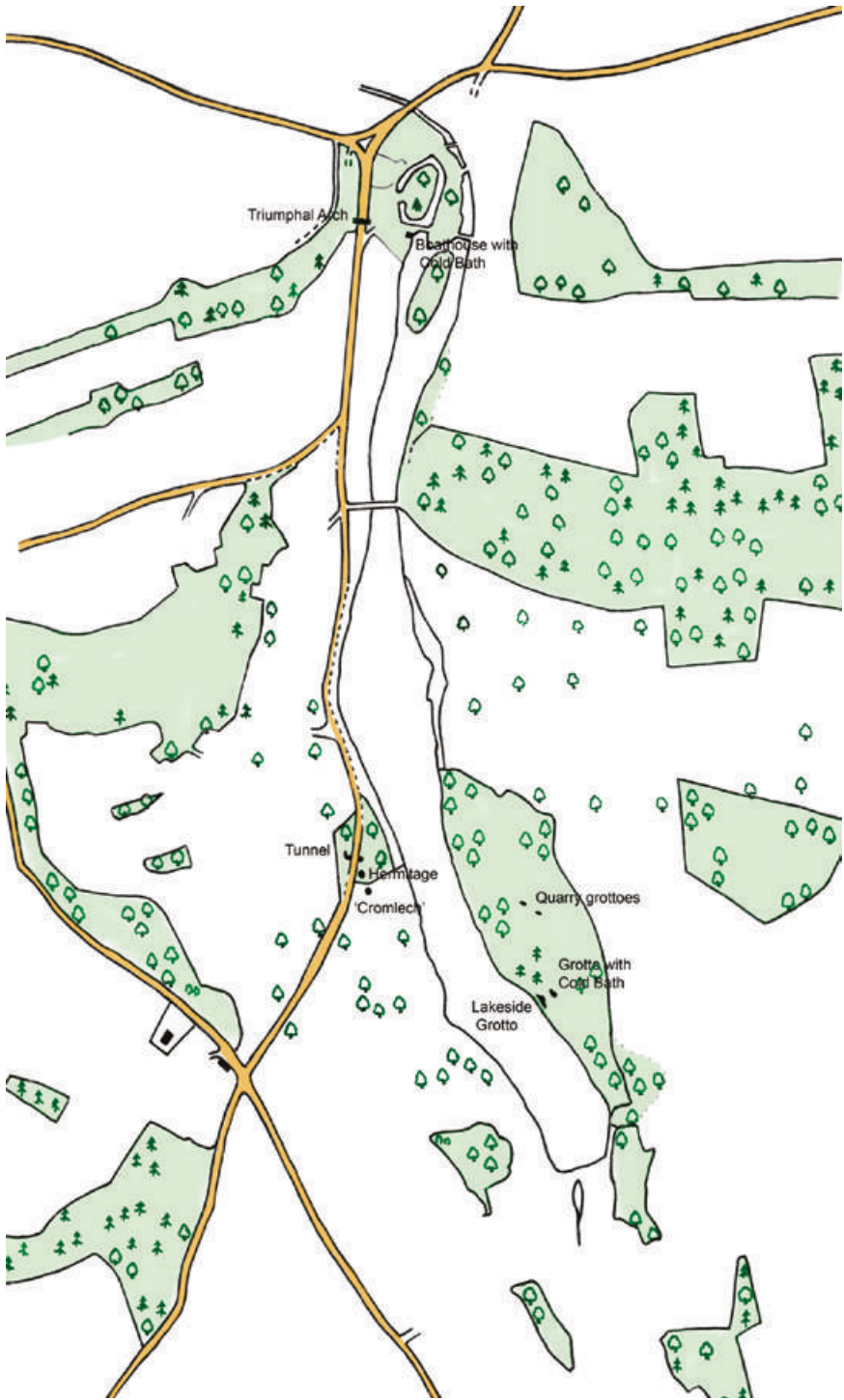


Fig. 14.4 Map of Fonhill showing location of grottoes, etc.

© Michael Cousins.

Knight was describing the grounds west of the river, making an anticlockwise circuit: subterraneous clearly indicates a passage going below ground, rather than an arched passageway above; the 'Umbrella Seat' must have been nearby, even possibly on top of the rockwork that would correspond to the Hermitage and which may have been under construction. After reaching the church, which also acted to terminate a prospect, Knight turned back on himself, ascending the hill to the rotunda to look onto the house. His final path would have taken him north of this to reach the boathouse with its rusticated, or rockwork interior ornaments. It is fitting to ascribe the construction of this and the seemingly contemporaneous gateway to the Alderman's time, although their architect is still unknown.¹⁷ We hear no more of the 'Umbrella Seat' after its mention by Knight, but it may have followed the design of that at nearby Stourhead. The rotunda – under construction in 1754 and clearly completed – conformed to a fairly standard model. It may have replaced an earlier prospect tower shown in one of the two George Lambert paintings (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.15](#)).¹⁸ The Alderman was an early practitioner in using the church as an eye-catcher and garden feature, and the example here bears comparison with those at West Wycombe and Nuneham Courtenay.

Edward Knight was a friend and correspondent of William Shenstone, and possessed an enthusiasm for architecture and gardens, as evinced by the accounts of his travels wherein he recorded key details of the noted estates of the time. It is probable that his interest would embrace aspects relating to the picturesque, for his relations included Richard Payne Knight of Downton, and Thomas Johnes II of Hafod.

The second description, written in the summer of 1766, possibly comes from the architect James Essex:

M.^r Beckford's House was not finish'd, but appeared to be intended as magnificent as most in England ... The Bed Chambers particularly grand. ... You ascend a Flight of steps to the House, which bring you under an Ionic Colonnade – the Offices are united with the House by a Piazza of the Doric Order. __

The Chimney Pieces in the the [sic] Work of Moore of London, cost 400£ each – Caryatides support the entablature.

There are two very fine Rooms, one intended for Music, in which there is an Alcove for the Organ, the other for a Picture Gallery. ... The Garden are [sic] pretty – there is a subterraneous Grot winding 30 yards. __ The Hermitage adorn'd with Shells and Spars, is well imagined.¹⁹

Again, our visitor kept to the western grounds, but by now the Hermitage had certainly received its essential and striking decoration, some of which was noted much later, in 1834.²⁰ Embedded fragments and impressions of shells still remain today in the roof of the main chamber: on the left, an alcove with an inclined shaft passing to the outside throws light on the battered torso of a statue, to the right, a small



Fig. 14.5 The boathouse interior showing the cold bath.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.



Fig. 14.6 The Hermitage: ogee frame with carved sitting figure.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

antechamber fitted out with a fireplace. Inserted in the rear wall of the Hermitage, framed by a flattened ogee arch, is a reclining figure of a bearded man, possibly meant to represent a hermit (Figure 14.6); below this is evidence of a projecting sill or bench, long gone.

That Fonthill House was still not finished is not altogether surprising as from ca. 1762 the Alderman was diverted with the building of a second house at Witham designed by Robert Adam. Cost did not appear to be of any concern in this, according to his Stourhead neighbour the banker Henry Hoare: ‘The day Lord & Lady Pembroke dined here they stop’d at M.^r Beckford’s & His Lordship told Them He wallow’d in money & therefore built 2 Houses to get rid of it.’ (See Chapter 4 for discussion of Witham.)²¹

It is worth noting that the Adam office produced for the Alderman three finished drawings of designs for bridges at Fonthill. While each of the proposals is different, all feature reclining figures of Bacchus holding a cornucopia.²² The view through the central arch of one of these designs depicts a series of three grotto-like arched structures on the distant bank, with rising ground behind, planted with trees. Roughly sketched in pencil, and seemingly capricious, they suggest water gently cascading over a raised floor into the lake below. None of the Adam schemes was executed, but the notion of having a statue of a mythical figure in the grounds may have taken hold. A sketchbook by J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) includes a number of preparatory sketches and finished watercolours of Fonthill made in 1799, including one that has acquired the title *Trees by the Lake in Old Fonthill Park, with a River God seated among Rushes*.²³ It is difficult to establish the precise location of Turner’s sketch, and nothing else is known of the ‘River God’; there is no

other evidence to support the view that such a figure was installed in the boathouse at Fonthill.²⁴

The Alderman's planting campaign at Fonthill is less easy to gauge, and it was never going to reach maturity in his lifetime. We know that he was the purchaser of a five guinea Bartram Box of seeds in 1754,²⁵ suggesting some botanical interests, and by 1761 some three miles of shrubbery had been planted. In 1760, Mrs Beckford paid a visit to Hester Pitt, the wife of William Pitt, Lord Chatham, at their residence in Kent, Hayes Place, the account of which illustrates that planting at Fonthill had been going on, and at some expense. Escorting her guest around, Hester

walkd in the discretest manner, but at the same time contrived to Shew Her [Mrs Beckford] much the Largest part of Hayes Ground, with which I was not at all tired, and was perfectly Satisfied with her manner of seeing it and the Impression it made. She was extremely sorry for not having seen it Sooner, that the Swells at Fonthill might have Copied Those that enclose Bridge Lane and the Pond, Their Shape having Struck Her mightily as having much more Grace and Beauty with Less expence of Trees than Those she had at Home.²⁶

Whether the Alderman's earlier visit to Claremont had any influence on the layout of the park at Fonthill is doubtful. Despite having lost many of its straight and formal devices (although it retained Bridgeman's amphitheatre), the grounds at Claremont must have felt constrained to the Alderman. Vanbrugh's lofty belvedere there had been in place many years (as had four temples), but it was the later tower at Stourhead that seems to have prompted the Alderman to follow suit at Fonthill, rather than this belvedere. Claremont's grotto, however, was under construction during the visit in the summer of 1750 and the Alderman may have recalled this when creating his subterranean feature and Hermitage at Fonthill. The planting at Claremont, and certainly Kent's clumps, seem to have made little impact on Beckford, and there is no evidence of professional assistance at Fonthill. The late-eighteenth-century exponent of the picturesque, William Gilpin, provided a later account of Fonthill, written around 1778. It bespeaks the Alderman's hand in the shaping of the grounds (rather than his son's): 'The ground, though *artificially formed, slopes well* to the river on each side, and beyond the bridge opens into a sweet retiring valley.'²⁷

The first grottoes

The precedent for the Alderman's tunnel at Fonthill is surely that at Alexander Pope's house at Twickenham, first created in 1720 to 1725 and extended nearly 20 years later. His famous grotto there had its parallel in Fonthill's Hermitage (Figure 14.7). Grotto and garden style evolved contiguously, with architectural feature giving way to rustic stone work and, initially, shell ornamentation, which



Fig. 14.7 The Hermitage.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

in turn yielded to mineral work, the grotto at Goldney Hall, Bristol, being another early use of that style. More attention was soon placed on the setting and integration of grottoes into the overall layout, with existing structures and their surroundings being adapted to be more aesthetically pleasing, although this was not universal. The task was to artificially reproduce or even outdo what nature could offer; it was a theme that the Alderman's son held close to his heart, and would later put into practice.

The subterranean passage or 'Grot' at Fonthill allowed direct and concealed communication between the grounds either side of the Tisbury Road. That the Alderman's Hermitage should be 'adorn'd with Shells and Spars' is no surprise. While in Jamaica, he was instrumental in procuring materials for the Earl of Shaftesbury for his grotto at St Giles. These included '2 Casks of Tamarinds' and a further 'one thousand of Shells'.²⁸ Julian (or Julines) Beckford, one of the Alderman's brothers, was also a principal party to their conveyance, and it is worth noting that Julian Beckford is listed in the names of subscribers to the second part of Thomas Wright's *Universal Architecture*, i.e. 'Six Original Designs of GROTTOES', which shows a sustained family interest in the subject.

But who actually created the Hermitage, tunnel (Figure 14.8) and associated rockwork at Fonthill? Considering the fact that a Lane is mentioned in conjunction with the later grottoes at Fonthill, the fame of Joseph and Josiah Lane (father and son) as the pre-eminent grotto builders of the eighteenth century, plus their places of birth at Ashley Wood and Tisbury (east and south of Fonthill respectively) marks them out as obvious candidates, in this instance Joseph specifically.



Fig. 14.8 The tunnel.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

We know little of Joseph Lane's upbringing. The son of Thomas Lane of Ashley Wood, he was baptised on 28 August 1717 in Tisbury, and the earliest indication we have of his trade is from his marriage in 1747 when he is recorded as a stonecutter of Tisbury.²⁹ Without being overly speculative, it is possible that he was in some way involved in the creation of the grotto at Stourhead, for which William Privet submitted a bill in 1748 for £180.17s.6d.³⁰ While this work included an element of stonecutting, it is credible that Joseph acquired skills, and even excelled in rockwork of this nature. He may also have had a hand in the grotto at St Giles for Lord Shaftesbury (although there is no evidence to support this), adding further skills and knowledge to his repertoire; but the abundant shellwork there is almost certainly by the specialist John Castles.³¹

On 9 January 1753, Joseph married for the second time, to Deborah Ingram (his first wife, Mary Flippen, seemingly dying in childbirth). Exactly nine months later a son, Josiah, was baptised at Tisbury. By this time Joseph had risen from

a stonecutter to become a mason. As a local, and a skilled tradesman, a stronger case may be fielded for Joseph being involved in Alderman Beckford's alterations of the earlier Cottington house and other additions at Fonthill, and more probably the subsequent house after the former was destroyed in 1755. Indeed Joseph had highly desirable skills for the work at hand at Fonthill: both as mason and also because he could apply his expert eye as a stonecutter, for there was a readily available source of materials at a quarry near the house (later to be incorporated into the Alpine Gardens).

We can but surmise how exactly the Alderman came to hear of Joseph's particular talent, and then directed him to create the Hermitage and tunnel, but engaged in his own right, Joseph's work tallies with Richard Warner's later comment about 'Mr. Lane, who exhibited the earliest specimen of his talents in the construction of a grotto, on a very small scale, at Fonthill'.³² With Fonthill being the place of Joseph Lane's emergence into the world of grottoes, his (and his son's) subsequent employment at Painshill, and not vice versa, is an explicable step. Painshill's owner, Charles Hamilton, was Beckford's maternal uncle;³³ certainly Lane senior must have been recognised as a capable grotto builder from 1763 when he was working at Painshill.³⁴ Just prior to that, he had constructed a cascade and rockwork cave at Loakes manor house (now Wycombe Abbey), Buckinghamshire, for William, Earl of Shelburne.³⁵

This was not a one-way interplay of ideas. Alderman Beckford's visit in 1750 to Claremont, which may have inspired Fonthill's early rockwork features, has already been noted. Stourhead was almost certainly another influential park, and several visits of exchange are recorded, and in 1768, at a time when the Alderman's works were maturing, he made a visit to Lord Lyttelton at Hagley, which Lyttelton reciprocated the following year.³⁶ Laurent Châtel has commented on the 'paucity of material relating to Fonthill' in the principal Beckford archives,³⁷ and this is especially so following the death of the Alderman and the period before his son's majority. Hence the accounts provided by visitors provide a particularly crucial and rich source of information. 1769 proved a very fruitful year, and two descriptions, by Sophia, Lady Shelburne of Bowood (1745–71), and the Irish politician John Parnell (1745–1801), who visited two months apart, are worth quoting at length as much for their contrasting views as well as detail. Lady Shelburne wrote,

The House is a Large & Handsome Stone Building with two wings but is Situated much too near the Road & confin'd on one side by a Common ... after dinner they shew'd us the Stables & the Lodging for the Stable people which makes a very fine House at some distance from the other & in a better Situation we took a short walk in the Shrubbery & drank tea in the Banqueting House The Shrubbery is at a distance from the House the Walk to it rough & the whole place, tho' very large, I think inferior to the Inside in Beauty [...] the Evening being very fine Mrs Beckford carried me a short drive about a shrubbery I had not seen.³⁸

Parnell, on the other hand, and on the whole, did not take to Fonthill:

a Knoll coverd with well grown old trees on one side and a Peice of water on the other Leaves scarce Place for so Great a Pile as the House and offices to stand in and the Paltry little Evergreen clumps Particularly scots firr crowding on the Brow of the Knoll & under the old Sycamores Oak &c on it add to the smallness of the Lawn & makes the House Preposterous, How can planters obtrude a few little Round Petty Paties of Evergreens in a spott coverd with scatterd old trees of full growth is it a Pleasure to see the young firr stunted scalded and killd by the Dripping Branches of the Old forest trees or are we to cutt down the great trees spotting a Lawn in hopes the young ones will soon grow up to supply their Place Either Surely is a Detestable species of Improvement there is a fine square of Stabling Building at Beckfords and behind them a Range of farm offices the whole about 200 yards from the House well conceald [...] the Bridge over the artificial Peice of water at Aldemn Beckfords is an hideous Piece of architecture Scarcely fitt for the most Private Part of a trading City only tolerable as being strong Enough to Bear Perpetual Waggons I never saw such a thing in my life in the Regions of taste Built as an ornament.³⁹

After the Alderman

Alderman Beckford died on 21 June 1770, and his son, who was just nine, inherited estates at home and abroad, and considerable wealth. A notable incident sheds light on the size and make-up of Fonthill at this time. In the 'Bill of Complaint of William Beckford' in which, until William came of age, Maria, the Alderman's widow, stated the case for her continued repair and maintenance of Fonthill, it was noted that

the said House and ffurniture with the Kitchen Garden and Pleasure Ground near the Water Grist Mill and the Park with some Land enclosed with the said Park and lying contiguous and near to the House containing in the whole about two hundred and twenty six acres part of which Park and Land containing about one hundred acres is ornamented with Timber Trees and plantations of other Trees and Shrubs...⁴⁰

Reverend Mr John Lettice, Beckford's long-standing tutor, frequently mentioned with respect to Beckford's tours, receives scant recognition with regard to Fonthill itself, but according to Beckford's earliest biographer he played a role in the subsequent layout of the park.⁴¹

By 1776 the Alderman's planting was maturing: 'a fine Grove of Oaks with clumps of evergreens on y^e left of the House is very picturesque and there is a fine peice of water', remarked Mrs Lybbe Powys, concluding: 'otherwise the situation is disagreeable'.⁴² The Andrews and Dury map of 1773 (see [Chapter 3 Figure 3.22](#))⁴³ still

shows the principal public road as being to the east of the water and crossing via the stone bridge, although there appears to have been a return of a road running south from the grand arch to join this public road, where it was probably gated. This accords with William Gilpin's brief description written about eight years after the Alderman's death, in which he records the bridge as still being present, but with his typical sting: 'It [Fonthill] takes its name from a woody hill and fountain hard by it, from which rises a stream that assists in forming an artificial river, decorated by a very sumptuous bridge. If the bridge had been more simple, the scene about it would have been more pleasing.'⁴⁴

In part, the Alderman's shrubbery lined the Tisbury road, but the greater part – some three miles – continued round the park in a regular zig-zag, and the grounds, 'though not variegated; were considered pretty'. The situation of the house, however, came in for criticism, being low down and subject to mists, and also censured for 'the prospect from the house in front, which is so very dreary, that, in winter it must be absolutely dreadful'. Helpful advice followed: 'Probably, with some pains, Mr. Beckford might obtain permission to plant a wood along the skirts of the hill, (the lands not being his own) which might, in some degree, screen the object I complain of. The improvement would certainly be a great one.'⁴⁵ Ultimately, once Fonthill Abbey was complete, William Beckford opted for a more permanent solution and had most of his father's Splendens pulled down.

Coming of age

William Beckford, it appears, held true to maternal and guardians' guidance during his minority, at least with regard to Fonthill, and any works executed there – limited though they may have been – seem to have been undertaken with Maria Beckford's blessing. The period following his father's death comes across as that of a young man formulating ideas and visionary, romantic dreams, typically by putting pen to paper, but also with more practical schemes for Fonthill's landscape. Upon attaining his majority in 1781, these began to take physical shape. He engaged James Wyatt (1746–1813) to draw up a proposal for enlarging the stretch of water north of Splendens by taking in Marsh Common, adding a number of islands and creating a cascade, and for the making of a new road to the east, crossing to the west bank via an iron bridge of about a 100-foot span.⁴⁶ Clearly the road running from the arch past the house had by then become a public one again, but with a plan – probably Beckford's – to revert to private. Wyatt's design was never implemented – he would come back for grander affairs later – but it showed an intent to develop away from the house. Indeed, aside from the house, Beckford effectively abandoned the west side of the Old Park in favour of opportunities to the east:

The stone of the present Fonthill House, built by the late Mr. Beckford, was taken from a quarry on the Eastern shore of the Lake, at an inconsiderable

distance from the scite of the mansion itself. Several acres of rocky ground, which formed this quarry, continued after the completion of the building still open; and exhibiting nothing but large naked masses of white stone and ugly excavations, and those almost fronting the house, it was resolved to cover every part of this quarry, some picturesque features of rock excepted, with soil brought from a distance by dint of labour, and then to plant the ground with oak, beech, elm, larch, fir, &c. leaving green walks, bordered with shrubs and flowers, and such other spaces open, as good taste suggested, according to the nature of the ground.⁴⁷

This work was reportedly carried out by the Alderman;⁴⁸ James Morrison would also develop this area in 1838.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the rugged terrain, quarries and outcroppings would have had a natural appeal to William Beckford, certainly following his early tours, evoking memories of travels and the scenery that so captivated him. A Swiss visitor, Henry Meister, would later note the similarity to the Alpine scenery Beckford admired on his travels (see [Chapter 10](#)).

This maze of hill and wood; one while descending with us into a deep valley; another time, mounting us up high hills from whose tops we descried immense prospects, extending over several counties, and bounded either by the sea or sky. These views were continually changing to a new country, and I thought myself by turns in Switzerland, in France, in England, and in America.⁵⁰

New water, new grottoes

From 1781 to 1784, William Beckford extended his quarry planting ‘along the adjoining hills which hang over the Lake’. But what Beckford then achieved with the water was significantly more dramatic than Wyatt’s plan. Beckford did away with his father’s confined river and its neighbouring sinuous channel; in their stead he created a dam and waterfall at the southern end, and effected ‘an enlargement of the bed of the river, and the removal of a stone bridge of several arches, by which the water could no longer be crossed’.⁵¹ From a practical standpoint, the removal of the bridge would probably have preceded the flooding; Britton, writing in 1801, ‘was informed it had been removed twenty years ago’.⁵² The Reverend John Swete (1752–1821) of Oxtou in Devon, a prolific traveller of the late eighteenth century, left the following account of his visit, made in the autumn of 1783, indicating that the water had been drained in order to undertake the works.

... all at once burst on my right, the house, and grounds of Fonthill and leaving the road, I ascended the summit of a hill on my left, where is a circular plantation of firs – from whence I had a fine View of the whole Scenery beneath which was in itself very attractive – descending to the road it pas’t

through a small ragged Village, and entering a fine rustic arch with a lodge on each side, I reach'd the lawn before the house, which is in front a handsome Structure of white stone, with two wings projecting, and joind to the house by a Colonnade – the mount on the right is most delightfully wooded, though its effect is partly lost by being so near to the house – the back grounds are charming but the stream that runs through is so small, that at this time, what little water was in the bed, appear'd in a state of Stagnation.⁵³

After several years of assimilation, the 'different form of the shores and extension now given to the breadth of the water have entirely changed its former aspect and character, and rendered it worthy of its present appellation of a Lake'.⁵⁴ In reality it had been transformed into flowing water. This was just part of Beckford's evolving scheme for Fonthill: Redding wrote that 'the east bank was ornamented with rocks, caverns, baths, and grottoes in the taste of the earlier part of the century...'.⁵⁵ Typically, however, this style of ornamentation did not prevail until the second half of the eighteenth century, and towards the end, particularly, the less decorated form started to dominate.

Beckford was 23 when these works were underway, as revealed in a series of letters to Dr Samuel Henley (1740–1815). In the first, Beckford asked 'If you are to visit D[evonshire] this summer I trust you will not pass by Fonthill without casting an eye upon my rocks and water, which is wonderfully expanded.' In the next letter, written a couple of months later, it seems that Henley had yet to visit Beckford, who encouraged him by saying 'we should enjoy my new creation of wood & water'. This time there is no doubt as to the builder of at least one grotto and its location, which figures in the third plea for a visit: 'Mr Lane is rockifying, not in high places, but in a snug copse by the river side, where I spend many an hour in dreaming abt my unfortunate princes [Vathek's companions], & contriving reasonable ways & means of sending them to the Devil.'⁵⁶

By the early 1780s, Joseph and Josiah Lane had become the foremost grotto-builders and ornamenters in England: their works by that time included grottoes at Painshill, Oatlands (a reworking of Stephen Wright's more formal affair), Wimbledon House, and probably the decoration of that at Ascot Place; all extensive and lengthy commissions featuring their distinctive, almost trademark, spar decoration with banded stalactites. At Fonthill, however, this 'rockifying' was solely Josiah's, his father having died in the summer of 1784.⁵⁷ One of the best descriptions of Beckford's early achievements comes in 1791 from a Dutch visitor, Baron Johan Frederik Willem van Spaen van Biljoen:

The parkland matches the house both in beauty and elegance – nowhere have we seen finer lawns so well maintained and of such large expanse stretching over the hillsides, with the valley occupied by a large river which flows over a fine waterfall of some 25 to 30 ft; there are several grottoes cut in the living rock; to achieve this effect, very tasteful use has been made of the quarries

which furnished the building materials for the house; the entrance to these grottoes is masked with creepers. There are also some artificial grottoes, a particularly fine one with a cold bath [Figure 14.9] and another where the water seeping from the top was forming stalactites. Men were occupied in levelling the irregularities of a hill so that the slope was swarming with a



Fig. 14.9 The grotto and cold bath.

Photograph © Elizabeth Waters.

quantity of workmen, who, taken together with a flock of some 200 or 300 sheep, greatly animated a landscape already very picturesque in itself.⁵⁸

Van Spaen clearly distinguishes between the quarry grottoes and the creations of Lane – other contemporary accounts also confirm these two artificial grottoes in this area. The principal grotto lay by the water's edge but was approached from above, as described by Meister:

Following a path covered with moss, and bordered with beds of flowers intermixed with clumps of the most delightful shrubs, and of the wild laurel, the verdure of which is so pleasant to the sight, we arrived at a small dome, which served as an entrance to a spacious grotto that had its principal front towards the river. At the end of this grotto which has none of the trifling ornaments of shell-work, but seems constructed by large masses of rock piled together in a picturesque confusion, a fountain throws out its chrystal streams, which, falling with a gentle murmur into a rustic bason, is conveyed under the rock and mingles with the waters of the river. As air is continually passing through the two domes that serve as entrances, the grotto is as dry as the best ventilated room.⁵⁹

John Britton's description of 1801 confirms the grotto to be by 'the well known Lane', whom he also acclaimed as 'a man who transfixed some of the romantic scenes of Salvator into English ground'.⁶⁰ Britton adds even more colour and detail of the grotto's decoration and surrounding planting:

It is externally formed of large masses of rock, and ornamented within by grotesque petrifications, stalactites, madrepores [corals of the common reef-building type], &c. aquatic plants and flowers shooting from the crevices. Its large interior space resounds with perennial springs trickling from various parts, and through channels here visible, and there unseen, hurrying along till lost in the waters of the lake. Issuing from the inclosure of the grotto by a winding path of shrubs, we come across a broad strait terrace of considerable length, bordered on the left by a lofty plantation, and on the right enlightened by the water. At the farther end of this walk we bid adieu to the Alpine Gardens.⁶¹

In 1822, just before the impending sale of Fonthill Abbey, *The Times* reported:

the range of cave below is divided into three arched chambers; and, from the centre vaults of these there is an opening to the lake, which flows up a miniature creek, half way into the apartment. There is something, in fine weather, very delightful about the place. The vaulted roof of this last centre cavern we mentioned runs low towards the front that opens upon the water, so that the stranger's prospect (standing erect) scarcely reaches across the lake.⁶²

Here, continued *The Times*, ‘there is no shell work, no fossil, no baby-house trumpery...’ Recent examination of the structure reveals that in places it had been constructed by cut and finished stone, suggesting re-use of materials from Splendens or the former house. Slightly higher up from this grotto was the more cave-like structure (van Spaen’s ‘particularly fine’ grotto):

At a small distance from this grotto is a large cave, in which nature or art, for it is not easy to discover which, has formed several deep fissures, some having the appearance of cells, and others answering the purpose of baths. The middle of this cavern is entirely open on the top, except that a sort of covering is formed by the shrubs which have planted themselves in the crevices of the rock, and a fine tree that seems to be planted by the hand of a magician in the centre of this retreat, springing out of a bed of violets bordered with green turf.⁶³

This ‘rude basin of rock, surrounded by crags, and overhung with lofty trees’, as it was later depicted, received the ‘drizzlings of a tiny stream, called the “Petrifying Spring”’.⁶⁴

Less clear is whether Josiah Lane was responsible for what has been taken for a third grotto,⁶⁵ basically a vertical outcropping of rocks just behind the spring. This may date to James Morrison’s time, when he sought to improve the water flow to the cold bath (‘the Rock’) and from that to the lower grotto:

Hayter has been in the Quarry since poor Humphrey’s death, he has been working at the Grotto about the Water works [...] We have made the two small ponds to hold water above the Rock where the Bath is, made it fall out of one with the other, and Carried it from thence into the Bath in the Rock which we have re clay’d_ and made to hold and is now full of Water, and from thence Carried it thro’ to the Grotto, this makes the Rock & Grotto quite lively to what it has been for many years past — The water is beautiful and Clear, there is but one fault, namely we have not enough of it, but we Cannot get more without taking it from the Spring at the Factory and this would be an expensive affair.⁶⁶

A number of writers have commented on the similarities between the Alpine Gardens and the description of the grounds of the fictional ‘Beachly’ in Elizabeth Hervey’s novel, *Melissa and Marcia or the Two Sisters*⁶⁷ (a narrative that Beckford later borrowed from his half-sister almost word for word in his *Modern Novel Writing*).⁶⁸ There are certainly features that surface in Hervey’s writing, such as the temples and grottoes, which suggest that she was using Fonthill as the model, but there are also subtle differences such as her ‘brilliant spars and curious shells’ which were never present in these grottoes. Hervey paints a romanticised scene,

with her idealised trimmings, and it would be wrong to take all of her description as fact.⁶⁹

What is telling at Fonthill from all of these narratives is a clear transition in style from the Lanes' previous grottoes: gone are the unnatural spar decorations and abundance of artificial stalactites (or roof pendants), replaced by a form much more rustic and massive in character. Whether this was at Beckford's behest or a suggestion on the part of Josiah Lane is unknown, although the former is more likely.

The commencement and extent of Beckford's planting activities is more difficult to pin down with precision; the works previously discussed would indicate that possession of the estate refers to his coming of age in 1781, and this is the likely context that, in 1797, the *European Magazine* reported on his contribution:

Although parts of the original estate at Fonthill are covered with fine oak timber, yet some thousand acres of the ground purchased by Mr. Beckford's father, as well as by himself, the leases of which have been continually falling in, were unplanted. Not to mention the great plantation begun by the late Mr. Beckford, the present gentleman has been, every year since his possession, continuing them upon a grander scale. Several hundred thousand trees, and, some years, not less than a million, and those of all the different sorts of forest wood, and of various tribes of exotic plants and shrubs, often constitute the work but of a single season.⁷⁰

William Beckford's creation of the Alpine Gardens ranks as a singular early accomplishment; yet Cyrus Redding's account of when this came about is questionable. It was a time when the Alderman's plantation on the east bank had 'grown to large-sized trees, and become a flourishing wood'; Lettice was 'instructing the Misses Beckford',⁷¹ and their father had just returned from Aranjuez – this would suggest the late spring of 1796. In the aforementioned area, Lettice 'suggested that walks should be made of nearly a mile in extent, in order to render that wild spot pleasanter for the ladies, who seemed to have a partiality for it'. Beckford clearly agreed, and had workmen set about the task, 'in what afterwards had the name of the "Alpine Garden"'.⁷² Visitors' accounts (such as those by van Spaen, Meister and Drysdale), however, show that even before this time this was a well-frequented area, replete with carriage roads and many paths, with the quarries having been developed into scenic features.⁷³

Contemporary accounts indicate that visitors were kept to the east of the water, probably at Beckford's direction. About this immediate region were several other features. Meister noted three 'greatly neglected' temples:

That which is dedicated to Hercules, is built on a small eminence almost disjoined from the other hills. The temple of the Naiad, the guardian of this

beautiful valley, is in a secret cavern, ornamented in the Etruscan taste, on the banks of the river with whose stream she waters it. The temple of Jesus Christ [the parish church] is at a distance from the boundary of these vast domains.⁷⁴

The neglect suggests that these structures were the work of the Alderman and subsequently abandoned to nature by his son. Towards the highest region of the Alpine Gardens was to be found ‘a root-house with a bowling-green in front, encircled with lofty firs, intermingled with lilac, woodbine, and laurel’. Further winding walks led through open groves and ‘almost impenetrable wood’, and on the highest ground of the quarries Beckford erected ‘a rustic rotunda, called the Paliaro. It is thatched with straw, like the huts of the Calabrian shepherds; and supported by six rude unbarked firs as columns.’ Later, at the turn of the century, on ‘a smooth level of green turf on top of a rock’, Beckford planned to place ‘an urn or sarcophagus [...] dedicated to the memory of Alexander Cozens, an artist of much original genius, and who was particularly partial to this spot’.⁷⁵

Meister alludes to the remains of a very ancient tower and ‘two caves of the most romantic appearance’, one of them covered with vine and ivy, seemingly dedicated to the worship of Bacchus (Figure 14.10). Mowl incorrectly transports readers to the wrong side of the Old Park, and infers that the so-called ‘cromlech’ was, in fact, this ancient tower.⁷⁶ Meister is clearly still in the area of the Alpine Gardens, and the ‘two caves’ and their drapery conform to those at the quarry lawn.

Writing in 1823, Rutter refers to how Beckford, before the building of the Abbey, was focused on ‘the erection of a tower on the summit of the highest hill upon



Fig. 14.10 Engraving of the quarry grottoes in the Alpine Garden.

John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823.

the estate, the foundations of which had been already laid by the late Alderman, after a design similar to the celebrated tower of Alfred at Stourhead...'.⁷⁷ However, it could hardly be deemed ancient – just never completed – and was on an entirely different part of the estate to the west, as Elizabeth Hervey noted in 1797, when she observed ‘the ruins on Stope’s beacon’.⁷⁸

Josiah Lane’s return to Fonthill in 1794 is more circumspect – ‘a carved roundel’ saying ‘J. L. 1794’ is all that we have to go on,⁷⁹ and even the deciphering of the inscription itself has been doubted, besides the possibility that the initials also happen to be those of John Lettice. Of more reliable substance, following an improvement in income from Beckford’s plantations, is a letter to his agent James Wildman in August 1790: ‘... My works at Fonthill, buildings, planting etc. are going on very briskly. I have been raising towers and digging Grottoes.’⁸⁰ What this tower was at this time is uncertain, unless he had already started to resurrect his father’s work on Stop’s Beacon.⁸¹ As to the grottoes, the work could refer to those in the Alpine Gardens (that with the cold bath above the lakeside grotto) or the so-called ‘cromlech’ built just south of the copse of the Hermitage wood (Figure 14.11). This structure, which certainly carries a more primitive air about it, is formed of two levels; too diminutive for occupancy in the lower one (although ideal for Beckford’s dwarf)⁸² with small steps leading up to a small viewing platform above. Possibly it was built on, or near to, the site of his father’s ‘Umbrella Seat’?

By the end of 1796, Beckford and Wyatt had started work on their grander scheme beyond the confines of the Old Park. An extract from a letter of 1799 suggests abandonment of the former gardens – although Fonthill House was evidently still well-maintained – in favour of extensive planting about the Abbey grounds.



Fig. 14.11 The ‘cromlech’.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

... We now got to Deptford Inn took fresh Horses and about eight mile from that Place is Fonthill, nothing can exceed the splendour, and magnificence of the House and every thing belonging to it the only Fault is that your eye is fatigued with the quantity of Gold that is about the House, There are some fine Pictures two beautiful Landscapes by Claud he has fitted furnished one Room in the Turkish style, but it is impossible to describe the extravagance of all we saw, his whole time and thoughts are taken up about the Abbey which is not to be a Church but in Rooms as any other House, but to exceed any thing in the Country, The Gardens are very bad, the Grounds are very extensive but hardly to be called beautifull there is a fine Peice of artificial water & some Good Trees, he is continually planting and improving...⁸³

Parallels with Fonthill in other grottoes

Lane's lakeside grotto at Fonthill was deliberately hidden – with the intent of solitude – and incorporated an opening onto calming waters (Figure 14.12). In this respect, there are clear echoes of the grotto at Stourhead, and that at Painshill, Charles Hamilton's superlative creation in Surrey, both of which had apertures to view their respective lakes. But it was this more rugged and natural form of grotto-work that Josiah Lane introduced at Fonthill which would lend itself to further commissions at other Wiltshire estates: the cascade with its intertwining tunnels – 'formed of *tumblers* found near the spot' – and separate hermitage at Bowood, built



Fig. 14.12 The Lakeside grotto, opening onto the water.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

from 1785 to 1788 for the Marquess of Lansdowne,⁸⁴ and a grotto at Old Wardour for the 8th Lord Arundell a few years later. The elevated position of the latter provided a prospect beyond the old castle towards the lake; a parallel may be drawn with the siting of Fonthill's 'cromlech', which would have provided a similar view across Beckford's new lake. The 'cromlech', even if not related to the aforementioned grottoes being dug in 1790, was probably constructed around the same time as Wardour's, an account of which illustrates an historical context that Beckford would have appreciated:

One of the fields [at Place Farm] is called Lost Stone, and in the centre of it was formerly a circular work, with a vallum set round with stones. About the year 1792, Lord Arundell employing the celebrated constructor of rock work, Josiah Lane, to form a grotto at Wardour, these stones were removed. In the centre of the original work, as far as I can now gather from the report of those who remember it, stood three upright unhewn stones of large dimensions, placed so as to form three sides of a square, and in the space beneath some human bones were found. These three stones were placed near the old castle at Wardour, and the bones deposited underneath.⁸⁵

While the builder of the grotto at Belcombe Court near Bradford-on-Avon (Figure 14.13) has not been identified it can be dated to post-1770, and shares enough similarities with the 'cromlech' at Fonthill, the grotto at Wardour, and elements of the rockwork at Bowood, to suggest Lane as the principal contender.⁸⁶ The grotto



Fig. 14.13 Belcombe Court grotto, Bradford-on-Avon.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.



Fig. 14.14 Bowden Park grotto.

Photograph © Michael Cousins.

at Bowden Park (Figure 14.14), probably for Barnard Dickenson (1746–1814),⁸⁷ likewise lacks builder and date of construction, and the dearth of archival information meant restoration after significant storm damage in the 1980s of the interior – with its prominent needle-like stalactites – was achieved from limited photographic evidence and from memory. If this was by Josiah Lane, then it marks a return to the styles of Painshill, Oatlands and Ascot Place rather than that at Fonthill. The decoration of Ascot Place is typical Lane, even if the rockwork construction was ‘by one Turnbull, a Scotch mason’.⁸⁸ Certainly Lane’s final work for C. N. Pallmer (ca. 1819) at Norbiton Place, Surrey, according to a lone description, sounds remarkably like that at Oatlands, and its positioning over water follows this predecessor. If so, this would support Lane reverting to his earlier style on projects carried out post-Fonthill, and would also strengthen the case for Lane at Bowden Park. Such reversion to an earlier style also suggests a significant level of involvement from Beckford in the design of the Fonthill grottoes.

It was John Claudius Loudon, the gardening authority of the time, who conveys the sad end of Josiah Lane:

His name was Josiah Lane, and he was a native of the adjoining parish of Tisbury, in the workhouse of which he died last year, at a great age! He was perfectly ignorant, but certainly had a genius for this kind of construction. He used to do all the work with his own hands, and be paid at the rate of about two guineas a week; but, like other money-getting men with ill-regulated minds, he never thought of making provision for age.⁸⁹

Josiah was buried on 28 January 1833, aged 79. His father Joseph, who probably created the first of the Fonthill grottoes, by all accounts, appears to have had considerably more business sense.⁹⁰

A new owner

William Beckford left Fonthill in 1822 having sold the estate to John Farquhar, whose nephew, George Mortimer, acquired the remains of Splendens and 1,200 acres of surrounding ground upon Farquhar's apoplectic demise in 1826. Three years later the majority of the Old Park and the Pavilion (the converted kitchen wing of the old mansion) were sold to James Morrison. In describing Fonthill in 1833, Loudon echoed previous comments that the 'house is badly placed, and it does not appear to us to be much improved by some immense clumps which Mr. Farquhar's nephew has planted near it'. Loudon continued:

The same individual had the beautiful mosaic flooring of the cave taken up, and, in relaying it, placed a large mariner's compass of black and white marble in the centre. The orifice in the roof of this cave, by which it is lighted, is unprotected by any fence or grating, and may be considered as a trap for the destruction of men or other animals. We very nearly fell into it, and in consequence wrote to Mr. Morrison, who has since informed us that he immediately afterwards surrounded the opening by a fence.⁹¹

Which cave is being referred to is not clear, but previous commentaries and this description would suggest it was that part of the cold bath, of which the 'middle of this cavern is entirely open on the top, except that a sort of covering is formed by the shrubs'.⁹²

Besides transforming the Pavilion, Morrison's initial works focused on returning the estate to order and implementing numerous additions and changes for which he used the services of the architect John Buonarotti Papworth (1775–1847).⁹³ The creation of various islands was planned (first on the side of the lake opposite the house, then by the pond head); other employments included the planting of trees, shrubberies and 'Flower beds upon the Lawn'. The quarry came in for particular attention, for example: 'Humphries has planted a good deal about the Quarry Shrubs, Fern, Tuscan, Adders Tongue &C, and likewise planted out a good many of the Trees which were in the Garden': American trees and shrubs were especially favoured, the latter especially at the Rookery. Papworth was also requested to make 'a few sketches of seats for the grounds', made from 'woods of different kinds',⁹⁴ and during the winter of 1836–7 the Hermitage was brought back to prominence, with the area grubbed-up and walled or fenced from the nearby road.

In 1837, James Combes (Morrison's steward) wrote: 'I wish you were here to enjoy the shady walks and the singing of the Birds last evening as the Sun was

setting I walked round the Quarry it was really delightful If M.^r Morrison will allow me £50. next Winter I will engage to make the Quarry the prettiest place in the whole world.⁹⁵ Indeed the quarry would become a small menagerie of sorts over the next few years, with rabbits, pheasants, pea hen, guinea pigs and curious ducks in a paddock there, as well as 'large White South American Geese' (Morrison was also offered a tame deer). The lake was equally resplendent with different breeds of duck, widgeons and swans. That year's end and the following represented the period of peak activity in the park:

The Mud is out and a precious quantity there is __ we are making the Island above the bridge and making the Dam to rise the water at the upper end of the lake _

The Gardener & Gilbert are planting out Evergreens, Hayter & Tine are filling up the Clumps in the Park with live Trees __

Are the Standard Cherry & Damson Trees designed for the Garden, it will be useless to plant such kind of fruit any where besides on account of the Birds __⁹⁶

The mud from the lake was used to cover 'over about 75 or 80 Acres of land', including 'a large piece of the enclosure which you [Morrison] designed for a Deer Park'.⁹⁷ Elsewhere, an orchard was established in the quarry, a new waterfall created north of the Pavilion (with 'new Islands at Fonthill Bishop'), and the old road through the park, which Morrison had earmarked for removal two years earlier, was now 'totally destroyed'.

Throughout Papworth's engagement, he habitually eyed sale-houses for suitable items for his client. At the auction of Coade in 1843,⁹⁸ Papworth picked out several items that he felt suitable for Morrison, of which Papworth suggested 'The Giant [Polyphemus] would certainly perform well over the Coverd way at the Landing Fonthill & the Acis & Galatea in the Cavern of the Rookery.'⁹⁹ (See Chapter 6 Figure 6.6.) The lot was duly purchased for 16 guineas, together with '40 Gothic Heads' that were evidently used to decorate the tunnel and grottoes at Fonthill.¹⁰⁰ Regrettably there was a falling out between Papworth and Morrison in 1845, and the architect died two years later.

Conclusion

Alderman Beckford's contribution to Fonthill can now be established on firmer foundations, and works often attributed to his son returned to him with certitude. His Hermitage and subterranean tunnel probably represent Joseph Lane's first commission, one that would evolve into the creation – with his son, Josiah – of the highly elaborate and wondrous grottoes that still delight us today. Yet the Alderman's making of the 'serpentine river', his extensive planting, and

the addition of various ornamental features also defined the eighteenth-century Fonthill Park. The Alderman died before his tower on Stop's Beacon could outdo that being erected at Stourhead (Alfred's Tower); his son would inherit those genes and ultimately build the most monumental of dwellings. But William Beckford also had other visions, and transformed the park further, bringing it closer to nature, making it his own, and casting off much of what his father had done. It is at Fonthill that we first see the change in Josiah Lane's style of grottoes – it would seem at his patron's behest – to rockwork-fashioned chambers, sparing in decoration; he would later apply this form to grottoes and other features at several other Wiltshire estates.

Beckford eventually removed himself from the trappings of his father's Splendens to the seclusion of Fonthill Abbey. For almost 30 years the Abbey outshone everything. But following its dramatic collapse in 1825, the accolade of magnificence was handed back to Stourhead. It was only under James Morrison's ownership that Fonthill, specifically the Old Park, was finally judged to have eclipsed its neighbour: 'some Gentlemen were here from London last week, and went from here to Stourhead, when they returned they told me that Stourhead was not worthy to be Compared to Fonthill'.¹⁰¹

15

William Thomas Beckford

Between dalliance and duty

Lawrence Klein

William Thomas Beckford (1760–1844) is a bewildering historical subject not just because of the actual complexities of his career. As many have recognised, the difficulty is that, over a long life, he left such extensive and stylish writings on himself, his inner life and his responses to all manner of things. Thus, it is easy to mine his writings for discrepancy and contradiction, but not so easy to characterise him unambiguously. As he admitted to his companion Gregorio Franchi, a lot of what he said and wrote was just ‘words, words, words’.¹

One telling instance of discrepancy, if not exactly contradiction, was his attitude toward his legacy. When he was young (1780), he wrote: ‘I care not a grain of Millet whether my name be engraven on marble or graces the annals of a Kingdom, not I.’² As we will see, he often dismissed ‘the World’ and its estimation of him. Later, however, his attitude may have shifted. Joseph Farington, among his many comments on Beckford, reported in 1798 Beckford’s intention, at Fonthill Abbey, for his ‘*own tomb* to be placed at the end of this Gallery, --- as having been an encourager of Art’.³ ‘Encourager of art’ would have been an apt epitaph, ‘engraven on marble’.

The main point of this essay is a fairly straightforward though neglected one: Beckford’s encouragement of the arts was, among other things, a fulfilment of a certain aspect of aristocratic vocation. This is not to deny that his relationship with the idea of being an aristocrat was vexed.⁴ Though a kind of populist in his politics, his father, Alderman Beckford, did envision his son acquiring a title. While embracing this vision, the son often defined his authentic inclinations against parental expectation. This aspect is summed up by the Beckford scholar, Boyd Alexander: ‘There was a perpetual conflict in him between artistic dalliance and duty.’ But what Alexander called ‘artistic dalliance’ could itself be a kind of ‘duty’, and that is what this essay explores.

Aristocracy and ambition

During William Thomas Beckford's life, the dominance of the aristocracy was challenged and new claims were made on behalf of a social entity called 'the middle class'.⁵ However, this period also saw a reconstruction and expansion of the British aristocracy, in which long-surviving families went from strength to strength and many new families joined them.⁶ The aristocracy flourished in the long eighteenth century for many reasons. One was its active engagement and leadership – in politics, of course, but in many other aspects of economic, social and cultural life. The aristocracy was often allied with British modernity and progressiveness in the eighteenth century; it was not a slowly fossilising inheritance from a deep past. While many contemporaries thought the political nation should be more inclusive, few suggested that the aristocratic component of the constitution should be eliminated. Similarly there were strong arguments for maintaining a leading role for the aristocracy in society and culture.⁷

It is an irony perhaps that Beckford's failure to get a peerage occurred during a period when the opportunity to acquire one was rather better than it had been for a very long time. Late in life, Beckford wrote (though he did not publish) his *Liber Veritatis*, in which he targeted the large number of individuals and families who had been elevated – in his view, unjustifiedly – through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has to be said that the Beckford family trajectory was not so very different from that of many families mocked in *Liber Veritatis*.⁸

Over several generations, the Beckfords had amassed a mercantile fortune, based on their Jamaican plantations and trans-Atlantic trade.⁹ The senior William Beckford, Alderman Beckford, was also the mouthpiece of populist politics, famous for the speech in which he asserted that the legitimacy of the polity was founded on 'the sense of the people'. However, even this speech seemed to acquiesce in the idea that, ideally, the nobility is the governing class.¹⁰ Alderman Beckford's key political ally was the elder William Pitt, who had earned the sobriquet 'the Great Commoner' on account of his formidable role in the House of Commons; but Pitt was from an aristocratic family nested within a wide connection of leading aristocratic families, and he gained a peerage. The Alderman himself married into the aristocracy and clearly tried to steer his family on a path that would lead to a title.

The Alderman bequeathed this ambition to his son. Of course, that ambition was frustrated by the episode of 1784, when the younger Beckford's alleged sexual misbehaviour exploded into a public scandal which precluded the possibility of his ever being elevated.¹¹ This episode haunted Beckford, and he never dropped the prospect of achieving the 'rank' that he thought he deserved on the basis of ancestry, wealth and personal merit. He was obsessed with his own and others' genealogies.¹² More important, he went on, in many ways, to act the part of an aristocrat though he lacked a title.

At the same time, Beckford often refused to behave according to expectations. He recognised that his inclinations did not conform to many contemporary

norms. He could go so far as to eschew an interest in ‘titles’.¹³ His own words provide testimony for the tendency to see him as solitary, eccentric, Romantic and ‘Gothic’, leading an outsider’s somewhat garish life. However, as David Watkin has emphasised, Beckford’s aberrancy can be exaggerated, and it is important to normalise him by putting him in the context of other people like him.¹⁴ This is not to deny all the things about him that were unusual and even unique; but in many ways his activities were within the register of aristocratic normalcy.

As a prospective grandee, Beckford was concerned from a young age by the question of ‘mission’. He wrote in 1777 in Switzerland: ‘I am filled with Futurity ... What will be my Life? what misfortunes lurk in wait for me? what Glory?’¹⁵ In 1781 he worried: ‘I fear I shall never be good for anything in this world ...’¹⁶ He projected such worries about his destiny into his fiction. Towards the end of *Vathek*, the hero (or anti-hero) is confronted by his ‘good Genius’ who tries, one final time, ‘to divert him from pursuing his ruin’. Appearing as a shepherd, the good Genius asks: ‘To whom Providence hath confided the care of innumerable subjects; is it thus that thou fulfillest thy mission?’¹⁷

Dalliance and duty in conflict

It is obvious that Beckford experienced inner conflicts about how he should be leading his life. His remarks about these conflicts can create the impression that he was torn between the pursuit of his own desires and the fulfilment of his social responsibilities. As noted earlier, Boyd Alexander crystallised this as a choice between ‘artistic dalliance and duty’. Many of Beckford’s statements support this reading. He regularly talked of rejecting ‘the World’ for a more private life,¹⁸ for ‘my dreams, my phantasies and all of my singularity’.¹⁹ He was very clear about his lack of a political vocation: ‘Politics was not my mission,’ he said.²⁰ He also frequently announced his hostility to polite society and its rituals. He revelled in being ‘out of the way of courts and ceremonies, and common-place visitations, or salutations, or gossip ...’²¹ He was determined not to be ‘what your old Ladies call ... “a charming Gentleman”’.²² (In fact, he was quite good at being ‘a charming Gentleman’ when he chose.)

Once, he projected his inner conflicts in an imagined conversation with his step-sister Elizabeth Hervey. In this mental scenario, he envisioned himself discoursing on ‘the splendour of the Chinese Palaces, the pomp of their processions and the grotesque wildness of their imaginations’ until interrupted by Hervey who demanded that he desist ‘in the name of Taste’: “‘For God’s Sake, William, leave the contemplation of plates and dishes, what will people think if these are the objects that chiefly attract your attention?’”²³ In view of the political and social expectations of his parents (to which he partly wished to conform) he betrayed his anxiety.

His anxiety about not being what was expected pushed him to register slightly his own true and powerful interests and passions. In 1781, he wrote ‘I

fear I shall never be half so sapient nor good for anything in this world, but composing airs, building towers, forming gardens, collecting old Japan, and writing a journey to China or the moon'.²⁴ The tone of this remark is self-denigrating with a touch of self-congratulation: Beckford often struck this mixed register. However, in the end these 'frivolous' activities were the very ones about which he felt most strongly and which he pursued with intensity and business-like efficiency. Indeed, these activities constituted his 'mission', and such activities were not inimical to the status of aristocrat. Indeed, these were ways to fulfil an aristocratic vocation.

There were aristocratic models for the various activities which Beckford suggested made him not 'good for anything in this world'. For instance, Beckford talked of 'composing airs'. Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon, was a musical aficionado who not only played the flute and supported the development of London concert life but also composed music. John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, was another notable musical amateur, who loved to perform on his drums. These men sought fellow musicians of their own class, but they often had to conscript all manner of help to make possible a musical occasion, polite accomplishment temporarily trumping social distinction.²⁵

Beckford also mentioned 'writing a journey to China or the moon'. Horace Walpole had produced his *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors of England* (in 1758) precisely to underscore the aristocratic engagement with literary art. One of Beckford's godfathers was William Henry Lyttelton, a future Baron Lyttelton, who published his own verse late in life. This Lyttelton was the brother of George, Baron Lyttelton, who, if he did not write 'a journey to China or the moon', did write 'a journey into Wales' though he was better known for *Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan* (1735) and *Dialogues of the Dead* (first published in 1760).²⁶ Beckford also noted, in his list of frivolous activities, 'forming gardens'. Another godfather, William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, had a life-long passion for landscape gardening and was known not just for enhancing the 'rural elegance' of his own properties but for advising others on how to configure theirs.²⁷

There were obvious key differences between Beckford's endeavours in these artistic, or aesthetically informed, activities and those of other aristocrats. One difference is that most of these aristocrats engaged in such activities as a complement to activities of a political or at least public nature.²⁸ Beckford was disinclined to engage in public affairs. Indeed, after the scandal of 1784 he was informally barred from such activities (though he was the incumbent of a seat in Parliament for many years and, in the 1790s, he tried several unsuccessful diplomatic gambits).

The other difference is that these other aristocrats pursued their artistic or learned interests within webs of aristocratic and gentlemanly connection and sociability. Aesthetic and learned pursuits by aristocrats became public through involvement in institutions such as the Royal Society, the British Museum, and the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. The Earl of Sandwich parlayed his personal interest in making music into the Concert of

Ancient Music.²⁹ Even the Society of Dilettanti, which began as a hedonistic dining club for former Grand Tourists in the 1730s, reoriented itself toward the patronage of archaeology and the study of ancient art in the second half of the century.³⁰ By contrast, Beckford's engagement in the arts was shaped by his social ostracism. Outside webs of aristocratic connection, he had to go it alone. Thus, it is not surprising that, among the activities he had listed, 'building towers' became the central project of his life. Fonthill bespoke unambiguously the aristocratic claim.

Beckford's interest and engagement in the arts was not hostile to aristocratic norms. In practice, Beckford belonged to an aristocratic culture that condoned such aesthetic engagement. While in many ways a caste apart, aristocrats were also gentlemen, seeking to enjoy the prestige that politeness offered and submitting to its disciplines. In the eighteenth century, politeness referred not just to interpersonal manners but, more widely, to a programme of cultivation expressed, variably, in learning and aesthetic appreciation and even artistic engagement.³¹ Beckford was not abnormal or frivolous for being interested in these matters. The degree to which aristocrats were supposed actually to practise the arts, as distinguished from encouraging them, was debated. The 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury had influentially distinguished the designing insight of the polite gentleman-aristocrat from the mechanic executing the work of art.³² The 4th Earl of Chesterfield had famously criticised the Earl of Burlington for dirtying his hands in building activities, a criticism to which Beckford was liable.³³ However, as already indicated, other aristocrats participated actively in the arts, and the boundary between engagement and encouragement was not strictly maintained.

Aristocracy as defender of a fragile liberty

Of course, fostering the arts was one component of a larger hierarchical regime, of which Beckford was a wholehearted supporter. Notwithstanding his own political dormancy, Beckford shared a commonplace conviction in the political importance of the aristocracy. Eighteenth-century Britons were always alert to the fragility of liberty and the threat of tyranny. From the seventeenth century, they had inherited the view that the main threat to liberty came from the monarch and his court. In this view, a strong and independent aristocracy was the only force powerful enough to serve as a brake on a corrupt monarch and his courtiers.³⁴

Beckford's agreement with this outlook is confirmed by several pieces of evidence. For instance, he wrote that 'high-minded noblemen are never court favourites; the subject must not touch the hem of the royal robe'.³⁵ More specifically, a comment about the elder Pitt is indicative: 'Pitt [the younger] loved power; he was proud – but he had not the pride of his father, who, a courtier in manners and fond of power too, would not suffer the King to rob him of his self-respect.'³⁶ Most interesting is a characterisation of Don João de Castro (1500–48), who had retired to a *quinta*, visited by Beckford in 1787. Beckford dramatised the situation

of this Portuguese hero, writing that de Castro must have desired this retreat after the ungrateful behaviour of his countrymen. Beckford's de Castro had engaged in 'arduous' contests, 'a long and agonizing struggle, not only in the field under a burning sun, and in the face of peril and death, but in sustaining the glory and good fame of Portugal against court intrigues, and the vile cabals of envious, domestic enemies'. In his own time as in de Castro's, Beckford generalised, humanity was 'equally insensible to the warning voice of genuine patriotism, equally disposed to crouch under the rod of corrupt tyranny. And thus, by the neglect of wise and virtuous men, and a mean subserviency to knavish fools, eras which might become of gold, are transmuted by an accursed alchymy into iron rusted with blood.'³⁷

On this matter, as in many others, Beckford was not of one mind. During his lifetime, the view got traction that the aristocracy, allied to the monarch and court, was a big part of the problem: as his father had laid it out, the sense of the people was a sound corrective to the corruption of an aristocracy allied to the royal court. Beckford had a streak of 'radicalism' or populism that derived from his father's politics and the traditions with which the Alderman was aligned. In 1796, Beckford published *Modern Novel Writing*, which showed signs of an anti-Establishment posture. It ended with an ironic appraisal of his critics' courage in defending 'the exclusive privileges of the FEW against the vulgar attacks of the MANY'. The second volume of the novel *Azemia* (1797) rebuked 'the idle and wasteful rich who live on their rents at the expense of the poor'. Thus, Beckford positioned himself as a critic of government in the name of the struggling rural poor and middling.³⁸

Any affinity between Beckford and contemporary radicalism was limited by his support for slavery. He knew that his wealth derived from Jamaican plantations and, especially as he got older, that his resources were dependent on the price of sugar, the possibility of slave revolt and the political course of abolition, in which he admitted 'so principal a part of my fortune was at stake'. Though he used the language of 'blackness' to disparage Africans, he was not obviously a 'scientific racist'; African subjection could be justified on the basis of environmental and historical, rather than biological, differences. Thus, he seems to have believed that Africans were better off under white management in the Caribbean than they had been in Africa, exposed 'to the butcheries of their native tyrants'.³⁹

Beckford definitely thought that there was a job for the heroic aristocrat in the defence of political and other values. This idea fed his belief in a society in which aristocrats were dominant. He embraced an organic and hierarchical view of society: he lamented the French aristocracy's loss of stature, and he admired Portuguese society, at least some of the time, because of the exalted position of people of rank. Indeed, Fonthill was periodically the scene for physical dramatisations of hierarchical society, ritual gatherings in which the different hierarchically arrayed facets of society were on display. These included his own coming-of-age party, his wife's funeral and, it seems, whenever Beckford himself returned after a long absence.⁴⁰

His belief in the aristocracy's cohesive role also fed his local paternalism. When he was building the Abbey, he regularly justified the project as a contribution to the local economy: it put everybody to work. The moral economy of the country house was an idea shared by others.⁴¹ It reflected an economic reality even if Beckford had additional motivations for building the Abbey. Clearly the strongest of those other motivations was the opportunity to realise in three dimensions the imperatives of his imagination. However, the realisation of those imperatives was not an abandonment of his aristocratic vocation but rather an opportunity to fulfil it. The aristocratic claim to leadership in the eighteenth century was manifested politically in the House of Lords and economically in the landed regime. Culturally, the aristocratic claim to leadership was made through both their own practice and their patronage, most conspicuously visible in their country houses.

During Beckford's life, as indicated earlier, people started saying that the 'middle class' was a particular receptacle of virtue. However, another current commonplace was that, whatever the faults of individual aristocrats, aristocrats were capable of a kind of heroic virtue of which the middling sorts were incapable. The middling sorts, it was said, were always limited by the necessity of making a living and by the narrowness of interest that accompanied that commitment. Thus, while the defence of liberty was the core responsibility of aristocracy, the defence of culture was another. Publicists of the middle and later eighteenth century dwelled much on the development of the fine and mechanical arts in Britain. In this project, they saw a definite role for the great. Thomas Martyn, for instance, declared that 'the polite arts are rising in Britain, and call for the fostering hand of the rich and powerful'. In particular, he wished 'that the nobility and gentry would condescend to make their cabinets and collections as accessible' as possible so that artisans and artists could develop a true taste.⁴² Thomas Mortimer likewise sought to enhance 'a free intercourse between the artist and the patron'.⁴³ He educed the example of Charles Lennox, the Duke of Richmond, who, 'animated with an ardent desire to promote the improvement of polite Arts', had opened his collections to artisans and artists. So did Beckford.⁴⁴ The cultural role of the aristocracy was not articulated solely by such publicists. The 2nd Earl of Shelburne suggested that the middling were too self-absorbed to lead society and that aristocratic independence was best able to 'soften and liberalise' society and to foster the polishing of culture.⁴⁵

In short, while the aristocratic class was subjected to critique in the later eighteenth century, this critique was answered by arguments that cast aristocrats as important contributors to progress and modernity.⁴⁶ Beckford was no fan of polite modernity. He looked elsewhere for inspiration. He was hostile to what he deemed 'the modern': bad taste, utilitarian thinking, egalitarianism. He valued 'the Gothic' (though he also perceived its limitations). However, his undertakings, especially the Fonthill project, did rest, among other things, on a notion of leadership in the arts of which aristocrats were uniquely capable.

Beckford believed that few men in contemporary Britain actually had true taste, and some critics denied Beckford himself that attribute.⁴⁷ Others interpreted

Beckford's achievement more sympathetically. Writing in 1801, after a visit to Fonthill, Benjamin West was 'lost in admiration' for 'the progress, which the combination of arts have made, directed by true taste'. When finished, West wrote, Fonthill will 'raise a climax of excellence without an example in the European world – and give an immortality to the man whose elegant mind has conceived so vast a combination of all that is refined in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture'.⁴⁸ Here was an achievement of aristocratic heroism: art not as dalliance but as duty.

Reading *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey

William Beckford's architectural imagination

Peter N. Lindfield and Dale Townshend

There is no doubt that, for those who visited it in its heyday, Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire was the material realisation of the same architectural energies that William Beckford had brought to bear on *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, his Orientalist fiction that, though written in French in 1782, was translated into English by Samuel Henley and published without the author's knowledge or consent as *An Arabian Tale, From an Unpublished Manuscript* in 1786. Though James Wyatt, the most renowned architect of his day, prepared the Abbey's designs, it was Beckford who masterminded and oversaw the project, taking full control of it after Wyatt's death in 1813.¹ Registering Beckford's central role in the Abbey's creation, the celebrated account in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of the entertainments that Beckford had hosted at Fonthill for Lord Nelson, Lady Hamilton and others in late December 1800 implied a connection between his fictional and architectural projects by conjuring up a scene of lavish feasting, spectacle and sensory gratification that would not have been out of place at Vathek's Palace of Alkoremi.² When John Britton retold this event in his *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire* (1823), he made the links between Beckford's fiction and his country house more explicit by claiming that it was on this occasion, in particular, that 'the accomplished author of Vathek had determined to exemplify by practical illustration some of the theories of that original romance'.³ Though Fonthill Abbey, Britton went on, possessed neither the five wings of the Palace of Alkoremi nor the five other palaces devoted specifically to the gratification of the senses, Beckford, in the manner of his sybaritic Caliph, had assembled within and around his mansion 'the most delightful blandishments of art, the fascinations of talent, and the choicest luxuries of the palate: besides the most rare and delicious viands, fruits, and wines, with odiferous plants, flowers, and essences'.⁴ These comments, of course, are a close paraphrase of the description of the first palace-like wing that Vathek adds to the Palace of Alkoremi in *Vathek*: its tables, we are

told, were ‘continually covered with the most exquisite dainties; which were supplied both by night and by day, according to their constant consumption; while the most delicious wines and the choicest cordials flowed forth from a hundred fountains that were never exhausted’.⁵ John Rutter followed suit in *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (1823), claiming that the staircase in the Great Tower at Fonthill was meant to give the illusion of the ‘eleven hundred stairs’ in Vathek’s tower – although, in the first two French editions, the tower had a preposterous 15,000 stairs.⁶ So inveterate was the assumption that Fonthill Abbey was the material manifestation of, or even physical paeon to, Beckford’s extraordinary architectural vision in *Vathek* that when Henry Venn Lansdown visited the ruins of the Abbey in October 1844, he could not help but see in the stony fragments potent reminders of Beckford’s romance, the organ screen in the Octagon thus becoming one ‘designed by “Vathek” himself’, the Brown Parlour ‘the very room’ in which ‘the magnificent “Vathek”’ frequently dined on ‘every delicacy to tempt the palate’.⁷

In this chapter, we wish to subject the relation between *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey, between Beckford’s literary and actual architectural endeavours, to further scrutiny, in some senses complicating what nineteenth-century visitors and commentators simply took for granted, and in other respects confirming yet also qualifying their assumptions. For, unlike the seemingly straightforward (though, itself, by no means uncomplicated) relationship between Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), that which exists between Beckford’s fiction and his house is characterised by a number of tensions and points of difference. First, while Beckford certainly seems to have exploited the connections between *Vathek* and Fonthill at times – and the lavish entertainments that he put on for Lord Nelson and his entourage in December 1800 seem to suggest as much – there remains evidence, both anecdotal and more empirical, that indicates that the relation between them was far more nuanced and complex for their creator than one of easy mirroring, semblance and equivalence.

Secondly, and unlike the Gothic architecture that links *The Castle of Otranto* to Strawberry Hill, *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey do not, at first glance, appear to share a common style or form: while *Vathek*, though not without elements of the emergent Gothic-fictional mode, is a product of the Orientalist tradition in eighteenth-century fiction, the Abbey’s façade was uniformly Gothic in design, and its interiors, such as the grand drawing room (Figure 16.1), a mixture of Gothic and largely Classical spaces.⁸ Thus, while the Gothic style of Fonthill deliberately courted associations with Britain’s Catholic past, the architecture in *Vathek* – though its style, Beckford insists, cannot be precisely named and identified – is strongly Islamic and Oriental in spirit.

Thirdly, while *Otranto* was written when the construction of Strawberry Hill had for the most part been completed, *Vathek* predates the creation of



Fig. 16.1 Stedman Whitwell, *The Grand Drawing Room* [at Fonthill Abbey]. Plate 5 from John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Fonthill by just over a decade: though it was planned from as early as 1790, Beckford's Gothic pile was built between the years 1796 and 1817.⁹ Separated by the differences in style, temporality and those imposed by Beckford himself, *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey do not readily lend themselves to the type of analysis that W. S. Lewis undertook in his seminal article 'The Genesis of Strawberry Hill' (1934), that is, the identification of the return of 'real' architectural features of the writer's house in the fictional text that it was thought to have inspired.¹⁰ If anything, Beckford's fiction seemed to have inspired his home. As we argue in this chapter, though, it is through a consideration of what we term William Beckford's 'architectural imagination' – an underlying discursive construct that runs from his earliest manuscripts, published works and architectural endeavours through to his later projects, writings and recorded impressions – that some of these difficulties might be resolved or at least further explained. It is nothing new to say that Beckford's architectural endeavours were firmly grounded in the terms of biographical experience, a point to which critics have repeatedly returned, and to which some of our observations below attest. The novelty of our argument, however, lies in its articulation and analysis of Beckford's 'architectural imagination', a broader imaginative 'complex' that informed both his literary and his architectural works, and a rich, generative faculty of which he himself was self-consciously aware.

Fonthill's tower and the Tower of the Caliph

When an enthusiastic Cyrus Redding made his first acquaintance with the aged Beckford, now residing at Lansdown Crescent, Bath, in 1835, the sight of the writer's tower on Lansdown Hill (Figure 16.2) prompted him to make what must to both parties have seemed a rather predictable observation: 'while I was on Lansdown', he remarks, 'I thought of the Tower of the Caliph'; 'the towers in "Vathek," at Fonthill, and here', he continues, 'lead to such a conclusion'.¹¹ Beckford's reported response, however, swiftly undercuts Redding's assumption that the towers of Lansdown and Fonthill were homages to the tower of the Caliph in *Vathek* with a frank disclaimer:

'No,' he replied, 'I have extraordinary sight; God rarely gives men such eyes. I am partial to glancing over a wide horizon – it delights me to sweep far along an extended landscape. I must elevate myself to do this, even at Lansdown.'



Fig. 16.2 Lansdown Tower, Bath.

Beckford's Tower & Museum.

The tower at Fonthill was as necessary an appendage to such a structure as it would have been to a real abbey.¹²

A structure determined by his love of landscape-viewing and a ‘necessary appendage’ to the Gothic style in which Wyatt had designed and built, the tower at Fonthill bore no relation, Beckford claimed, to the Caliph’s in *Vathek* beyond the most obvious and superficial of parallels. A sketch (Figure 16.3) that Beckford himself produced of Vathek’s tower in the presence of Mr. John T. C. Heaviside in 1843 rather underlines this point.¹³ The grand and muscularly tapered tower in Beckford’s sketch is governed by Classical forms: the lower section resembles a triumphal arch, the central register is framed by pilasters and the upper tier is encircled with



Fig. 16.3 William Beckford, *Vathek’s Tower*, Drawn aged 83, 1843.

Collection of Philip Hewat-Jaboor.



Fig. 16.4 J. Martin, *View of the South Front [of Fonthill Abbey] from the Lawn Grand Drawing Room*. Plate 12 from John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

round-headed arcading. Although Fonthill's tower (Figure 16.4) is superficially similar in that it tapers upwards in sections, its ornament is firmly Gothic: lancet windows, blind arcading and pierced crenellations resembling a corona. Standing corrected, Redding defensively replied to Beckford with the comment that “The Tower of the Caliph is so prominent in ‘Vathek’ that I am not the only person who labours under the mistake”.¹⁴ Indeed, he was not alone in these assumptions, but when another anonymous correspondent in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1844 published his recollections of his conversations with Beckford in 1837, he recalled the latter expressing similar sentiments. When asked whether his establishment at Fonthill was really as large as it was reported to be, Beckford vigorously replied with the expostulation “Enormous!” – before hastily adding the caveat that, despite the building's Alkoremi-like scale, “it did not realise the reports which were current as to the magnificence of my mode of living; for instance, I never sat down alone to forty dishes”.¹⁵ By Beckford's own admission here, he was not the Caliph of Fonthill that he was often taken to be, nor did he reside at Fonthill Abbey in a state of luxurious self-indulgence anywhere approaching that of his best-known fictional character.

‘The Transport of Pleasure’

While Beckford thus often tended to deny the somewhat superficial and commonplace connections between house and fiction that his contemporaries routinely

made, Fonthill and the architecture of *Vathek* are nonetheless indubitably linked by the deeper and more abiding terms of Beckford's architectural imagination, the precise contours of which were already taking shape in his juvenilia of the late 1770s. In the early 'The Transport of Pleasure' manuscript (ca. 1777–8), for instance, a 17-year-old Beckford described to his tutor, the artist Alexander Cozens, a rich and poignant vision of idealised existence within imaginary architectural space, one that would still be very much in place in Beckford's work over five decades later.¹⁶ Part boyish escapism and part romantic and erotic reverie, the piece described the fantasy of Beckford's and Cozens's retreat from society into an intensely private world of sensual stimulation and intellectual companionship. Ensnared in a high tower built on a hill, the two pass their days in an endless round of eating and drinking, reading and writing, philosophising and star-gazing, Beckford thus spinning a homoerotic or at least queer fantasy that would be realised to greater effect in *Vathek*.¹⁷ Not insignificantly, the imaginary tower in which Beckford and Cozens in this piece dwell is Gothic in design and furnishing, its painted windows 'crowded with gorgeous figures coloured in antient tomes' and lit by the lights of many tapers. One hundred steps within it lead up into 'a spacious hall wainscoted with cedar', while its arched roof is said to be 'strangely sculptured with gothic devices'. A Gothic tower containing censers, tapestries, rich chalices, softly-muted choirs, large flower-filled porcelain vases, mosaic-covered statues of knights, sovereigns and saints, and a capacious gallery enclosed with gilt lattice work: it is hardly surprising that Boyd Alexander was led to entitle this manuscript as 'Fonthill Foreshadowed' in his influential study *England's Wealthiest Son* of 1962.¹⁸

Yet, more than a 'prophecy' of the work that Beckford would undertake at Fonthill Abbey some 20 years later, the fantasy set out here is better thought of as an early expression of what we are calling Beckford's 'architectural imagination', a nexus of imaginative architectural elements, behaviours and luxurious sensations that would come to shape and determine much of his subsequent literary and architectural undertakings. As realised here, the coordinates of Beckford's architectural imagination involve the fantasy of withdrawal into a timeless and intensely private architectural space, one in which two individuals who are somewhat illicitly or transgressively linked with one another – here, the jejune student and his older male tutor – indulge in a lavish lifestyle of sensory delight and intellectual pleasure. Beckford's architectural imagination is nothing if not literary, for, in addition to its sense of the 'literary trance' in which Beckford and Cozens exist at the tower, 'The Transport of Pleasure' is shot through with literary allusion to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the tale of Locman, the sage of the enchanted labyrinth of flowers that features in Marianne-Agnès Pillement, dame de Fauques's Oriental fiction, *The Vizirs; or, The Enchanted Labyrinth* (1774). Beyond this, the space depicted looks also to the Bower of Bliss in Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and, through Spenser, to the enchanted castles in the epic romances of Tasso and Ariosto: Beckford's architectural imagination is nourished and nurtured on some of the major texts of the British and European canon.

The most significant implication that this early work bears for an understanding of the relationship between *Vathek* and Fonthill Abbey is that, just as it draws simultaneously from fictions in both the Oriental and English or ‘Gothic’ traditions, so it refuses to impose a distinction between Gothic and Oriental styles of architecture: adjacent to the Gothic tower on the hill stands a suite of Oriental apartments, opulently furnished with Chinese and Japanese effects, and clearly taking their cue from Beckford’s erstwhile architectural tutor William Chambers’s evocative descriptions of the Halls of the Moon in *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772). Opulently furnished with jewels, marble, ivory, porcelain, mother of pearl, silver and gold, these are the structures to which Chinese princes are said to retire, a place where, like Cozens and Beckford in the early fantasy, they feast ‘and give a loose to every sort of voluptuous pleasure’.¹⁹ The Gothic cedes effortlessly to Orientalism in ‘The Transport of Pleasure’ as if there were no substantial difference between them. Herein, then, lies a key feature of Beckford’s architectural imagination: as drawn to Orientalism as it is to the Gothic, it makes no firm distinction between them.

Traditions with Oriental roots

In this regard, Beckford was, for once, thoroughly in step with many of the architectural historians and practitioners of his day. Sir Christopher Wren’s memoirs that were published as *Parentalia* in 1750 had advanced the influential (though by no means uncontested) theory that Gothic architecture had derived originally from the east. Thus, he claimed, ‘what we now vulgarly call the *Gothick*, ought properly and truly be named the *Saracenick Architecture refined by the Christians*; which first of all began in the East after the Fall of the *Greek Empire* by the prodigious Success of those People that adhered to *Mahomet’s Doctrine*’.²⁰ This soon influenced Georgian architectural and interior design, and during the 1750s Gothic and Chinoiserie were often either grouped together as alternatives to the prevailing taste for Classicism or combined as hybrids in contemporary interior fashions. Plates in Thomas Chippendale’s influential furniture pattern-book *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director* (1754), for instance, present combinations of Chinese and Gothic motifs in single designs such as Plates XXI–XXI *Gothick Chairs*; XXIII–XXV *Chinese Chairs*; and CXI *China Case* (Figure 16.5).

Similarly, William and John Halfpenny in their *Chinese and Gothic Architecture Properly Ornamented* (1752) brought together the two aesthetics, unifying them as legitimate though still marginally inferior alternatives to Classicism.²¹ Underscoring the styles’ similarities, their Gothic and Chinoiserie designs are very similar in form, ornament and disposition; both were fashionably exotic, and in their flowing and asymmetric forms, they were mutually in keeping with late eighteenth-century Rococo. In the light of these and other examples, it would appear that Beckford’s Gothic Abbey at Fonthill was not as stylistically remote from the self-consciously

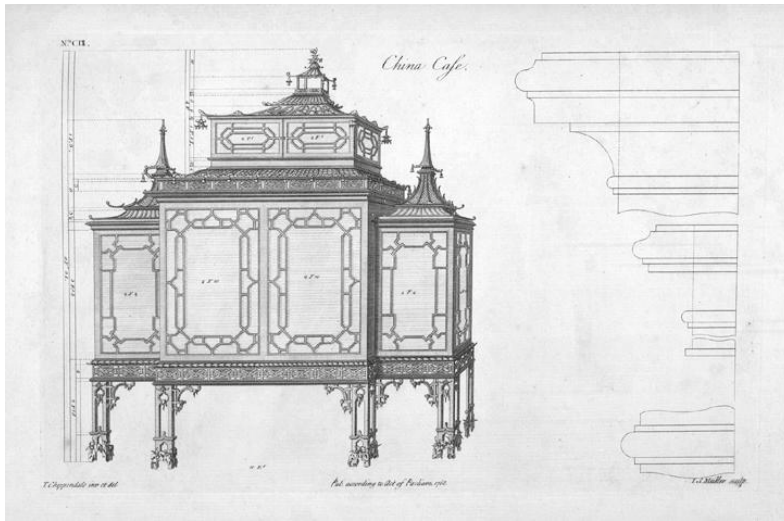


Fig. 16.5 Thomas Chippendale, *China Case*. Plate CIX from Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1753).

© Peter N. Lindfield.

Persian and Arabian tone and setting of *Vathek* as it first seems.²² A visual reconciliation of the two styles was depicted in a watercolour of the Hall of Eblis by Jackson (Figure 16.6) that is now held at the Lewis Walpole Library, Connecticut.²³ Successfully realising the space's cavernous qualities, the artist has also made an important and revealing architectural choice: swollen Egyptian columns (loosely of the Papyriform type) support overtly Gothic vaulting. This drawing, though surely not authorised or even known by Beckford, certainly provides insight into his architectural imagination, explaining, as it does, a reader's response to the apparent disjunction between the Gothic architecture of Fonthill and the Oriental forms and structures of *Vathek*.

It was not only Gothic architecture that eighteenth-century cultural commentators held to have originated in the east. In the first volume of *The History of English Poetry* (1774), Thomas Warton advanced the claim that literary romance too, the formal vehicle of Beckford's imagination in *Vathek*, originated with the Arabians and Saracens on the northern coast of Africa. Transported at the beginning of the eighth century into Spain, this 'extravagant' and highly imaginative literary form, Warton argues, eventually spread throughout Europe and into Britain; western contact with the east during the Crusades only further ensured its dissemination. Though Warton's views were not shared by all – Thomas Percy, for one, had earlier claimed in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) that the romance form was originally of European or 'Gothic' extraction – they were sufficiently current for Beckford tacitly to rely upon them in his composition of *Vathek* in early 1782. As Henley's scholarly notes to the unauthorised translation of the text made clear, the enchanted architecture of the tale looked not to Gothic antecedents so much



Fig. 16.6 Jackson, *Hall of Eblis* from *Vathek*. N.D. Babb-Beckford no. 101.

Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

as to the Oriental magic and wonder of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. Horace Walpole, in turn, perceived startling continuities between the eastern tradition of Romance and Gothic architecture: 'the *Arabian Nights* and King's [College] Chapel [Cambridge]', he wrote in 1789, are cognate with one another insofar as both are 'above all rules', the orders, symmetries and mathematical principles of classical literature and architecture.²⁴ It was precisely these presumed continuities between the imagination, romance and non-classical architectural styles that led John Britton to remark that one with so 'vivid' a fancy as William Beckford could not but choose to commission and oversee at Fonthill work in the Gothic mode: incapable of being satisfied 'with any thing of commonplace or even usual character', a mind such as Beckford's required 'novelty, grandeur, complexity and even sublimity; and it may be safely asserted, that no style or class of architecture is so well adapted to effect these purposes as the gothic, or ecclesiastical'.²⁵

Certainly, a sense of imaginative and fanciful 'rulelessness' (in the sense of being entirely 'without rules' rather than infringing or violating pre-existing ones) applies to the architecture of *Vathek* particularly well. Its architectural highlights – the Palace of Alkoremi and the Hall of Eblis – are said to be unclassifiable according to established architectural criteria, orders and traditions.²⁶ Though Sandro Jung has argued that the novel's architecture is recognisably Gothic in style, Beckford, when sketching out the surfaces of the Hall of Eblis, is insistent upon the fact that this is 'of an architecture unknown in the records of the earth'.²⁷ This important comment economically repeats the description of the extraordinary, fantastical architecture that the narrator William encounters at the centre of the earth in 'The

Long Story' or *The Vision* (ca. 1777), another early, florid architectural fantasy that Beckford addressed to Alexander Cozens. Part natural wonder and part constructed architectural fantasy, the Halls of the Glorious in this story are described as being 'divided by at least three thousand massy Columns into the most stately Halls decorated with Colonades [sic] of slender pillars inconceivably striking'.²⁸ Though these references to pillars and colonnades in *The Vision* are couched in the language of Classicism, we are subsequently told that they 'supported neither frieze nor Cornice, nor any ornament in the least degree consistent with the rules of Architecture we observe on the surface of the Earth, but sustained on their airy Capitals a variety of glistening Garlands composed of Sparrs and intermixed like the branches which form our Bowers'.²⁹ Similar references to otherworldly orders of architecture that are yet to be conceived, identified and named as such run throughout the *Episodes of Vathek*.³⁰ Perpetually fascinated by fantastical natural, supernatural and manmade forms, Beckford's architectural imagination, like the *capriccio* tradition with which it was contemporary, is characterised by an interest in 'impossible' architectural structures that have no existence beyond the realm of fantasy.

'Impossible architecture' at Fonthill

As William North's prefatory 'Memoir' to his 1819 edition of *Vathek* observed, 'Much of the description of Vathek's palace, and even the renowned "Hall of Eblis," was afterwards visibly embodied in the real Fonthill Abbey, of which wonders, almost as fabulous, were at one time reported and believed.'³¹ Though Beckford, as we have argued, was known on occasion to dispute this, the assumption that Fonthill Abbey was, in some senses, the realisation of the architectural visions of *Vathek* was one that was shared by Rutter, Britton and numerous other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visitors to the house. Although modern and contemporary Beckford scholarship has frequently rehearsed a similar claim, it nonetheless remains one that is worth exploring in greater depth. Despite Beckford's caveats, *Vathek's* buildings and their architectural effects do, indeed, seem to offer numerous templates for Fonthill's exterior and interior, and a number of important themes expressed by the novel's architectural fabrics were subsequently realised by Beckford and Wyatt at the Abbey. Of these, architectural grandeur and sublimity – especially as expressed through scale – and the importance of collections and their display are the most important, and are also two elements that are introduced in *Vathek* at the outset of the narrative. Seeking substantially to augment the 'scanty' structure that his father Motassem had erected on the hill of Pied Horses, Vathek adopts as his primary architectural project at the Palace the construction of a tower, a building that, though it was conceived as an imitation of the Biblical Nimrod's building of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), the Caliph erects 'not, like that great warrior, to escape being drowned, but from the insolent curiosity of penetrating the secrets of heaven'.³² As

critics have long pointed out, this reflects Beckford's life-long interest in towers, one that was expressed in 'The Transport of Pleasure' and which culminated in the building of Lansdown Tower, Bath, to Henry Goodridge's designs between 1825 and 1827.³³ The sheer grandeur, scale and the dwarfing of human inhabitants by imposing architectural forms that we see in *Vathek* seem to derive from Beckford's fascination with Giovanni Battista Piranesi's illustrations (Figure 16.7), an interest, it has been postulated, that was ignited by his father's large collection of the Italian's prints.³⁴ The influence of Piranesi on Beckford's architectural imagination is certainly evident in his printed but suppressed *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783), the travelogue in which Beckford imaginatively adorns the blank German landscape with castles 'in the style of Piranesi',³⁵ and then later, before the Doge's Palace in Venice, imaginatively visualises and then draws 'chasms and subterraneous hollows, the domain of fear and torture, with chains, rocks, wheels, and dreadful engines, in the style of Piranesi'.³⁶ Similar Piranesi-inspired scenes of lofty and subterraneous architectural space recur in *Vathek*, though augmented here by eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime effects of grand and imposing architecture in writers such as John Dennis.

At Fonthill Abbey, sublime architectural grandeur was conveyed by its size. It was conceived on the scale of an exceptionally endowed monastery (such as the nearby Glastonbury), and intended to reflect Beckford's vast sugar-derived wealth that, at least initially, ensured him a handsome income. Although Beckford claimed that it had cost him £273,000 to realise, Fonthill is thought to have cost the substantially larger amount of £400,000, and has fittingly been styled by one modern critic as the work of a megalomaniac wishing to secure immortality for himself.³⁷ There is a striking connection, here, between Beckford's unbridled architectural imagination in *Vathek* and that realised in Wiltshire. By 1790, Beckford's thoughts about how to spend his income had settled firmly upon architecture. His announcement that 'I am growing rich, and mean to build Towers, and sing hymns to the powers of Heaven on their summits' resonates uncannily with the 'insolent curiosity' of the Caliph at the tower of Alkoremi to 'extort from the stars the decrees of his destiny'.³⁸ Wyatt's preliminary sketches for Fonthill (see Chapter 4, Figures 4.15 and 4.16) clearly illustrate, in turn, this ambition, and demonstrate the tower's centrality to, and dominance over, the remainder of the already palatial Abbey.³⁹ In Beckford's novel as in his house, towers are the architectural manifestations of hubris and overreaching ambition, characteristics that his architectural imagination simultaneously celebrates and censures.

The design of Fonthill changed considerably over the following years: with the dismantling of Fonthill Spensens between 1801 and 1807, the Abbey was to become Beckford's principal residence.⁴⁰ Wyatt cautioned against this, saying that 'much blame would be thrown on him as the adviser', to which Beckford replied, 'You are older than I am, yet I have lived long enough not to mind what the world says.'⁴¹ The Abbey's designs became increasingly ambitious and extensive in response to a new-found need for accommodation. Once again, the parallels

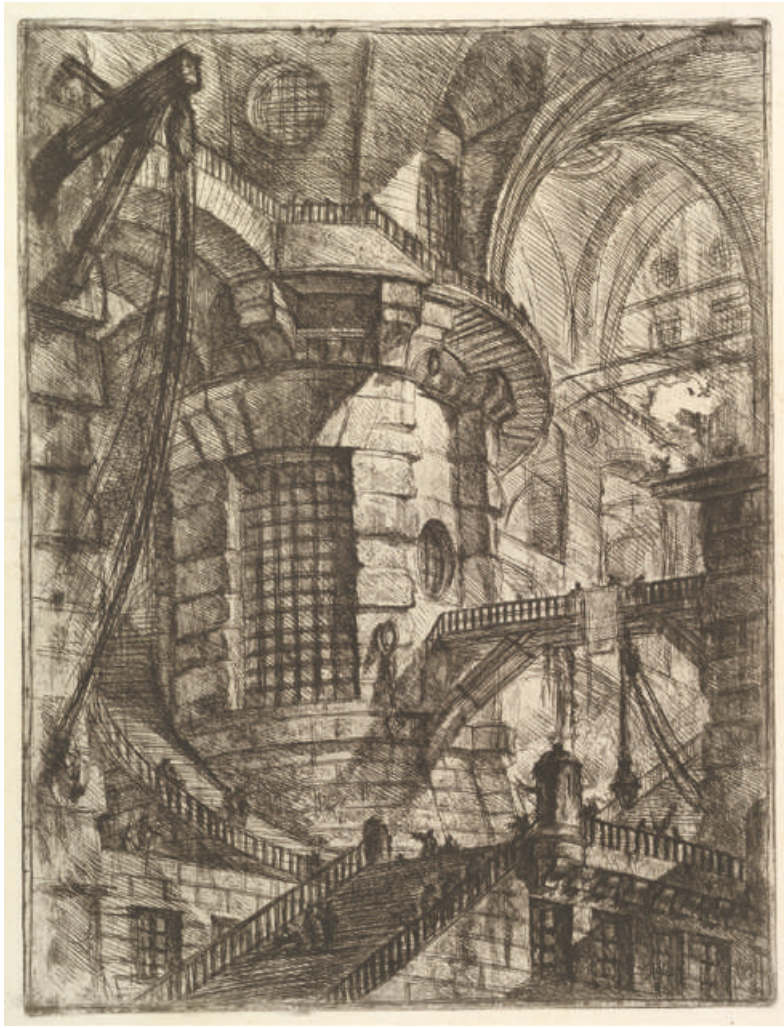


Fig. 16.7 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Round Tower*, from *'Carceri d'invenzione'*, ca. 1749–50.

© www.metmuseum.org. 37.45.3(27), Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937.

with *Vathek* are patent: like *Vathek*, who extends and redevelops the Palace that he inherits from his father, Beckford at Fonthill wished to expand, exceed and improve upon the scale and ostentation of his inherited Palladian pile. Like Beckford and *Vathek*, Walpole's work at Strawberry Hill had been driven by similar aims; its Gothic Revivalist architecture was to a large extent motivated by the desire to exceed paternal architectural example. Wyatt's proposal for the expanded Abbey, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1798, depicts Fonthill with a Salisbury Cathedral-like projection and spire towering over the expansive north and south

wings, a structure that quite literally reaches up to the heavens.⁴² A further extended proposal, this time with a 300-foot spire,⁴³ demonstrates the sheer insatiability of Beckford's architectural ambition, the ambition hinted at in his letter from 1790 and registered in Wyatt's reservations concerning his ability to satisfy it.⁴⁴ For Beckford, Vathek's folly in erecting such a tower, and his subsequent consignment to a lifetime of perpetual yearning in Eblis's hell-like depths, did not serve as sufficient warning about the dangers of over-reaching. Here too, it would seem, Beckford regarded his novel and his home as discrete, rather separate entities. Almost certainly, he could not emphasise the continuities between the two without heaping upon himself the damnation and suffering meted out to the Caliph at the narrative's end.

Nevertheless, misfortune did, indeed, strike Fonthill when, in May 1800, the crossing-tower collapsed. Undaunted, the ever-opportunistic Beckford seized upon the catastrophe as the occasion to create an even more ambitious residence: 'We shall rise again more glorious than ever', he wrote to Sir Isaac Heard on 21 May 1800, 'provided the sublime Wyatt will graciously design to bestow a little more commonplace attention upon what is supposed to be his favourite Structure'.⁴⁵ 'The Crash and the Loss', he insouciantly continued, 'sound magnificently in the Newspaper, I neither heard the one nor feel the other'.⁴⁶ In December of the same year, Beckford hosted the famous party for Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton, by all accounts a sumptuous and extravagant event that prompted reporters and commentators to compare Fonthill Abbey to the Caliph's splendid Palace of Alkoremi. To Beckford's dissatisfaction, however, the house remained incomplete one year later. Urged into action by the frustrated client, Wyatt is reported as wishing to assure Beckford that he would 'do all in his power to forward the work at the Abbey so as to make them ready by the spring', promising to be at Fonthill 'by the end of this Month [December 1802] to see how all goes on & to settle any things that may be wanted'.⁴⁷ Progress was eventually forthcoming, and Wyatt created a suite of extravagant Gothic parade rooms on Fonthill's *piano nobile*. Of these rooms, the most impressive were the Abbey's north and south arms, King Edward's Gallery (see [Chapter 4 Figure 4.19](#)) and St Michael's Gallery (see [Chapter 4 Figure 4.17](#)) respectively. Since the space was so vast that it could not be heated, Fonthill's western limb, the cavernous Great Hall in which Nelson and Lady Hamilton were entertained, was later converted into the state entrance.⁴⁸ That the Abbey's proportions and decorative wealth had ironically become, in effect, a realisation of the Caliph's Palace in *Vathek* did not escape the shrewd John Rutter in 1823: 'The lofty tower now distinguishes the centre of an immense line of other towers and curtains', he wrote, 'stretching to the north and south, plainly indicating how much we have yet to explore the interior'; 'As we pass the threshold, the height of the archways, and the dimensions of the doors, are felt with surprise'.⁴⁹ Fonthill, it was clear, was as vast and sublime a spectacle as that described in the pages of Beckford's romance, but it was the underlying work of Beckford's architectural imagination that drew the two together.

The parallels between these two different but related expressions of Beckford's creativity do not end here: the Abbey, as William North's observation of 1819 made clear, also demonstrated notable similarities with the Hall of Eblis in *Vathek*. Eblis's watch towers, the narrator notes, 'ranged before the ruins of an immense palace, whose walls were embossed with various figures';⁵⁰ as the moon dilates on 'a vast platform', so it reveals 'the shades of the lofty columns which reached from the terrace almost to the clouds'.⁵¹ Early designs for Fonthill mirrored and repeated this mass of attenuated, ever-receding towers: as Rutter observes, 'designs were ordered to be prepared for a grand range of towers, to run direct eastwards from the Lancaster Tower; another and another succeeded each, and were successively demolished, until finally they shrunk into the small, but internally beautiful adjuncts of the Sanctuary and Oratory'.⁵² More acutely, when *Vathek* descends into the subterranean Hall of Eblis, he is struck by the 'grandeur of the surrounding objects' that 'extended their view to those at a distance', discovering in the gloom 'rows of columns and arcades, which gradually diminished, till they terminated in a point radiant as the sun, when he darts his last beams athwart the ocean'.⁵³ Although Beckford's Abbey lacks the columnar architecture described here – its lengthy arms, St Michael's and King Edward's Galleries, are Gothic rather than Classical in design – the prospect from Fonthill's central crossing (or Octagon) along St Michael's Gallery nevertheless simulates the effect described in the novel, particularly given that the gallery terminated with a sun-like oriel window designed to admit more light. Some impression of this effect can be gauged in the plate in Rutter's *Delineations* that depicts the view from the south end of St Michael's Gallery towards the Crossing and King Edward's Gallery (Figure 16.8).

The party at Fonthill Splendens

By Beckford's own admission, and as scholars have long pointed out, the Hall of Eblis sections in *Vathek* were directly inspired by a Christmas and coming-of-age party that he hosted at Fonthill Splendens in late 1781. The manuscript sources of this information are worth returning to, revealing, as they do, not only what has often been taken to be the fiction's primary point of architectural origin, but also the extent to which Beckford framed this event, both at the time and later on in his life, as the acute realisation of that particular nexus of space, intimacy, transgressive desire and sensory pleasure that, as we have argued, comprise the foundational terms of his architectural imagination. Having turned 21 only the month before, Beckford in a letter of 19 November 1781 to Louisa Pitt-Rivers enthusiastically discussed the preparations that Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg had been making for the staging of 'a mysterious something' at Splendens, 'a mysterious something', the letter continues, that, in the artist's 'own unhallowed words', 'eye has not yet seen or hearts of man conceived'.⁵⁴ Looking back on the event in a subsequent letter to Louisa in March 1782, Beckford, while urging his



Fig. 16.8 W. Finley, *Interior of St Michael's Gallery [at Fonthill Abbey], Looking Across the Octagon into the King Edward's Gallery*. Plate 7 from John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

correspondent to take no heed of the malicious rumours that transpired in its wake, made nostalgic reference to 'our orientalisms last December at Fonthill', recalling fondly 'those more fortunate retired hours' that the two passed 'immured in the Turkish chamber – when joy thrilled in every vein and every glance we cast

on the vaulted ceiling [sic], glowing with saffron light, reminded us of the subterranean retreat of the princess of the Isle of Ebony in the tale of the 3 Calenders'.⁵⁵

In these letters of late 1781 and early 1782, then, we see a reiteration of the same fantasy that Beckford had expressed in 'The Transport of Pleasure' manuscript some four years earlier: the withdrawal of two illicitly connected individuals into a richly appointed architectural space, indulging there in the celebration of sensory and intellectual pleasure. Though not the queer romance of Beckford and Cozens his tutor, this retreat is equally transgressive and clandestine, for Louisa Pitt-Rivers was Beckford's senior by several years and the wife of his cousin, Sir Peter Beckford. The scandal surrounding the episode would subsequently play a role in ushering Beckford into a more respectable marriage with Lady Margaret Gordon in May 1783. Added to this scenario in the letters is Beckford's persistent fascination with impossible architectural forms, with structures that, as in *The Vision* and *Vathek*, have yet to be conceived and seen on earth: doors lead to passages, and passages to other passages, eventually combining into a fantastical architectural space that is impossible to fathom. As in 'The Transport of Pleasure', the scene, with its references to the Isle of Ebony and the three Calenders, is also couched in literary reference, a conflation of two separate stories from *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

When, on 9 December 1838 (approximately 57 years later), the aged Beckford added a lengthy manuscript note to these letters to Louisa, his memories assumed even greater fanciful proportions. 'Immured we were "au pied de la letter" [literally] for three days following', he recalls, 'doors & windows so strictly closed that neither common day light [sic] nor commonplace visitors could get in or even peep in.'⁵⁶ '[T]he solid Egyptian hall', the note continues, 'looked as if hewn out of a living rock, the line of apartments of apparently endless passages extending from it – on either side – were all vaulted – an interminable stair case [sic], which when you looked down it appeared as deep as the well in the pyramid – & when you looked up was lost in vapour, led to suites of stately apartments gleaming with marble pavements – as polished as glass.'⁵⁷ '[N]o wonder', Beckford writes, 'such scenery inspired the descriptions of the halls of Eblis – I composed *Vathek* immediately upon my return to town thoroughly embued [sic] with all that passed at Fonthill during this voluptuous festival.'⁵⁸

A celebration of youth, beauty and the delights of all the five senses in an impossible, Piranesi-like architectural space: there is nothing quantifiably different in Beckford's memories of the festivities of December 1781 from the fantasies that he had expressed in 'The Transport of Pleasure' and, indeed, in *Vathek*. While his depiction of the Hall of Eblis in the novel certainly attests to just how formative this party at Fonthill Splendens was, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that it was simply the actualisation of the constitutive terms of Beckford's deeper, more pervasive imaginative architectural 'complex'. If not, the letters of 1781–2 and the note of 1838 certainly framed it as such.

Beckford intimated as much in that revealing conversation that he had with Cyrus Redding upon the occasion of their first meeting at Lansdown Tower in 1835. 'Old Fonthill', Beckford noted, 'had a very ample, lofty, loud echoing

hall, one of the largest in the kingdom. Numerous doors led from it into different parts of the house, through dim, winding passages.⁷⁵⁹ While this certainly informed his writing of the closing sections of *Vathek*, the Hall of Eblis, he now claims, had been largely ‘generated’ by his own creative faculty, his imagination ‘magnifying’ and ‘colouring’ the Palladian spaces of the father’s home with the ‘Eastern character’ with which the son had long been enamoured. In Redding’s account, the Christmas party of 1781 is merely the catalyst to a much more generative process of imaginative engagement. Finally figured here as the ‘impulse’ of his ‘own mind’, *Vathek* is one manifestation of Beckford’s extraordinary architectural imagination, an expression of the same creative energy with which he approached the design and construction of Fonthill Abbey, the same singular and vital principle that drove and informed Beckford’s life and work from the earliest to the latest of days.

Fonthill and its *Maecenae*

Works of art lost and found

Martin P. Levy

Of all the collections associated with buildings on the Fonthill estate in Wiltshire, it is the one created by William Beckford at James Wyatt's Fonthill Abbey¹ that, for its range and originality, remains the most famous. However, before him, Beckford's father, Alderman Beckford, had furnished his new Fonthill House – often referred to as Fonthill 'Splendens' – in great style.² Later, James Morrison and his son Alfred were to lavish huge attention on the surviving Pavilion of 'Splendens', between 1832 and Alfred's death; it was demolished in 1921.

Sources for the Fonthill collections

The Beckford collections, particularly William's, have long attracted scholarly attention, culminating in the exhibition *William Beckford: An Eye for the Magnificent* (2001–2).³ Studies of the Morrisons' collections, by contrast, remain in their relative infancy. Recently however, in *A Genius for Money: Business, Art and the Morrisons* (2011),⁴ Caroline Dakers has drawn into focus the major collection of paintings and other works of art formed by James Morrison, while also adding a significant chapter on the exceptional and hitherto underappreciated collecting and patronage of his son Alfred.⁵

Although the works of art commissioned or bought for the various properties at Fonthill have been widely dispersed, sufficient documentary evidence survives to identify elements of these accumulations where they have now settled, and also to allow rediscovery when they surface on the art market. For recognising works from William Beckford's collections, key sources include John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (1823), and Edmund English and Willes Maddox, *Views of Lansdown Tower* (1844). Also essential for any investigation are such auction catalogues as Christie's, *Magnificent Effects of Fonthill Abbey* (1822, a sale that was cancelled); Phillips, *The Unique and Splendid Effects...*, 1823; and English and Fasana,

Catalogue of the Splendid Furniture, Cabinets, Paintings...the Property of the late William Beckford, Esquire (1845). Beckford's daughter Susan Euphemia, Duchess of Hamilton, inherited the collections from her father, and there is considerable evidence about the movement of works from Bath to Hamilton Palace and to other Hamilton properties in London and elsewhere in England that can be found in the Hamilton Archive.⁶ Many of these Beckford pieces can be identified in Christie's catalogue of the Hamilton Palace sale in 1882, and the subsequent post-sale publication *Hamilton Palace Collection Illustrated Priced Catalogue*, also of 1882. A comprehensive bibliography of the massive contemporary and later literature documenting Beckford's collections is given in the 2001–2 exhibition catalogue.⁷

Beyond archival and later printed and photographic sources, there are often physical identifying clues offered by decoration incorporating elements of Beckford's armorial bearings (Figure 17.1), which he frequently incorporated into work he commissioned, for example the Cinquefoil and the Latimer Cross.

For the Morrises, the extensive Fonthill Estate Archives (private collection) are only now beginning to throw up their riches. And while Alfred Morrison



Fig. 17.1 Candlestick (detail), gilt bronze, English, ca. 1800. The manufacture attributed to Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy (1780–1845).

Courtesy of Christie's, image © Author.

is mentioned in some nineteenth-century commentary, for example in connection with the enamel artist Charles Lepec in *The Art Journal*, 1867, the study of his patronage remains at an early stage.⁸

Certain re-discoveries and rescues over the recent decades are the subject of this brief survey.⁹ While the emergence of missing works of art tends to create, *per se*, a *frisson* of excitement, recovered works from the Beckford and Morrison collections are in fact highly significant bricks in reconstructing, and thus giving greater substance to, the collecting habits of extremely wealthy and committed patrons.

Beckford-provenance furniture and works of art

The John Crang organ (Figure 17.2) was built in the 1760s for Alderman Beckford's newly completed Palladian mansion. It was provided with a superb Rococo-decorated case, which appears to be the work of a significant, but so far unidentified, London cabinet-maker. The younger Beckford sold the organ in 1801; in 1817 it was presented to Towcester Parish Council, and installed in the church; in 1980, having been damaged by fire, it was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum¹⁰ and restored, but is now back in storage, so once again lost from view.

During the course of painstaking research undertaken for the 2001–2 exhibition, hitherto unpublished furniture for Fonthill 'Splendens' emerged. Notable, and commissioned by the younger Beckford, is a pair of late eighteenth-century gilt-bronze-mounted white marble side tables, supporting red Egyptian granite tops. These tables, perhaps supplied by Benjamin Vulliamy (1747–1811), represent a surprising and chaste essay in late eighteenth-century Neo-classicism, just at the moment Beckford was about to embark on the Gothic splendours of the Abbey.¹¹

Despite all that is known of William Beckford's collections, for example at Brodick Castle, Arran (previously a seat of the Dukes of Hamilton, now National Trust for Scotland), Charlecote Park, Warwick (formerly the seat of the Lucy family, now National Trust), and museums around the world, much remains lost, for example eight of the ten distinctive ebony cabinets on stands that once furnished the St Michael's Gallery at Fonthill Abbey.¹² Nonetheless, major discoveries have been made.

Sometimes Beckford-provenance articles have been hidden in plain sight. One such is the ravishing ormolu-mounted ebony cabinet with *pietre dure* plaques (Figure 17.3) supplied by Robert Hume Senior to Beckford around 1815–20; the plaques were supplied by Beckford's friend and agent Gregorio Franchi. It was lot 1347 at the Fonthill Abbey sale of September and October 1823, bought by Robert Hume Junior, acting for Robert, 2nd Earl Grosvenor.¹³ It remained at Eaton Hall until 2012.

William Beckford is famous for the richness of the works of art he commissioned, and for his active role in their creation. He would sometimes embellish, for example eighteenth-century French or Chinese ceramics with elaborate silver-gilt mounts, and he also had a passion for mounted hard stones. In 1989 one such piece emerged from obscurity at a London auction.¹⁴



Fig. 17.2 Organ by John Crang, English, ca. 1760–5. Seen here at Towcester Parish Church, prior to its donation to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1980, and subsequent restoration.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The lapis lazuli cup and cover with silver-gilt mounts (Figure 17.4) had apparently languished in Australia for the previous 40 years at least, where it was considered to have been a Victorian copy or imitation of a Renaissance original. Having arrived with the owner's valuation of £1,500, it was in short time identified



Fig. 17.3 Cabinet by Robert Hume Senior, ca. 1810–5. Ebony with Italian *pietre dure* plaques, marble top, silk-lined interior and gilt bronze mounts, English.

Courtesy of Christie's, image © Author.

by the late Charles Truman (then of Christie's) as the 'Oval-shaped Fluted Cup and Cover, of lapis lazuli, on stem and foot of the same, mounted with silver-gilt, with bird's-head and serpent handles, finely chased with fruits' illustrated in the catalogue of the Christie's 'Hamilton Palace Sale' on 26 June 1882, as lot 2028, when it fetched £783.10s.0d. Prior to its arrival at Hamilton Palace, this luxurious work of art was recorded in 1844 in the drawing room at Lansdown Tower. Although this work had suffered losses, notably the elaborate finial (by then replaced, but now restored), it was acquired for the considerable sum of £143,000 by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The mounts of the cup and cover, marked for John Harris and dated 1826–7, incorporate elements of the Beckford family armorials, including elegant herons and snakes forming the handles. Gregorio Franchi may well have been responsible for sourcing the lapis lazuli, before 1819.¹⁵ As the museum's then director, the late Michael Jaffé, noted at the time, the Beckford cup and cover was joining 'the Fitzwilliam's small but choice collection of rare mounted pieces ... and the Limoges enamel triptych initialled by Pierre Reymond, a masterpiece in Beckford's Raphaelite taste ...', formerly at Fonthill Abbey.

Recent discoveries

More recently, one of Jaffé's successors as Director, Simon Jervis, added (as his first acquisition) another covered cup with a Fonthill connection, but this time one commissioned by Alfred Morrison (Figure 17.5). Morrison lent this enamel



Fig. 17.4 Cup and cover, 1826/7. Lapis lazuli and silver gilt, marks for John Harris, English.

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

on copper and gold object, dated 1866 (with many other works), for Lepec's celebrated display at the Paris *Exposition Universelle*, 1867. Following Morrison's death, it was sold at Christie's by his widow Mabel. On 25 January 1899, lot 390 was a 'Tazza and Cover, of enamelled and gilt metal, decorated with emblematic figures, arabesque foliage and other ornament, a figure of cupid on the lid ...'. A buyer named Marcus acquired this, and several other lots by Lepec. Having disappeared from view, the Fitzwilliam covered cup (together with other Marcus purchases) re-emerged, unidentified, in 1994.¹⁶ Charles Lepec is now recognised as arguably 'the most original and outstanding enamel artist of the nineteenth century'.¹⁷ And his most significant patron, by a considerable margin, was Alfred Morrison.¹⁸

But returning to William Beckford, perhaps one of the most magnificent furniture discoveries during the research for the 2001 exhibition was the English gilt-bronze and Egyptian marble-topped centre table (Figure 17.6), in a private collection.¹⁹ Keen furniture historians can also spot the table in an interior featured in Robert Altman's film *Gosford Park* (2001). The table is clearly shown in the 'grand



Fig. 17.5 Covered cup, enamel on gold, by Charles Lepec (1830–90), French, 1866.

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, image © Author.

drawing room’ at Fonthill Abbey in John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill* (1823), pl. 5. The Fonthill table, the designer and maker of which remain unknown, was lot 1140 when sold by Phillips in 1823: ‘A SPLENDID SALOON TABLE, formed of a circular slab of the very rare BRECHE UNIVERSELLE, of extraordinary size, the diameter being 4ft, 8 on a *grand and massive* STANDARD, formed of THREE BRONZE DOLPHINS ... extraordinary SLAB was bought from Egypt by Emperor Buonaparte, and presented to Empress Josephine, and was purchased at the sale at Malmaison, in 1816.’ The history of the top would doubtless have appealed to Beckford, as it would have done to Philip John Miles of Leigh Court, Bristol, who acquired the table in 1823.

Around the walls of the ‘grand drawing room’, surrounding the table, were part of a distinctive set of early nineteenth-century Roman gilded seat furniture (Figure 17.7) that once belonged to Cardinal Fesch (1763–1839), supplied for the Palazzo Buffalo-Ferraioli, Rome, and then sold at the Fesch Sale, 1816.²⁰ The design is attributed to Lorenzo Santi (1783–1839) and Dionisio Santi (born 1785/6). The chair shown here forms part of that suite, although it cannot be said for certain that the entire set subsequently passed to Beckford. Some of the Fesch chairs have a rounded pediment, whereas the present example has the distinctive triangular pediment seen in Rutter’s engraving. The chair (now in a private collection) was at one stage with a London dealer called S. & H. Jewell (established 1830), and then lost from view until appearing, unidentified, at a West Country



Fig. 17.6 Table, gilt bronze and African marble, English, ca. 1816.

Private collection, permission courtesy Christie's, image © Author.

auction in 2012.²¹ The grandeur of the design represents a strand of Beckford's taste that included French furniture from the *ancien régime*, old master paintings and Asian lacquer.

A group of objects that typify Beckford's taste during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century are the 1780s Sèvres porcelain brown and white Asian-inspired pieces, of a type known at the time as 'des Indes'; these Beckford had transformed with silver-gilt mounts. There is a teapot and cover at Brodick Castle,²² and the example shown here (Figure 17.8), with mounts marked for James Aldridge, 1827/8. Bet McLeod has identified the present cup and saucer, together with the coffee pot, in the 1844 inventory compiled by English & Son of Bath and Robert Hume of London following Beckford's death: 'A Brown & White Coffee pot. Tea cup and saucer – lined – very rich.'²³ The cup and saucer were later recorded in the inventory taken at Hamilton Palace.²⁴ In the Hamilton Palace sale, the present cup and saucer were described as 'A SMALL CUP AND SAUCER, chocolate ground, with flowers in relief, mounted with silver gilt'; they were bought by 'E. Joseph' for 18 guineas. Having not been recognised since the 1882 sale, this exquisite 'Beckford' object languished in the vaults of an American museum and was later de-accessioned, only to be spotted by an eagle-eyed London silver dealer, who sold it to a private collector. It was acquired in 2010 by the Art Institute of Chicago.



Fig. 17.7 Armchair, Italian, ca. 1800–10. Gilt wood (the upholstery of later date), the design attributed to Lorenzo Santi (1783–1839) and Dionisio Santi (born 1785/6).

Private collection, image © Author.

The interiors of Lansdown Crescent, Bath, where Beckford moved after quitting Fonthill Abbey, and then Lansdown Tower, situated overlooking Bath, both contained works he had brought with him from the Abbey, and in addition some distinctive furniture, much of it assumed to have been designed by Beckford himself, working with his architect Henry Goodridge (1797–1864). Most of this furniture was designed for specific positions in these two locations, and while it was never actually on the Fonthill Estate, it was made to display objects that had been. Moreover, it shows Beckford in advance of contemporary fashion, commissioning robust Italianate furnishings that anticipate, by several decades, design from the later nineteenth century. For these reasons, two recently discovered examples of ‘Bath period’ furniture are included, and also because, in addition, they have a link to the Morrison family.

In the late summer of 1996 a coffer (Figure 17.9) appeared in a sale of nineteenth-century furniture at Bonham’s (Knightsbridge). The distinctive design and remarkable quality of manufacture in this oak and gilt-bronze-mounted coffer, dating from 1831–41 and probably manufactured by the London cabinet-maker Robert Hume Junior, aroused no curiosity. It passed unnoticed (except by its buyer), despite the telltale cinquefoils on the top. Later in an English private



Fig. 17.8 Cup and saucer, porcelain with silver gilt. The porcelain French (Sèvres), ca. 1780, the silver gilt English, with marks for James Aldridge, 1827/8. Art Institute of Chicago, image © Author.



Fig. 17.9 Coffe, oak with gilt bronze embellishments and silk-lined interior. The design attributed to H. E. Goodridge (1797–1864) and William Beckford (1760–1844), probably manufactured by Robert Hume Junior, English, ca. 1831–41.

Victoria and Albert Museum, image © Author.

collection, the coffer came back onto the market in 2004, and is now in the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁵

In 2010, equally unappreciated, an identical coffer, this time complete with its stand, passed through an unidentified auction in Loughton, Essex, before surfacing

to more acclaim at Sworders, Bishop's Stortford, on 22 September 2010, lot 1657. Once fully understood, the coffer and stand were considered of such significance that it was subject to a temporary export stop by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art, and subsequently acquired for permanent display at Lansdown Tower, now in the care of the Bath Preservation Trust.²⁶

There were originally four of these cabinets, complete with stands, two at either end of the scarlet drawing room of Lansdown Tower. Between one pair, in a bay window, stood a pedestal (see [Figure 17.10](#) below). The provenance of these coffers on stands is complicated, beyond the fact they were all certainly once at Lansdown Tower, where two were illustrated in Edmund English and Willes Maddox (illustrations), *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*, London, 1844, pl. 4. They appear to have been offered twice at auction, first at English & Fasana, Bath, ... *Splendid Furniture from Lansdown Tower*, 4–5 May 1841, lot 25 or 26, possibly unsold or repurchased by Beckford, or acquired by James Morrison. Next they seem to have been included in English & Fasana, Bath, *Catalogue of the Splendid Furniture ... the Property of the Late William Beckford...*, 20–29 November 1845, day 8, lot 520 or 521, and later part of the group may have belonged to Susan, Duchess of Hamilton, at Easton Park, Suffolk, 1852.

As is evident from the suggested provenance (above), there remains confusion as to precisely when this coffer-on-stand left Beckford's possession and which of the four that he originally commissioned is shown here. It has only relatively



Fig. 17.10 Willes Maddox, *Scarlet Drawing Room*. From *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*. Bath: E. English, and London: T. McLean, 1844, plate 4.

16081, RIBA Collections.

recently come to light that James Morrison, Alfred's father, owned two of the cofers (eventually at Basildon Park, Berkshire), although the documentation seems to conflict with the apparent 1841 and 1845 auction sale evidence.²⁷

The tripod that stood between two of the cabinets-on-stands shown in the Willes Maddox view of the Scarlet Drawing Room at Lansdown Tower,²⁸ also probably manufactured by the London cabinet-maker Robert Hume Junior, has recently been identified in a European private collection, having passed unidentified through a Christie's South Kensington auction in the 1970s. It corresponds precisely with the one described at the 1845 Lansdown Tower sale as '[a] very beautiful Oak Tripod, enriched with bold water gilt mouldings. The top is formed of a circular solid slab of rare Lumachello marble, from the Himalaya mountains, 19 inches in diameter. In the plinth is another slab of the same costly marble.'²⁹ The silver-mounted Chinese vase originally on top of the tripod has been identified by Bet McLeod,³⁰ who has also noted that the tripod pedestal is visible in a photograph, probably dating around 1872–3, of the Beckford Library in Hamilton Palace, suggesting that it was part of the consignment of objects sent from Bath to Hamilton Palace between 1844 and 1850. Beckford



Fig. 17.11 Bookcase, ebony and ivory, English, ca. 1865. Designed by Owen Jones (1809–74) and manufactured by Jackson & Graham (1836–85).

Courtesy of Christie's, image © Author.

probably owned more than one pedestal of this form, and a second (with a *lapis Lacaemonius* top and probably *alabastro Fiorito* below)³¹ is the one formerly in the collection of the architect and pioneer collector of Regency furniture, Professor Albert Richardson (1880–1964), who acquired his in April 1939 from Frederick Jones, Bedford; this is now in the collection of the Bath Preservation Trust at Lansdown Tower.

Alfred Morrison's collections

The furniture and works of art commissioned and collected by Alfred Morrison for Fonthill (as well as for his London house at 16 Carlton House Terrace), while generally less well known, are nonetheless being increasingly recognised as outstanding achievements by manufacturers active across Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. As more documentation and surviving work comes to light, the desirability of a comprehensive exhibition seems overwhelming.

One of the grandest interiors at Fonthill, designed by Owen Jones and manufactured by Jackson & Graham, was the room 'in Cinquecento style'³² lined with ebony and ivory cabinets (as well as panelling and a chimney) to display Morrison's



Fig. 17.12 *Amazon*, enamel on copper (?), in original ebonised frame with velvet and silver gilt mount, by Charles Lepec (1830–90), French, 1864.

Victoria and Albert Museum, image © Author.

Chinese porcelains acquired from the looted Summer Palace in Peking (Beijing). The fireplace was sold at Sotheby's (London), 17 February 1984, lot 95, while other examples appeared more randomly. The grandest element, a curved cabinet created for an apse (Figure 17.11), first appeared (described as Italian) with a dealer in London's Westbourne Grove in the 1980s; it was soon thereafter included in an exhibition at the Fine Art Society.³³

Most recently two more works by Charles Lepec, acquired by Morrison and later exhibited at the Paris *Exposition Universelle*, 1867, emerged from obscurity: *Atalanta* and *Amazon* (Figure 17.12).³⁴ These had been acquired in 1899 by the Manchester-born watchmaker and later collector Evan Roberts (1836–1918), and then passed by descent; they are now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Of the residents who once graced the Fonthill estate, William Beckford and Alfred Morrison stand out. As works they commissioned and collected continue to resurface, greater light is shed on two voracious patrons, both possessed of exceptional determination and taste. In both cases, these sons of wealthy collectors were responsible for accumulations on a scale and of types that place them at the pinnacle of those whose activities made a lasting impact on contemporary and later taste.

18

Little Ridge

Michael Drury

In March 1902 Hugh Morrison visited his architect, Detmar Blow, to settle matters relating to a new house on the Fonthill estate. Little correspondence survives but curiously the written estimate for £3,507.15s was headed 'Berwick St Leonard Manor House'.¹ Stranger still, further examination shows that costs included the careful dismantling of this seventeenth-century ruin. Fortunately Hugh's diaries plot the sequence of events,² and all is explained when it becomes clear that his new house was not going to be a new house at all but the rebuilding of an old one on a new site (for additional contextual material see [Chapter 7](#)).

The plan was to take down the old manor house ([Figure 18.1](#)) and rebuild it four miles away, below the ridge to the east of the lake, as shown in Blow's topographical sketch ([Figure 18.2](#)).



Fig. 18.1 *The Old Manor House, Berwick St Leonard*, from Sir Richard Colt Hoare's *Wiltshire*, published 1829.

Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society at Wiltshire Museum, Devizes.



Fig. 18.2 Sketch by Detmar Blow showing the proposed site for the re-erected manor house at Little Ridge.

From the Wyndham Papers at Petworth House, by kind permission of Francis Wyndham and the Earl of Egremont.

A draft of a letter from Morrison to his local land agent, written on the back of Blow's estimate, mentions the use of 'traction power', i.e. steam-driven traction engines, to move the salvaged materials, expressing concern that it might damage the roads. It goes on to say that the building work was

to be executed by estate men, the present staff to be augmented as necessary ... Blow proposes to get a clerk of works and also to have his own man down here for some time, he is going to try and get Frank Green but if he is engaged he will look for somebody else.³

Detmar Blow: architect of Little Ridge

Blow was an unusual architect and he worked in unusual ways, shunning the conventional use of contractors. His mentor William Morris had taken to architecture after reading Ruskin as an undergraduate, but turned to other things because, as his friend the architect Philip Webb said, 'He found he could not get into close contact with it; it had to be done at second hand.'⁴ Detmar Blow eventually succeeded where Morris had failed, training first as an architect and then under Webb's guidance as a stonemason, working with his own hands in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Frank Green was a mason too, but not an architect, and over the 10-year period prior to the Fonthill project he had worked alongside Blow, recently providing the craft skills on site that Blow was no longer able to offer personally as he tried to expand his practice.

Detmar Blow may have recently forsaken his lifestyle as an itinerant architect/mason for a more conventional office base, but had Morrison called on Blow that March unannounced he might still have been surprised by Blow's working arrangements. His office address at 9 King's Bench Walk in London's Inner Temple seemed a highly respectable one, but behind its outward appearances it was as unconventional as its tenant. Blow lived there with his mother and his brother Sydney, who described the arrangement thus:

My mother, when she realised there was no chance of my throwing up the theatre and going back to grow flowers with her in West Sussex, had come to live with us there ... We provided her with the one bedroom that the chambers boasted, and Detmar and I re-organised the large living room. Two deep recessed bookcases that stood each side of the fireplace were dismantled, and in their place two patent beds were erected that shut up in the daytime flat against the wall and hidden by beautiful William Morris curtains. Not even the nosiest of parkers would have guessed that beds were produced from behind those curtains every night.⁵

Where Blow got any architectural work done is not clear, but he still found 'respectable offices with framed perspectives on the walls and clerks slaving in the background'⁶ uncondusive, as did his old friend W. R. Lethaby, who condemned them in those terms. Blow's father had died in 1898 and King's Bench Walk was his son's attempt at respectability, with an eye to turning his career in a more profitable direction while accommodating his younger brother and his widowed mother and keeping the family afloat.

Certainly respectable offices had not featured in Detmar Blow's career previously. After early European travels with John Ruskin, he had fallen in with William Morris and his circle through the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and, dressed in a waggoner's smock, had driven the great man's coffin to the churchyard in Kelmscot on a yellow farm cart decorated with willow boughs.⁷ Adopting an itinerant career to work with his own hands, his wanderings had taken him to Wiltshire even before he came to Fonthill, first to East Knoyle in 1892, where he had repaired the church tower as resident architect for Philip Webb, and then in 1897 to Lake House, on the Avon north of Salisbury, where he had rescued an Elizabethan manor house with striking similarities to Berwick St Leonard.

Blow's introduction to the Morrison family could have come as a result of his work at Lake House, or perhaps via East Knoyle: Webb's client there, the Hon. Percy Wyndham, was well known to Hugh's parents, his mother inaugurating the South Kensington School of Art Needlework with Mrs Percy Wyndham.⁸ Blow stayed in Knoyle for some time while working at the church and was a frequent visitor to Clouds, the house Webb designed for the Wyndhams nearby. In fact, though, it is more likely that the connection between Morrison and Blow was made through another Wiltshire client, the Antrobus family at Amesbury. Blow had worked there

more recently; indeed he was already involved in projects for Lord Antrobus at Amesbury Abbey when, on the last day of the nineteenth century, an event occurred that was to bring him more widespread recognition.

On 31 December 1900 two stones forming part of a trilithon in the outer ring at Stonehenge fell during a storm. Antrobus owned the monument and entrusted Blow, now something of an acknowledged expert in the repair of ancient buildings, with the remedial work. But a national debate ensued concerning their re-erection, growing to encompass the whole question of the future of the monument and the stability of the remaining stones.⁹ In the end those that had fallen were not re-erected until 1958, though Blow did straighten the tallest of the remaining standing stones. Lady Antrobus sent her friend Mabel Morrison a photograph album illustrating the work in progress. Detmar Blow featured, in conjunction with members of the Antrobus family (Figure 18.3), and it is unlikely to be entirely



Fig. 18.3 Detmar Blow at Stonehenge in about 1901 with his client Sir Edmund Antrobus standing behind. The child astride the fallen stone is his client's son, also Edmund, killed at Ypres in 1914. William Gowland, the archaeologist, is on the left. From an album given to Mabel Morrison by Lady Antrobus, Fonthill Estate Archives.

coincidental that Mabel's son Hugh first consulted Blow about his new house soon after the work at Stonehenge was complete.

As explained by Caroline Dakers in [Chapter 7](#), Hugh Morrison's building projects benefited from the wealth generated by previous generations. Hugh had married in 1892 and was a wealthy man following his father's death in 1897, but he needed a new home because his widowed mother was bequeathed Fonthill House and the surrounding parkland for the rest of her life. To find a site, Hugh had to negotiate with his uncle and his brother; in 1902 he agreed a land exchange to enable the construction of Little Ridge, as the re-built Berwick St Leonard manor house was to be known, the site being outside that part of the estate that came under his direct control. The earliest payments on Hugh's 'New House Account' were made in 1902 and included three weeks' wages for Basil Stallybrass, the clerk of works, amounting to £6.15s.0d.

Blow's Little Ridge team

If Blow was no ordinary architect, then Stallybrass was no ordinary clerk of works either. An architect in his own right, he joined Blow in 1899 and, like Blow, became a craftsman too. Involved in several of Blow's earlier projects, he acted as his 'man on the spot' at Stonehenge, learning archaeological techniques that came to the fore when the drainage was dug at Fonthill in November 1903. Stallybrass recorded a meticulous archaeological excavation, identifying Romano-British remains.¹⁰ A 1991 publication suggests that although the standards of excavation and fieldwork set in the nineteenth century by the pre-eminent archaeologist Lt. General Pitt Rivers were not achieved by others for at least 30 years after his death in 1900, an exception is found in the work Stallybrass did at Fonthill.¹¹

In Frank Green's absence, James Neale may also have joined Blow's team on site. Like Green, Neale was a local mason: both men had worked with Blow at East Knoyle, and it is likely that Neale worked for the Wyndhams at Clouds, as well. Neale was another regular member of Blow's itinerant band in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in charge on site when Blow was away at Lake House and performing a similar role during the difficult repair and rescue of another church tower at Clare in Suffolk. Although it does not specifically state that he worked at Fonthill – and Hugh Morrison's diaries do not mention him – a description of Little Ridge in *Country Life* waxes lyrical about these local tradesmen:

Each a giant at his trade and often in stature, they hate to leave their old homes and so they farm a few acres when building is not plentiful. When a very noble church tower was repaired close by, the mason was not addressed



Fig. 18.4 Little Ridge under construction: the old Berwick St Leonard Manor House being rebuilt on its new site.

Fonthill Estate Archives.

by his name, Jim or Neale but as Farmer Jim and once I heard this friendly warning coming down the tower, ‘Jim, thee must tap the rick, there be snow-storm coming.’¹²

Blow and his team were aided by the Fonthill Estate workforce and together they carefully recorded and dismantled the old manor house at Berwick St Leonard and transported it for re-erection. On a sloping site, levels were built up at the front to form a formal raised garden, contained within a stupendous rampart as shown in Blow’s early sketch. Sadly all that remains of the original Little Ridge today is this great bastioned garden, upon which is now perched its diminutive successor, the present Fonthill House, designed by one of Blow’s pupils, Trenwith Wills (see [Chapter 8](#), particularly [Figures 8.1](#) and [8.6](#)).

According to Stallybrass, the carefully numbered stones from Berwick St Leonard were packed in straw and transported (by steam traction) to the new site ([Figure 18.4](#)):¹³

The most accurate measured drawings were first taken of the irregularity of the old mason’s work in order that this might be retained. Then each stone was taken down, labelled, penned in hurdles, removed to the new site and set up again in complete harmony with its former position and appearance...¹⁴

The building of Little Ridge

With nothing to be seen of Blow's original house today, the *Country Life* description is all the more valuable and remains the best record of Little Ridge. It applauds Blow's hands-on approach and elaborates upon the benefits that could be obtained only by a direct relationship between the architect and the building process:

Mr Blow [felt] secure that the fragmentary skeleton of the Berwick St Leonard manor house could be re-vivified and re-clothed as a modern house on a modern site and yet not lose its ancient savour. What it should be like his well-practised mind's eye could see. But that is not all that is necessary. How often a client, thoroughly pleased with his architect's inviting plans and charming drawings, is yet much disappointed in the ultimate result! Somehow all the charm seems gone; there is something harsh, awkward and repellent that has been introduced, although, seemingly, the plan has been carried out. And this may not be the architect's fault beyond his falling in with the client's demand that the 'job' should be 'contracted' for and the lowest tender accepted without due inquiry made or even a passing thought given as to whether the builder and his men either have or are capable of acquiring any understanding of what the architect has in mind. Thus tone and texture are missed; form is very slightly but quite disastrously warped; there will be something in the laying of the stones and in the working of the timber that falsifies the whole original conception ... Assuredly an architect must realise that his work will be a failure if there is not some measure of mutual understanding and some sympathy of aim between him and those who execute his designs. No-one knows better than Mr Blow the difficulty of wedding the airy spirit of three centuries ago to the sturdy need of today, and no-one has learnt how to overcome it more successfully.

At Little Ridge he [Blow] realised what he wanted was at hand. He had only to seek and find. Masons, carpenters,¹⁵ plasterers, some already knowledgeable, all quite receptive, were collected, and the old-new house took shape excellently well ... No form of decoration was more popular in Wiltshire three hundred years ago than plasterwork, and therefore this was largely resorted to at Little Ridge. Not, however, in the form of exact reproduction of old examples, but in new designs founded on precedent [Figure 18.5]. Mr Stallybrass, who also acted as clerk of the works to Mr Blow, was the chief craftsman and modeller¹⁶ ... The birds and animals seen in several [of the schemes] recall the delightful manner of mediaeval beasts. Ceilings of varied and original design are to be found in most of the principal rooms ... recalling many an example dating from Elizabethan days.¹⁷



Fig. 18.5 The dining room at Little Ridge in 1912: the plasterwork is attributed to Basil Stallybrass.

© Country Life

Basil Stallybrass was on site by the end of summer 1902.¹⁸ Referred to in relation to the drainage in November 1903, he must have been there on a regular basis in 1904 too, undertaking the plasterwork during the final stages of construction. The local geology did not escape his attention either, Stallybrass noting that a bed of local stone suitable for roofing tiles had still been worked in the recent past.¹⁹ Hugh Morrison's diaries suggest that he was less interested in such things himself. He does not waste words and there is hardly an adjective to be found on their pages, although one appears in an early entry relating to his wife and their architect: 'Mary thought him charming.'²⁰ Nonetheless, the entries do at least give a chronology to what was to become his never-ending building programme. Though the house was practically complete by the end of 1904, the Morrisons did not actually move in to Little Ridge until May 1905 and by the time the *Country Life* article was written in 1912, the rebuilt Berwick St Leonard manor house had already been extended with the addition of a nursery wing to the east (Figure 18.6).

Hugh and Mary had long wanted children but having them had not been easy. It is sad but perhaps not surprising that a search through Mary's letters reveals so little about the building of her house and so much about their tragic



Fig. 18.6 Little Ridge from the south-east. The nursery wing, added in 1907, is on the right, connected to the original house by the great Dining Room window.

© Country Life

and often painful quest for a solution to fertility problems.²¹ Her eventual pregnancy must have been hugely gratifying, for Hugh as well as Mary; quite apart from their own emotional relief, it resolved the inheritance problem described by Caroline Dakers in [Chapter 7](#). But after so long trying, the pregnancy must have come as something of a surprise, and as a consequence the new wing was built fast. Blow was again their chosen architect and the new nursery and kitchens were already under discussion in November 1906, just before their son John was born in December. An initial sketch, in Blow's hand ([Figure 18.7](#)), was titled the 'John Wing'.²²



Fig. 18.7 ‘The John Wing’, as proposed, from the east, in a sketch by Detmar Blow.

RIBA drawings collection.

Little Ridge becomes the new Fonthill House

The finishing touches were added to this addition in 1908 but Hugh was not content with his extended house for long. His uncle Charles and his aunt Ellen both died in 1909, leaving even more money, and as Hugh’s fortune increased so did his building ambitions. The nursery extension had necessitated alterations to the hall and dining room, and a new library was created within the existing shell of the old house in 1908. Soon after came a new laundry and alterations to the stables – but this was all small change, as seen from Hugh’s new position of enormous wealth. In 1909 Blow started to plan a major addition to his house on Morrison’s Scottish estate in Islay and then, in 1910, a new London town house in Halkin Street was first discussed, eventually completed in 1913. Blow had entered into partnership with Fernand Billerey in 1906 and, although Blow himself still appears from time to time in Hugh’s diary entries, many of the meetings concerning Islay and Halkin Street were with Billerey, who was no doubt responsible for most of the detailed work if not much of the overall design too.

Though hugely expensive, this work was nothing compared to Hugh's next great building project (Figure 18.8). In 1911 his mother had bought Shawford Park in Hampshire and, with the prospect of her moving out of the old Fonthill House, Hugh decided on an enormous scheme of enlargement at Little Ridge to make it the dominant house on the estate. But Fonthill House still stood, enabling him to move back to the house Mabel was vacating for the duration of the building works, intending to demolish it once his grand new home was complete. This time Morrison and Blow used Trollope and Colls., a conventional contractor, and a new road was constructed from the house down to the lake. A new bridge connected Little Ridge with the old Fonthill House and Mary moved their furniture back across to it, but their residence there proved a longer one than either she or her husband might have imagined.

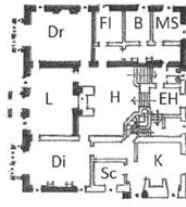
Drawings are dated 1913 and work appears to have commenced that September, but the war soon brought it to a virtual standstill. Nonetheless, although building slowed, it may never have stopped completely. Hugh records a meeting with Blow in March 1915 'and settled future work at Little Ridge', but the Morrisons, living in the old Fonthill House, had to divert Trollope's attention to remedial work following a fire there soon after. With the house only partly damaged the Morrisons did not move out, and the old house survived until 1921 when it was eventually pulled down, Little Ridge taking its name. Completed at last, the grandiose new mansion that Little Ridge had become was eventually reoccupied on 6 October 1920, when Hugh records '[w]e returned to Little Ridge for first time since 1913' (Figure 18.9).

The demise of the new Fonthill House

The house was an anachronism almost before it was finished in the changed circumstances that followed the cessation of hostilities. A 50-metre corridor ran between the kitchens at one end and the long gallery at the other; the drawing room was 12 metres (40 feet) long. Morrison's financial resources might have provided the domestic staff required for such a plan 10 years earlier but there was less desire for such grandeur in the changed society of the 1920s. Inheriting the name was an ill omen. The new Fonthill House, planned in those final optimistic years before the Great War, was destined to suffer the same fate as the previous Fonthill House, and only 50 years later. The huge extensions, becoming unsustainable before Hugh Morrison died in 1931, seemed even more impossible to his son; by the 1960s John (by then Lord Margadale) and his wife were already considering a more manageable house to stand on the same site. In June 1971²³ they commissioned Trenwith Wills, a former assistant of Billerey's, to design a replacement. Within a week an estimate had been obtained for demolition and the County Planning Officer had confirmed that as the house was not listed it would not be necessary to seek consent.



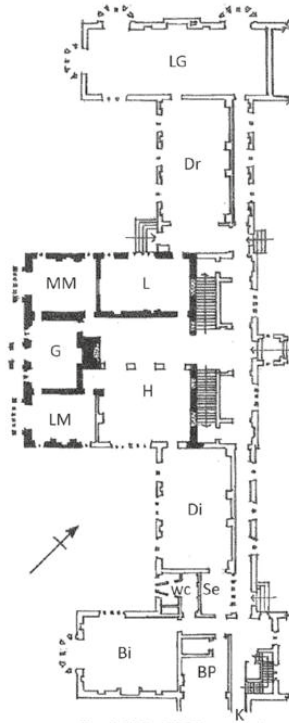
Berwick St Leonard
Manor House in 1902



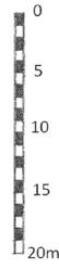
Little Ridge as first built



Little Ridge extended in 1907
(The 'John Wing')



The 1913 – 1920 extensions,
becoming Fonthill House



| | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|----|------------------|
| P | Parlour | | |
| H | Hall | | |
| ND | New Dairy | | |
| SH | Slaughter House | | |
| NB | New Boiler House | | |
| Dr | Drawing Room | | |
| L | Library | | |
| G | Garden Room | | |
| Di | Dining Room | | |
| Fl | Flower Room | | |
| B | Bed Room | | |
| MS | Men Servant's | | |
| K | Kitchen | | |
| EH | Entrance Hall | | |
| Sc | Scullery | Se | Servery |
| S | Study | BP | Butler's Pantry |
| L | Larder | St | Stair |
| SH | Servants Hall (Nurseries over) | LM | Lady Mary's Room |
| | | MM | Mr Morrison's |
| | | LG | The Long Gallery |
| | | Bi | Billiard Room |

Fig. 18.8 Ground floor plans, showing the ruined Berwick St Leonard Manor House prior to demolition, its re-erection as Little Ridge and subsequent extensions and enlargement.

Drawn by the author from plans in the RIBA drawings collection.

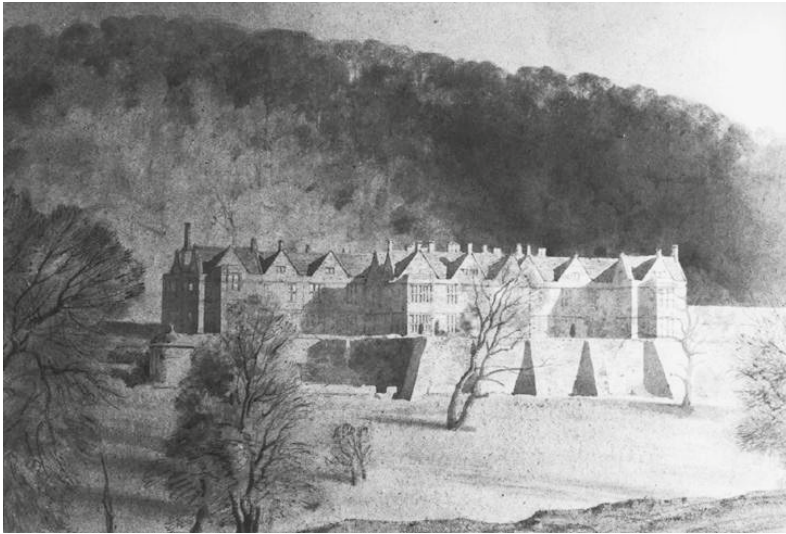


Fig. 18.9 Fonthill House from a painting by C. Geoffroy-Dechaume, 1925. This view from the south-west shows Fonthill House in its final form, extended to either side of the original centre section (which stands behind the lone tree).

From a photograph in the author's collection.

Resistance came from the Blow family, who alerted *The Times*: by November Nikolaus Pevsner, then chairman of the Victorian Society, was writing to Lord Margadale, outlining the history of the house, describing it as ‘one of the particularly good buildings by Detmar Blow’ and suggesting the wings be pulled down and the original centre part kept. Confronted by *The Times* diarist and also the local paper, the *Salisbury Times and Journal* (who drew attention to the house’s seventeenth-century origins), as well as Pevsner and the Victorian Society, Margadale adopted delaying tactics, as he admitted in a letter to his new architects.²⁴ The Department of the Environment, claiming that it ‘had been informed that the house was completely burnt out by a fire and had been substantially rebuilt after the First World War’,²⁵ refused the Victorian Society’s request for spot-listing what they claimed to be ‘one of the most notable of early twentieth century houses’.

By May 1972 demolition ([Figure 18.10](#)) was complete and a piece in *The Times* Diary on 12 June only served to clarify what had become a very confused picture:

Lord Margadale now says ‘There never was a fire in the house. The only fire was in 1919 (sic) in another Fonthill House, on a different site in the estate. My father pulled that down in 1921. I’ve never said there was a fire in this Fonthill. I cannot help it if a Government department gets the wrong end of the stick.’ A spokesman for the department says ‘We were first approached last autumn ... It is now clear that there was a misunderstanding, and in the



Fig. 18.10 The house during demolition in 1972. The large window in the centre lit the Hall.

Fonthill Estate Archives

course of the telephone conversation the two houses became confused. ... It now seems there would have been a strong case for spot-listing'.²⁶

Lord Margadale read the paper over breakfast and wrote to his political colleague, Peter Walker, then Secretary of State for the Environment:

I read The Times this morning ... I am afraid (the article) denigrates your Ministry and casts slight doubts on my honesty ... As far as the house that was burnt but not burnt down was concerned, I do recall this very clearly as I was in the house at the time; I remember on Good Friday morning being woken up with my room full of smoke to be rushed downstairs, passing the Hot Cross Buns floating on the kitchen floor in three feet of water.²⁷

Only on the Fonthill estate could confusion over the fate of one house lead to the loss of another. And John Morrison's hot cross buns, symbolic of a resurrection to come, are strangely appropriate in concluding this story of the long succession of remarkable buildings that have graced this landscape. No sooner is one condemned than another rises again.

In the case of Little Ridge, its rise and fall reflects the career of its designer, for in both cases early promise was compromised by an abundance of riches. Detmar Blow, the last disciple of Ruskin and one whose early years were steeped in Morrisian socialism, was to make his name as a society architect and end

his days disgraced by the richest man in England. The more they heard of his itinerant, bohemian lifestyle, the more his up-market clients seemed to want his services, and by the time work started on the great extensions at Fonthill, Blow, now rivalled only by Lutyens in the domestic market, was building Hilles, his own house on the Cotswold escarpment near Painswick. When the original staircase from Little Ridge was replaced, the original treads, made in solid oak from the Fonthill estate, were re-used at Hilles. Little Ridge is mirrored in Blow's porch too, but as at Fonthill there was a hiatus in his building programme during the Great War. Blow's practice fared better than most but work slowly dwindled and in August 1917 Lutyens, whom Blow had known from their time together at the South Kensington School of Art, wrote to his wife with apparent glee: 'I met Blow last night. He is doing no work! except a house for himself and living with Westminster running his house, a sort of bailiff and Maitre d'Hotel! as far as I can make out!' ²⁸

Lutyens was right. Blow had accepted a post as private secretary and manager of the Grosvenor Estate for 'Bendor' Grosvenor, the Second Duke of Westminster (1879–1953), whom he had known at Clouds since early days in Wiltshire. The Duke's widowed mother married the Hon. George Wyndham, who inherited Clouds in 1911; his great-grandfather was Richard, Marquess of Westminster, who had commissioned the 'new' Fonthill Abbey. A trusted friend, Blow became far more than the Duke's agent and was given power of attorney in estate affairs. Part of his informal arrangements with Westminster involved leasehold properties in Mayfair, claimed by Blow's family to have been a gift, though later the Duke declared he had not intended Blow to profit from them by sub-leasing.²⁹ A rift between the two rapidly widened and despite Blow's offer to hand back whatever amount was requested, he left the Duke in 1933 amid malicious gossip. His health suffered and although repayment was eventually accepted, Blow's last years at Hilles were wrecked and he died a broken man in 1939. He was not to see the second war or the destruction of so many country houses in the two decades that followed, culminating in the final loss of the house that his idealistic Little Ridge had become.

19

The Smithsons at Upper Lawn Pavilion

Amy Frost

Upper Lawn was located on what was originally William Beckford's land, at a time when it could be seen as sheer folly to spend all we had on building something for ourselves: but the act was one of deliberate commitment: the siting was deliberate, for Beckford had built England's greatest Folly.

(Alison Smithson, 1986)¹

The mid-twentieth century saw a new addition to the history of architectural creativity on the Fonthill estate. In 1959 architects Alison and Peter Smithson purchased part of the old Upper Lawn Farm and constructed the Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly (Figure 19.1). Originally intended as a summer house, the building became a second home, used as a retreat until the Smithsons sold it in 1982.

The Smithsons

Alison and Peter Smithson were members of a group of young architects in post-war Europe who reacted against the ideas and methods of the older generation leading the process of rebuilding after the war. This group emerged out of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in the early 1950s to form Team 10, and were searching for a closer communication between form and social need in architecture and urban design.² For Alison and Peter Smithson this corresponded to ideas they had been exploring since 1949 through their design for Hunstanton School in Norfolk; ideas of form, materials and construction that became known as New Brutalism. The Smithsons further developed their ideas from the 1950s into the 1960s through designs such as the proposals for the Golden Lane housing estate (1952), the Economist Building (1959–64) and the Robin Hood Gardens housing estate (1966–71). Alongside their constructed buildings and unexecuted competition designs, the Smithsons' theories were developed



Fig. 19.1 Alison and Peter Smithson, Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly, 1959–62.
Photograph, Amy Frost, June 2017.

and disseminated through their extensive output of publications and teaching. Their writings ensured that their influence would spread beyond built works, and established the Smithsons as two of the most influential European architects of the second half of the twentieth century.

The Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly at Fonthill, built 1959–62, and which the Smithsons continued to adapt and occupy until 1982, played an essential role in the development of these ideas, serving as a testing ground for experimentation in form and material use. Upper Lawn was fundamental to the Smithsons' interest in creating buildings designed for energy efficiency; its design was an exploration of how to maximise natural light and harness solar warmth. The role of Upper Lawn in the Smithsons' own architecture and in the genesis of modern sustainable architecture is what most assessments of the building focus upon.³

In such assessments the importance of the setting of the Fonthill estate is acknowledged and the integration of the new building within the existing landscape highlighted. But the presence of William Beckford within the layers of the landscape's history, which was highly valued by the Smithsons and determined their choice of the site, has been noticeably overlooked.⁴ As the opening quotation of this essay illustrates, the Smithsons chose to build at Fonthill because of the presence of Beckford, and the location of their building with a direct sight-line to where the remains of Fonthill Abbey still stood was just as deliberate. The

Smithsons were following Beckford's example and building a folly at Fonthill; they were also sharing his desire to make that folly a retreat within the wider landscape.

The connection between the history of Beckford at Fonthill and the Smithsons' building is expressed by them in *Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly*, published in 1986, four years after they had sold the building.⁵ The book is more than just an architectural monograph; it is a record of the evolution of a building and how it can change through inhabitation. It documents the family's occupation of the house through diary entries and photographs, telling the story 'as a romantic vignette of a rural play-life of week-end hermits, in a hermitage that is an unassuming permanent-tent'.⁶ Together with the unpublished notes by Alison Smithson in the Smithson Family Collection, the book reveals far more than has previously been discussed in overviews of the house about the influence of Beckford on the Smithsons.

The Smithsons' encounter with Fonthill

According to Peter Smithson, Alison had known Fonthill as a child, which prompted her to revisit the estate in the mid-1940s.⁷ Beckford's Fonthill Abbey drew her to these early visits, and her discovery of the Abbey remains in the summer of 1945 establishes romanticism in Alison's ideas about the place:

First visit of discovery ... was like the Fairy Story of the Sleeping Princess, where the Prince has to hack through brambles and thorn hedge to discover the castle, not in this case intact but since books then tended to claim hardly a stone of the Abbey remained, it was magical enough, when the car had blindly forced its way through the wilderness of the overgrown track, to find a compact building with no trace of damage or repaired break.⁸

The romantic landscape of Beckford's Fonthill was the ancestry that helped inspire the Upper Lawn Pavilion to be what Peter Smithson regarded as 'the true child of the English Poetic tradition', and the account of the 1945 discovery confirms that knowledge of the Abbey and of Beckford was fundamental to why, and what, the Smithsons built on the estate.⁹

The next recorded visit to Fonthill was Easter 1950, when the Abbey remains were captured by Peter Smithson in photographs. Visits continued in the lead-up to their purchasing a piece of Fonthill in 1959. The estate as a whole was already influencing their ideas during this time, and notes to a photograph of the side arch of the large archway reveal that the 'running belts of trees' leading to the archway from the road had informed the landscape aesthetic of their design for Churchill College, Cambridge, in 1958.¹⁰

The importance of Beckford's Fonthill in inspiring these early visits and the eventual construction of the pavilion is confirmed in *Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly*, where the first illustration is not a view of the subject of the book, but rather

the map of Beckford's estate published in John Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* in 1823. The map locates Upper Lawn farmhouse, or West Lawn farmhouse as it was known in 1823, within the wider domain of Beckford's landscape.

The map is followed by a history of the estate told through published accounts, starting with an extensive extract from John Britton's 1801 description of Fonthill Abbey from *The Beauties of Wiltshire*, with Alison's annotations on what elements of planting and buildings survived in the 1980s. At the bottom corner of the page is a quote from Beckford that Alison originally wanted to appear as a 'verbal illustration' on the page:¹¹

I have been haunted all night with rural ideas of England the fresh smell of my pines at Fonthill seemed wafted to me in my dreams. The Bleating of my sheep and lowing of my herds in the deep valley of Lawn Farm fairly sounded in my ears.

Written in May–June 1787 while Beckford was in Portugal, this moment occurred the year after his exile from England, when the idea of retreating back to Fonthill would have seemed far away. As an adult perhaps Alison was also haunted by memories of visiting Fonthill as a child, which led to the 1945 rediscovery of the remains of Fonthill Abbey. Or perhaps, writing the book in 1986, four years after they sold Upper Lawn Pavilion, she chose this quotation from the *Journal of William Beckford in Spain and Portugal 1787–1788* because she too was haunted by the sale of the house and the loss of the retreat that they had found there.¹²

The ideas for the design of Upper Lawn Pavilion can be traced to 'Patio and Pavilion', the Smithsons' exhibit for the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956.¹³ The exhibition explored the concept of a 'symbolic habitat' that responds to the basic human needs of 'a view of the sky, a piece of ground, privacy, the presence of nature' and leading to basic human urges 'to extend and control, to move'.¹⁴ At Fonthill the Smithsons discovered just such a view of sky and piece of ground in October 1959. They set about following those human needs by extending and adapting an existing building to create a testing ground for the development of further architectural ideas.

The construction of Upper Lawn Pavilion

The site that the Smithsons purchased included one of a pair of partially demolished farm cottages built into the north side of a walled garden (Figure 19.2). They discovered that there had been a farmhouse on the site as early as the fifteenth century, and the retention of parts of the historic fabric was essential to the design that followed.¹⁵ The earliest sketch by Alison Smithson for Upper Lawn dates from 1958, showing that the ideas inspired by the found building were forming before the purchase had even been completed.¹⁶ A diagram followed, illustrating how the



Fig. 19.2 Upper Lawn Cottage, 1959. The older second cottage has already been removed.

Smithson Family Collection.

walls and surfaces that were to be kept became the foundations for the layers of the new structure.

The exterior walls of the cottage that joined with the north garden wall were retained, as was the gable fireplace wall at the west end. The south walls of the cottage facing into the garden were removed to allow for the new building to lead directly into the walled garden space (Figure 19.3). The west fireplace gable wall, once the connecting wall between the pair of cottages, became the central wall of the new building, with a concrete beam embedded in it supported by concrete posts at either end. Onto this was fixed a timber frame for a two-storey structure (Figure 19.4). This concrete and softwood frame was then covered with teak and aluminium and the large windows were then pushed up internally to the external skin. The ground floor was designed to open up to the east into a yard on the footprint of the demolished second cottage, and to the south into the rest of the walled garden. The upper storey sat above the old north wall level, with glazing on three sides offering panoramic views over the Fonthill landscape.

The new building took shape during the early years of the 1960s and was at first lived in 'camp-style' under a tarpaulin covering the frame.¹⁷ This 'life in a polythene bag', as Peter Smithson called it, adapted as further layers were added to the house until it was nearly complete by 1962.¹⁸ From the beginning the house was



Fig. 19.3 Upper Lawn under construction looking north.

Smithson Family Collection.

intended to act as both a home and a testing site for methods and materials that the Smithsons felt would not yet be accepted in London, such as pitch-fibre drain pipes or polyester water tanks. It was also to test the performance of materials such as high purity aluminium sheet, which if successful they would then begin to use in work for clients.¹⁹ They sought to create a 'climate house' through the opening up to, and shutting out of, the outside climate, as well as through the construction materials used, and by testing what solar gain could be achieved in a building with glazed south, east and west walls.²⁰

'Jerome-ing' at Upper Lawn

In the 1960s the driving idea behind the creation of such an idyll at Fonthill was much the same as it had been for Beckford in the 1790s, the search for 'a place wherein to be restored to oneself, as a source of ones energies'.²¹ Four years after they had sold the building, Alison Smithson referred to the 23-year period of her family's creation

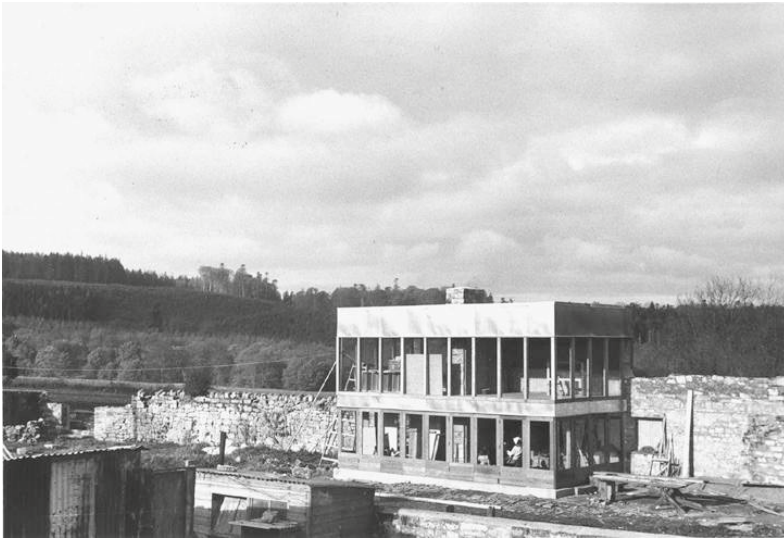


Fig. 19.4 Upper Lawn under construction looking north-west.

Smithson Family Collection.

and inhabitation of the Upper Lawn Pavilion at Fonthill as having been a period of time spent ‘Jerome-ing’.²² For the Smithsons ‘Jerome-ing’ to, from and at Fonthill was a means of retreat from the city to a place where, like Saint Jerome to his cell or to the wilderness of the desert, they could withdraw to reflect and experiment; a place that could be ‘in the Saint Jerome sense, a study from which to appraise, contemplate, consider and re-assess, the city’.²³ This idea of the pavilion or folly being a place of retreat is also the link between William Beckford’s vision for the estate and what it meant to England’s leading post-war architects 160 years later.

In April 1991 Alison Smithson wrote ‘Saint Jerome; The Desert ... The Study’, a pamphlet discussing painted representations of Saint Jerome and his two habitats, the cell and the desert.²⁴ These two retreats – one created, the other discovered – were sought by Saint Jerome so he could be alone to dedicate himself to the study of the printed word or the natural world. Both environments were to stimulate and challenge thoughts, ideas and the individual’s concept of the idyll. For Alison the habitats of Saint Jerome illustrated that

[w]hether in an urban setting or in nature, all creativity relies on being cocooned. Such a sense of inviolability relies on its *fragment* of functional space being within an *enclave* encapsulated in its turn within a protective territory.²⁵

Beckford too shared an interest in Saint Jerome, as seen in the number of paintings he owned of the subject, similar to those representations Alison Smithson wrote about.²⁶ Beckford sought a similar retreat, as a young man escaping into

the Fonthill landscape from Fonthill House, and as an adult creating both Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower in Bath as retreats for study and contemplation within a landscape. It is not hard to imagine Alison visiting the National Gallery in London to see *Saint Jerome Reading in his Study* by Antonello da Messina from 1475, the work that she used to illustrate the cover of the pamphlet, and finding displayed near it *St. Jerome in a Landscape* by Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano, once owned by Beckford.

To the Smithsons Fonthill represented ‘a place made idyll: a dream of a stress free way of life’.²⁷ They sought ‘Time to be in touch with nature’ away ‘from the drawing board and the telephone’, and created a retreat where they could write and work on developing ideas.²⁸ As work progressed at Upper Lawn the idea of ‘Patio and Pavilion’ from the 1950s evolved into a new theory, ‘Pavilion and Route’, published in 1965.²⁹ This established the concept of a building being conceived as one part of a larger environment, a *fragment* of an occupied space that would sit within its own protective boundary or *enclave*. This enclave in turn would sit within a larger *territory* or *domain*, usually a landscape or view. At Upper Lawn the ‘Pavilion and Route’ theory was realised, so that ‘the Pavilion sat in the walled yard and garden as in an enclave, the view was the domain’.³⁰

For the Smithsons, the combination of their fragment (the pavilion), the enclave (the walled garden) and the domain (the Fonthill landscape) was the same as it had been for Beckford. The Abbey was Beckford’s retreat, the cell in which to study surrounded by his books and objects; the surrounding landscape was the wilderness in which he could concentrate on nature. Through the Smithsons’ eyes, Beckford’s Abbey was similar to the pavilion, their fragment; the landscape inside the Barrier wall was similar to their enclave; the wider Fonthill estate was similar to their domain. Upper Lawn Pavilion and Fonthill Abbey both offered the possibility of a special relationship between house, inhabitants and nature. Beckford would have envied the Smithsons’ ability to view the landscape through walls of glass, or to slide back a door, open up a wall and step out into nature, or let nature in.

The Smithsons’ time spent in Upper Lawn Pavilion was documented through photography and journals. The Upper Lawn diaries kept by Alison record changes to the house and landscape, particularly noting the effect of weather and the changing seasons. She recorded new planting, first crops, the changing lives of the family within the enclave, and detailed their time ‘Jerome-ing’.³¹ Peter’s photographs run alongside, recording the building work, the life within the ‘polythene bag’ and the changes to the finished building that occupation made. The building within its landscape was frequently photographed, as was the view from the Pavilion, especially north towards the remains of Fonthill Abbey. It was similar to the way the Beckfords had captured their layers of occupation at Fonthill through the eighteenth-century country house portraiture of Fonthill House, or through J. M. W. Turner’s views of Fonthill Abbey seen from different vistas, at different times of day and season.

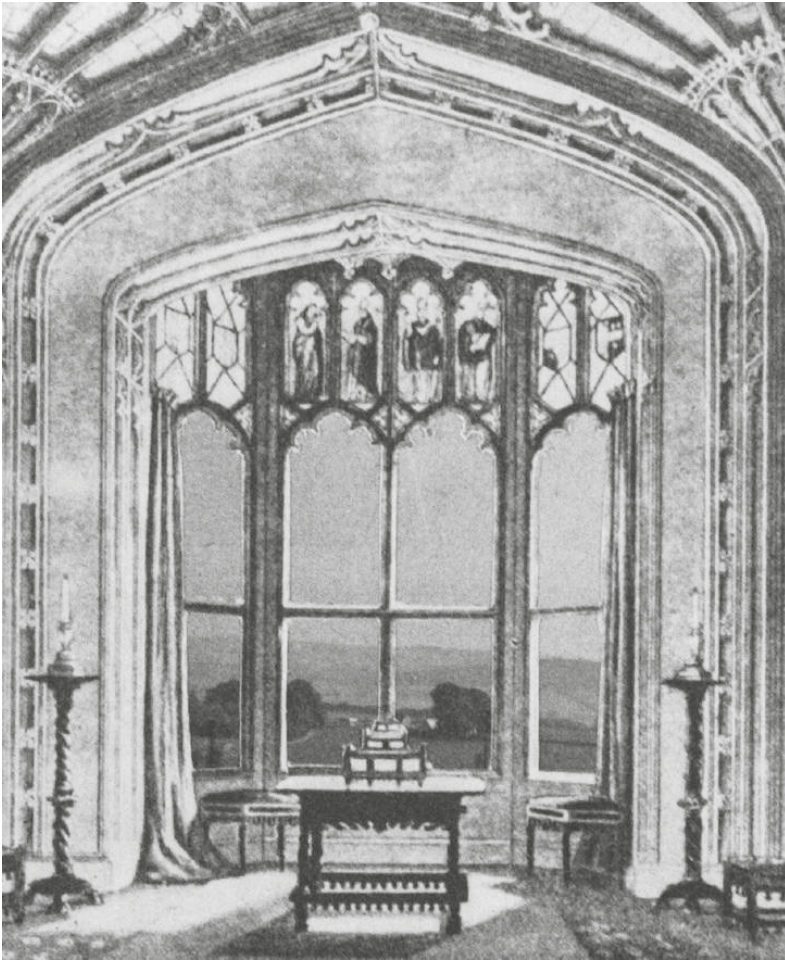


Fig. 19.5 Detail from *Photomontage of Upper Lawn as if in the view from Fonthill Abbey*: that is, set into an engraving by Cattermole of a window of Fonthill Abbey, Alison Smithson, early 1960s. Upper Lawn Pavilion is to the left of the casket on the table.

Smithson Family Collection.

The ‘Jerome-ing’ journey itself became a further exploration of ideas, as the Smithsons’ car, a Citroën DS, became the ‘think tank’ for Alison’s observations on the movement of human and machine through nature. *AS in DS*, published in 1983, is the diary of a passenger travelling through nature as seen from the inside of the car, and of that machine itself moving through nature. Most of the journeys chronicled are those made between London and Fonthill.³² Illustrated by views of the Fonthill landscape from the car, and of the car in the Fonthill landscape, *AS in DS* reveals the transition between the urban life of London and the escape to Fonthill.

When ‘Jerome-ing’ the car was the moving cell, or the private room on wheels that carried them to and from the wilderness.

The idyll ended when Fonthill no longer offered the protected retreat. For Beckford it was a forced withdrawal from an idyll he could no longer afford. For the Smithsons it came in 1982, when new owners moved into the neighbouring cottage to Upper Lawn and inevitably disrupted the ‘idyll’. The Smithsons last visited Upper Lawn in March 1982, shortly after it was sold.³³

Upper Lawn Pavilion – as seen from Fonthill Abbey

In the early 1960s Alison Smithson created an illustration that offers perhaps the greatest insight into the connection between Upper Lawn and the history of architecture integrated into landscape at Fonthill. She took a copy of the engraving by Cattermole of the St Michael’s Gallery of Fonthill Abbey that had been published in 1823 in John Britton’s *Graphic and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey* and pasted onto it an image of Upper Lawn Pavilion as it would have been seen from the south oriel window,³⁴ thus projecting a view of their folly as seen from William Beckford’s had Fonthill Abbey survived (Figure 19.5). The image adds further weight to the deliberate choice of building on the Upper Lawn site, by showing how the vista between the two buildings, even if only imagined, was at the heart of what the Smithsons created.

Recent works to the landscape at the remains of Fonthill Abbey have made it possible to see this fantasised view in reality. Similarly from the Upper Lawn site a glimpse of the surviving Lancaster Tower of Fonthill Abbey can also now be seen. It is not difficult to picture Alison and Peter Smithson looking at the same vista through the landscape, and imagining what the view of Fonthill Abbey, had it survived, would have been like from the Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly.

Fonthill Abbey, terror and videogames at the British Library

Greg Buzwell

No discussion of Gothic literature would be complete without mention of William Beckford and his novel *Vathek* (1786), so it came as no surprise when both author and novel cast lengthy shadows across the British Library's major exhibition *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination* in the autumn of 2014. The show celebrated 250 years of Gothic literature, ranging from Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to contemporary supernatural tales by authors such as Clive Barker, Sarah Waters and Neil Gaiman. Beckford, inevitably, featured heavily in the section of the display devoted to Gothic fiction's first golden age, taking his place alongside Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis as someone who brought new ideas to the increasingly popular world of terrifyingly outré fiction. For the exhibition the British Library was able to borrow Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Beckford from the National Portrait Gallery in London and the superb architect's model of Fonthill Abbey from Beckford's Tower and Museum in Bath. The loans were exhibited alongside illustrated editions of *Vathek*, some of Beckford's letters and John Rutter's magnificent volume *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (1823). Taken as a whole these exhibits resulted in this part of the exhibition being arguably the most striking and memorable in the gallery.

The Gothic tradition and videogaming

In addition to exploring the genesis and development of Gothic literature the exhibition also addressed the influence of Gothic fiction upon fashion, music, lifestyle, film, photography, art and architecture. There was however one area of creativity that the curators of the show, myself included, found it difficult to reference – namely Gothic literature's considerable impact upon computer games. There are literally thousands of computer games in which Dracula-style castles, dense haunted forests, sinister cults, ruined abbeys and moonlit, zombie-infested

graveyards play a large part. During the planning process for the exhibition the inclusion of videogames and computer animations was discussed at length, but a lack of space and money ultimately counted against the idea. This gap was partially filled, however, with the aid of the *Off the Map* competition, and once again Fonthill Abbey provided the imaginative spark that brought this additional element of *Terror and Wonder* to life.

Off the Map is an annual videogame design contest for UK higher education students. Each year the competition encourages students to create video games, text adventures and virtual environments using digitised British Library 'assets' (i.e. digitised maps, views, illustrations, sound recordings, manuscripts and printed texts taken from the British Library's collections). The 2014 competition, run by the British Library in partnership with Crytek, a videogame design company, and GameCity, a cultural centre for videogames in Nottingham and the home of the National Videogame Arcade, took the *Terror and Wonder* exhibition as its inspiration. Students had a choice of three options around which to base their entries: the seaside town of Whitby, which features so prominently in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897); Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842) or Fonthill Abbey. Specific assets for the Fonthill Abbey option included images from Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, plans of the estate, topographical drawings of the Abbey and its grounds, written accounts of the Abbey and, for an extra dash of background colour, extracts from accounts and letters relating to Beckford's life, together with selected passages from *Vathek*.

Nix

The eventual winners of the 2014 competition were a team from the University of South Wales who chose Fonthill Abbey as the focus for their design. The fact that so little of the Abbey survives arguably worked in the students' favour. We know what Fonthill Abbey looked like, we have the paintings, plans and descriptions, but the fact it is now largely absent from the landscape – a ghostly presence that exists purely in the imagination – meant that the students could pursue surreal flights of fancy. Put another way, their setting for the game was under no compulsion to resemble a specific, identifiable location. The result was a truly original concept and one that was in many ways reminiscent of the daring use of sublime landscapes frequently found in Gothic novels. The winning game, called *Nix*, and created by Jackson Rolls-Gray, Lauren Filby and Faye Allen, challenged participants to reconstruct the ruins of Fonthill Abbey by solving a series of puzzles in an ethereal underwater world. *Nix*, ideally, was designed to be enjoyed in conjunction with the Oculus Rift, a virtual reality headset for 3D gaming, which enabled the user to explore the submerged Abbey ruins in stunning three-dimensional detail. The device even gave the students the idea for their team name. They entered the competition as 'Gothulus Rift', a neat play on words combining the romantic past

and the technologically advanced present. The use of a virtual reality headset also dictated one of *Nix*'s most dazzling features, namely that it is set largely underwater. Virtual reality headsets can induce motion sickness in some users, but by setting the game underwater the visuals could be slowed down and rendered in a gentler, more languid and poetic fashion – a terrific example of how necessity often leads to creative leaps in imagination.

The imagery featured in the game is stunning. Players find themselves looking up through Fonthill's submerged central tower as seaweed sways from the stonework (Figure 20.1); books glide like jellyfish from the shelves in the library and the sun, filtered through several fathoms of water, bathes the Abbey's shattered walls and drowned rooms in a ghostly shade of green. The sight of Fonthill's famous tower surrounded by fish and seen through an eerie underwater light is precisely the type of sublime spectacle – beautiful, haunting, awe-inspiring and terrifying – so beloved of Gothic authors. Visually, the imagery looks like the setting for one of H. P. Lovecraft's more fantastical tales or the set design for a Hollywood film set in a post-apocalyptic future. As Tim Pye, the lead curator of *Terror and Wonder*, commented after *Nix* had been announced as the competition winner:

What is so impressive about the *Nix* game is the way in which it takes the stunning architecture of the Abbey, combines it with elements from its troubled history and infuses it all with a very ghostly air. The game succeeds in transforming William Beckford's stupendously gothic building into a magical, mysterious place reminiscent of the best gothic novels.



Fig. 20.1 The spectral ruins of Fonthill Abbey as seen in the videogame *Nix*. The game imagines the Abbey underwater, overgrown with seaweed and illuminated by muted, distant sunlight.

Image © Jackson Rolls-Gray, Faye Allen and Lauren Filby.

Going further, the videogame's curators turned one of Gothic fiction's most common themes on its head. Ruins in Gothic novels act as both a short-hand method of evoking a past that has irrevocably vanished and as a means of inspiring a sense of melancholy. Taking arguably the most impressive Gothic Revival house ever built – and one made all the more remarkable by its almost mythical history and its tragic collapse – and then asking modern game players to recreate it in a virtual world reverses this process. Rebuilding the vanished walls of Fonthill Abbey in digital form brings the glories of the past back to life in new ways. Potentially, by the same means, any lost building, any vanished landscape and even any lost civilisation can be given a digital afterlife.

In conclusion Fonthill Abbey, while only being a small part of the *Terror and Wonder* exhibition, came to provide several of its most enduring memories. Many of the comments from visitors praised the iconic exhibits (Doctor Dee's spirit mirror, which was on loan from the British Museum for example, or Bram Stoker's manuscript for his theatre adaptation of *Dracula*). Others commented on the quirky and surreal (the model of the 'were-rabbit' we were able to borrow from Aardman Animations, or the vampire slaying kit we were delighted to have on loan from the Royal Armouries in Leeds). Many, however, perhaps because of its near total disappearance from the landscape, were enthralled by the story of Fonthill Abbey and its flamboyant creator. The *Nix* videogame combined the iconic with the surreal. It took the past and brought it into the present: nineteenth-century architecture combined with brilliant storytelling and twenty-first-century technology to produce something totally new. For a building which no longer exists Fonthill Abbey is curiously ever-present in the Gothic imagination, a ghostly reminder of how the glories of the past cast shadows that stretch to the present day and beyond.

21

Epilogue

Caroline Dakers

Fonthill remains largely private. There are no public footpaths across the original estate formed by Sir John Mervyn in the mid-sixteenth century. The three-mile-long wall built by Lord Cottington around his park survives in part; it kept his herd of deer inside and everyone else outside (a farmer from Fonthill Gifford who demanded the right to drive his cart across the park was defeated in the law courts in 1714). The one footpath which provided the residents of Fonthill Gifford access to their parish church was removed when Alderman Beckford demolished St Nicholas's church in 1746. Much of William Beckford's Barrier survives, longer and higher than Cottington's



Fig. 21.1 John Piper, *Approach to Fonthill*, 1940. Piper photographed and painted the Fonthill archway and the south lodge during the war, but it appears he was unable to access land inside Beckford's Barrier.

Image courtesy of the Whitworth, © The University of Manchester

wall, and there are no public footpaths within its curtilage. Beckford's intention was to keep just about everyone firmly outside, including the Hunt and the curious.

A slight change occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coinciding with the British aristocracy and landed gentry accepting some of their social responsibilities, investing in model villages, for example, and schools and school-teachers. The employees and neighbours of the Grosvenors, the Shaw Stewarts and the Morrisons were permitted access on an annual basis to the grounds, to enjoy garden parties, sports days and the celebration of significant birthdays and weddings. The Morrisons continue this tradition on their estate. However, after the Second World War almost all the land within Beckford's Barrier was once more closed off to the curious (see Figure 21.1); William Burn's 'new' Fonthill Abbey was demolished in 1952 and bats took up residence in the surviving Lancaster Tower. Still a few trespassers penetrated the woods.

The research for this book has been both exciting and unusual. We have been able to criss-cross the Fonthill landscape, looking below the ground as well as inside structures, measuring trees and pulling carved stones out of the mud of the lake, studying proposals for new Fonthill houses in the planning stages and completed. We hope our findings provide a rich mosaic of material for historians.

Not surprisingly, our research has uncovered gaps in the narrative, questions with no answers (at present). So we also hope that foregrounding names and revealing uncertainties will trigger responses from our readers, be they archivists, general readers or residents of Fonthill itself.

Our archaeologist David Roberts (Chapters 2 and 9) would of course like a very large grant to carry out further work across the whole region. The first stage would be a proper LiDAR and aerial photographic survey of the whole region, to better place everything we already know in context, and probably to find large numbers of new settlements and field systems from prehistory and the Roman period.

Neil Burton (Chapter 3) is still in the dark about what happened to the Cottingtons, to their wealth and their collections. For over a century they occupied one of the largest mansions in Wiltshire, with estates in Berkshire, Hampshire, Middlesex and Kent. Was it through their allegiance to the Roman Catholic church and the ill-fated campaigns of James Stuart, the Old Pretender, who made Francis Cottington a Baron in 1716, that they gradually lost their wealth? Did the Cottingtons visit James Stuart at his court in Avignon or, later, in Rome? Where was the 2nd Baron Cottington buried? And where are the Cottington family records?

The monuments of the Mervyns and Cottingtons at St Nicholas's church remain missing. Did Alderman Beckford bury them when he demolished the church, as Colt Hoare reported in his *Modern History of Wiltshire*? It would have been easy enough to move them up to the new parish church.

Amy Frost is also puzzled by missing bodies (Chapter 4). We presume Alderman Beckford and his wife still rest underneath the Marquess of Westminster's Victorian church, but no special provision was made for them when the new church was built. The loss or destruction of the Alderman's papers (how, by whom?) leaves



Fig. 21.2 Joseph Theakston, St Anthony of Padua.

Photograph by Caroline Dakers.

an enormous gap in our knowledge of his building plans at Fonthill, including the elaborate gardens revealed in the two paintings he commissioned and that are now attributed to Antonio Joli.

Amy, like David Roberts, has an expensive project in mind, to realise the actual height of William Beckford's Abbey, perhaps using a balloon or a laser beam; to visualise the impact of this iconic building in the landscape. Paintings by Turner suggest the effect was profound.

All of us would like to investigate further the precise whereabouts of the materials, fixtures and fittings from the demolished houses. This could be a community project, cataloguing chimneys and chimney pieces, doors and windows, pieces of dressed stone, now forming part of later mansions, farmhouses, cottages and barns at Fonthill. One of the Alderman's chimney pieces found its way to a house in Montagu Square, Marylebone; a staircase balustrade from 'Splendens' was re-erected by James Wyatt at Dodington Park in Gloucestershire; a ceiling by

Casali is now at Dyrham Park, also in Gloucestershire. Joseph Theakston's statue of St Anthony of Padua, commissioned by William Beckford for Fonthill Abbey, has a new position a few miles from Fonthill in the grounds of Wardour Castle (see Figure 21.2), while Rossi's statue of St Anthony resides in a school in Lisbon. The ebony and ivory display cabinets designed by Owen Jones for Alfred Morrison's Fonthill House found a new use in the billiard room of a house in Shaftesbury before being sold at auction; one piece can be seen in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand. Closer to home, a fine wooden floor in Detmar Blow's Little Ridge was acquired by Bernard Nevill and relaid in his house, formed for its part out of the stable block of the Grosvenors' 'new' Fonthill Abbey. The original gate piers of the 'new' Abbey were moved a few miles away to form the entrance of Hays House, now a retirement home.

The physical debris of Fonthill is scattered far and wide; recovering Fonthill is an endless task.

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73. National Archives: Cal SP Dom. 1635, 385.
74. Ex. inf. Roy Wilde, who contributed the following note: 'While undertaking the magnetometry and resistivity survey at Fonthill, members of the team noted a Cedar of Lebanon which had not been numbered by the Woodland Trust. On further investigation, they came to the conclusion that the Valley Cedar could have been planted as early as 1639. The girth measurement of the Valley Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) Grid ST92813227 on 16 May 2017 was 7.27m, carefully gauged at 1.3m (diameter breast height – dbh), following Forestry Commission criteria. Detailed examination of the tree ring geometry was carried out on the lowest major branch stump. This showed 183 tree rings across a cut that measures 92cm by 62cm. The maximum width of a single tree ring was 5mm in the lower half of the stump, centred in the 30- to 70-year formative growth period of the branch.
As the length of formative growth and maximum tree-ring width is critical to the calculation of age estimates, two other Fonthill *Cedrus libani* in the area of Fonthill Splendens were re-measured and inspected for accessible tree ring evidence. It is clear that, for the Fonthill cedars, the transition from formative to mature stages of growth occurs at approximately 80 years, rather than 60 years as applies to some other species. Using the only two data-sets published and applying the Forestry Commission calculations to the 7.27m girth measurement of the Valley Cedar gives a youngest likely planting date of 1673 ("good" site with 60 years formative growth tree rings up to 6mm) and oldest likely planting date of 1448 ("poor" ground with 80 years formative growth and tree rings up to 4mm).
Applying the Fonthill branch tree-ring evidence of an 80-year formative growth period, with rings up to 5mm prior to mature narrowing, results in an acceptable age of 378 years, planted approximately 1639.' Roy Wilde is a volunteer archaeologist on the AONB Foundations of Archaeology project, the Salisbury Museum 'Finding Pitt-Rivers' project and (in progress) a small excavation on a Late Iron Age site on the Wilton Estate.
75. Peter Fitzgerald, *Nathaniel Ireson of Wincanton* (Wimborne: Dovecote Press, 2016).
76. John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire – I. Alderman Beckford's Houses," *Country Life* 140 (24 November 1966). Harris was the first to realise that Alderman Beckford did not immediately rebuild the Cottington mansion.

77. Rutter, *Delineations*, 3; Appendix A, 106.
78. Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham: Fonthill Gifford church faculties.
79. James Everard, Baron Arundell, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1829), 22.
80. Williams, *Catholic Recusancy in Wiltshire*, 185.

Chapter 4

1. For the only full-length biography of William Beckford see Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).
2. For the history of the Beckfords and slavery see Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons* (London: Windmill Books, 2012).
3. The purchase of Fonthill from Cottington was tied up in Beckford paying off mortgages that Cottington owed, the course of which can be found in the Abstract of the Title of William Beckford to his Estate in Wiltshire, Wiltshire History Centre, 1990/2/3. See also Schedule of Indenture, Wiltshire History Centre, 413/277.
4. The Inigo Jones attribution was made by John Rutter in *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: J. Rutter, 1823). The attribution to John Vardy is from Timothy Mowl, *William Beckford: Composing for Mozart* (London: John Murray, 1998), 2. Mowl had changed this attribution from the builder Hoare in an earlier work, Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *Trumpet at a Distant Gate: The Lodge as Prelude to the Country House* (London: Waterstones & Co., 1985), 89–91.
5. Richard Pococke, visit 3 July 1754, published in *The Travels Through England of Dr R Pococke*, ed. James J. Cartwright, vol. II (London: Camden Society, 1889), 47.
6. July 1769 Diary of the Countess of Shelburne, Bowood MSS, Vol. 5, 2–5.
7. Pococke, *Travels Through England*, 47.
8. Amount spent annually reported in the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 February 1755.
9. For reports of the Fonthill fire see also *Oxford Journal*, 22 February 1755 and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 25 February 1755, 90.
10. Walpole to Bentley, 23 February 1755, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis and Warren Hunting Smith, vol. 35 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937/1984), 211.
11. See Gauci, *William Beckford*, Chapter 3.
12. Mike Fraser, Danae Beckford-Stanton and John Fox, "William Beckford's Paternal Half-Siblings and their Descendants," *Beckford Journal* 10 (2004): 14–29.
13. Jacques-Henri Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England*, Letter XIX, ca. 1793, reprinted in William Gregory, *The Beckford Family* (London: Simton, Marshall & Hamilton, 2nd edn 1898), 26.
14. These were the arms of the London branch of the family, Beckford himself having yet to have his own.
15. Duddingston House, Edinburgh, of 1760, designed by William Chambers, John Wolfe and James Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol. IV (London: 1767), 14–17.
16. Wolfe and Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Description of plates, 9. Fonthill House is illustrated on plates 82–7.
17. John Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire*, Vol. I (London: Verner & Hood, 1801), 211. Rudolf Wittkower noted that Fonthill was based on Houghton as recorded in the engravings for *Vitruvius Britannicus* and those found in Isaac Ware's *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Houghton in Norfolk* (London: 1735), although Beckford himself is not listed as a subscriber to either book. Wittkower, "Pseudo-Palladian Elements in English Neo-classical Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 157. A visitor in 1799 also compared the north elevation to another Campbell design, Wanstead House in Essex: Diary of Lady Ann Rushout, 15 July 1799, transcript in private collection.
18. Wolfe and Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*; Lathom pls. 94–8, Moulsham pls. 30–1 and Kertlington pls. 32–6.
19. Pocket Book of Thomas Hall recording his Tour on Horseback and by coach in the company of Cap. W Trevarion, Thursday 20 September 1798, Wiltshire History Centre, 776/652.
20. James Paine attribution is Reginald Blomfield, *A Short History of the Renaissance in England 1500-1800* (London: G Bell & Sons, 1900), 224, an attribution also shared by Howard Stutchbury in *Colen Campbell*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 109. Blomfield comments that Fonthill is one of the last houses to use such colonnades to link the main house to its wings, adding further argument concerning the outmoded nature of Fonthill's design. For the evidence of Hoare as designer of Fonthill see Howard Colvin, "Hoare, -", *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*, 3rd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 499 and John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire: Alderman Beckford's Houses," *Country Life*, Nov. 24 (1966), 1373.
21. Count Felix-François d'Espie, *The Manner of Securing all Sorts of Buildings from Fire*, Trans. Louis Dutens, (London: H. Piers, 1756), edition is dedicated to Beckford. See Eileen Harris and Nicolas Savage, "Espie," in *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 190–1.

22. Visit dated 5 September 1800, Richard Warner, *Excursions from Bath* (Bath: Crutwell, 1801), 120.
23. Newspaper accounts show that in February 1764 the copper roof was replaced again when a previous roof was blown off during a storm, suggesting either two such incidents or that the roof remained 'thatched' for two years before being replaced, *The Ipswich Journal*, 4 February 1764.
24. Temple to William Pitt, 7 September 1762, Public Record Office 30/8/61, fols.71–2, noted first by Gauci, *William Beckford*, 259, nb.12.
25. William Beckford to his son, ca. 1768, London Metropolitan Archives, Willis Collection, Q/WIL/26, first pointed out by Gauci, *William Beckford*, 159.
26. Advert in *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* December 1768. Payment to Moulton in 1769 of £100, National Archives C12/1321/8, 2nd schedule. Moulton continues to be listed as based at Fonthill in *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 29 November 1784.
27. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 154–5.
28. For an assessment of the furnishing and collections at Fonthill at this time see Philip Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House: 'One of the most Princely Edifices in the Kingdom'," in *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 51–71.
29. Diary of the Countess of Shelburne, Bowood MSS. Drysdale to Rev. James Nairne, 13 October 1768, reprinted in the *Wiltshire Gazette*, 14 February 1924, and another undated but ca. 1768 letter reprinted 21 February 1924.
30. Drysdale, *Wiltshire Gazette*, 14 February 1924.
31. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 161.
32. Drysdale, *Wiltshire Gazette*, 21 February 1924
33. See Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House," 54–5.
34. National Archives, C12/1321/8, 2nd and 4th Schedules.
35. Drysdale, *Wiltshire Gazette*, 21 February 1924.
36. Soane Museum, Adam 50/31–32, and for ceilings Adam 50/91–2.
37. Soane Museum, Adam 51/14.
38. Although the span of the single arch bridge raised on rockwork is smaller in size. Single arch bridge is in the Soane Museum, Adam 51/12.
39. Soane Museum, Adam 50/30. Thanks to Stephen Astley for first suggesting this is a design for Witham not Fonthill.
40. *London Chronicle*, 23 September 1762 and *London Daily Advertiser*, 27 September 1762.
41. Abstract of Sundry Deeds relating to Priory of Witham by Isaac Heard, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.88.
42. Illustrated in "Colen Campbell," *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol. II (London: 1717), pls. 91–2.
43. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 154.
44. Survey by Thomas Browne, April 1761, Somerset History Centre, DD/WYp, Box 1. P.15. Pt3. First pointed out by Robert Wilson-North and Stephen Porter, "Witham, Somerset: From Carthusian Monastery to Country House to Gothic Folly," *Architectural History* 40 (1997): 93.
45. Shelburne Diary, Bowood MSS, Vol. 3, 295.
46. On Beckford possibly turning down a title due to the impact it might have had on his political position see Gauci, *William Beckford*, 125.
47. Moulton's advertisement in the *Salisbury and Wiltshire Journal* of 24 December 1768 lists work for Beckford in Wiltshire 'and Somerset', meaning Witham.
48. Wolfe and Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, vol. 5 (London: 1771), pls. 38, 39–40, 41–2. Rev. Warner illustrates a version of Witham on the route of his tour in 1800, but there is no mention of any house in his text. Warner, *Excursions from Bath*, 119. The allusions to history and lineage that Witham presented would have been of equally strong importance to the Alderman's son. However, the son would eventually demolish the Adam house to sell the building materials in 1810 and reluctantly sell the estate in 1812.
49. "Parishes: Eaton Bray," in *A History of the County of Bedford*, Victoria County History Vol. 3, ed. William Page (London: 1912), 369–75.
50. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 15 June 1767.
51. The painting was sold alongside other Casali works in 1801 to William Wyatt Diamond of the Theatre Royal in Bath, where they were displayed in the ceiling. In 1845 it was sold again to Col. Balthway at Dyrham Park where it can be seen today in the ceiling of the Hall.
52. Last Will and Testament of William Beckford, The National Archives, Prob. 11/959. William Thomas Beckford is recorded as being 'in general in a bad state of health' and that remaining at Fonthill would be best for his 'weakly constitution'. Testimony of Maria Beckford, National Archives, C12/1325/21.
53. *Ibid.* For the claims over the will see Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 35–7.
54. "Testimony of Maria Beckford," in *Passages from the Diary of Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwicke, Oxon*, ed. Emily J. Climençon (London: Longmans, 1899), 166–7: Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys used the phrase, the 'Great Beckford, as he is usually styled,' on a visit to Fonthill in 1776.

55. Temple to William Pitt, 1 September 1762, National Archives, PRO, 30/8/61, fols.71-2, quoted in Gauci, *William Beckford*, 145.
56. Lybbe Powys, *Diary*, 166.
57. Sir Richard Joseph Sullivan, *Observations Made during A Tour through Parts of England, Scotland and Wales in 1778*, 3rd edn, Vol. 1 (Dublin: 1785), 127; Lybbe Powys, *Diary*, 166-7.
58. Beckford to Cozens, 4 December 1778, reprinted in Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford* (London: Heinemann, 1910), 60-6.
59. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, Monday 1 October 1781.
60. The note is dated 9 December 1838 and attached to the original letter to Louisa Beckford dated spring 1782. For full transcript of the note see J. W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 89-91.
61. See Robert Gemmett, *The Consummate Collector: William Beckford's Letters to his Bookseller* (Croydon: Fonthill Media, 2014).
62. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 11 October 1784.
63. On 27 November 1784 the *Morning Herald* reported news of a 'grammatical mistake in regard to the genders' involving Beckford and Courtenay.
64. Beckford could have been imprisoned and tried under the Buggery Act re-enacted by Elizabeth I in 1563 had enough evidence been found. For further reading on Beckford and sexuality see Jon Millington, *A Beckford Bibliography* (Warminster: Beckford Society, 2008), 57-60 (Part One: Sexuality).
65. On 27 November 1784, the *Morning Herald* printed the following story: "The rumour concerning a Grammatical mistake of Mr. B--- and the Hon. Mr C---, in regard to the genders, we hope for the honour of Nature originates in Calumny!"
66. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 5 June 1786.
67. Scheme No. 1 illustrated in Soane Museum, 57/30 (title No. 1), 57/33 and the upper sketch of 57/35. Scheme No. 2 Soane Museum 57/31 (titled No. 2) and lower sketch of 57/35. Scheme No. 3 Soane Museum 57/34 (titled No. 3) and 57/32.
68. Soane Museum 57/36 and Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, a.1.
69. Christopher Woodward, "William Beckford and Fonthill Splendens: Early Works by Soane and Goodridge," *Apollo* 147 (February 1998): 31-40, includes a visualisation of the proposed corridor drawn by Ptolemy Dean. See also David Watkin, "Beckford, Soane and Hope: The Psychology of the Collector," in *William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 38-9.
70. Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House," 60.
71. For the Tapestry Room chimney piece see Soane Museum 81/1/25, 81/1/29, 81/1/39 and 81/2/88 and Bodleian Library, Beckford MS c.84, fol.111, and for the coffered niche see Soane Museum 57/18 and Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.84, fol.112.
72. Soane Museum 8/5/8, 8/5/7 and 57/36; Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, f.1 bed design, f.2 section of bed-chamber. The design matches the description of the bed sold in 1801.
73. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 234-5.
74. For discussion by John Harris on the gallery in country house history see Woodward, "William Beckford and Fonthill Splendens," 37.
75. Prince of Wales visit recorded by Thomas Wildman, Wildman to Beckford 30 September 1794, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett., C. 501, fols. 10, 11v.
76. Government Art Collection no. 9164, "Coloured Sketches in the Collection of the Fonthill Estate."
77. See Megan Aldrich, "William Beckford's Abbey at Fonthill: From the Picturesque to the Sublime" in ed. D. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 118.
78. Beckford to Wyatt, 10 April 1794, reprinted in Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 214.
79. Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House," 61.
80. Beckford to his mother, 29 November 1796, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.16, fol. 7. Diary of Ann Rushout, 15 July 1799, 51, quoted in Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House," 61-2.
81. Both are in the Beckford Tower Trust collection, gifted in 1978 to the Beckford Tower Trust from the Bath Industrial Heritage Museum, formerly in the possession of Ralph Keevil. James Lees-Milne attributed the cornice to the work of Soane at Fonthill (Beckford Tower Trust accession card index), but no evidence within the records of Soane's work for Beckford confirms this.
82. Hewat-Jaboor, "Fonthill House," 63-7.
83. Pocket Book of Thomas Hall, 20 September 1798. Referred to by Britton as the Tartarian room; Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 240.
84. Warner, *Excursions from Bath*, 119.
85. Warner, *Excursions from Bath*, 126.
86. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 215.
87. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 241.

88. Advert for the auction in *The Times*, 23 July 1801, and then running continually throughout the rest of July and into August.
89. *Morning Post*, 27 May 1801.
90. Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. 3, ed. Kathryn Cave, Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 916. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 2 July 1802.
91. For a detailed account of the sale see Robert Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill: Architecture, Landscape and the Arts* (Croydon: Fonthill Media, 2016), 77–87.
92. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, Thursday 27 August 1801.
93. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 24 September 1801.
94. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 8, 2887–8 (entry for 16 October 1806); Douglas to Beckford, 27 November 1806, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.20, fols.14–15.
95. Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.30, f.175.
96. Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, chapters 7–8.
97. James Wyatt took pieces of wrought iron from the Fonthill staircase and incorporated them into his designs for the staircase that dominates the hall at Doddington Park. See John Martin Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 281–5.
98. This name first given to the house on an engraving by Thomas Higham after a view by John Buckler, published by Richard Colt Hoare, January 1829.
99. January 1790, reprinted in Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford* (London: Centaur Press, 1962), 156–7.
100. In 1796 Joseph Farington recorded in his diary a sketch based on a drawing Wyatt had shown him for a tower at Fonthill that he had made four years before. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 2, 612.
101. Beckford to Wyatt 10 April 1794, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.37, fols. 50–1.
102. The possibility that it was Wyatt who recommended Beckford should visit the monasteries is discussed by Aldrich, “William Beckford’s Abbey,” 118–9.
103. Beckford to Mrs Beckford, 29 November 1796, reprinted in Melville, *Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 221.
104. Beckford to Sir William Hamilton, 2 February 1797; Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 159.
105. RIBA K8/1, 1–3. John Wilton-Ely, “Beckford the Builder,” in *William Beckford*, exhibition catalogue (Wiltshire: Compton Press, 1976), 40–1.
106. In the collection of Bolton Museum and Art Gallery.
107. Ian Warrell, “William Beckford and the Rise – and Falls – of Fonthill Abbey,” in *Turner's Wessex: Architecture and Ambition* (London: Scala, 2015), 78–119.
108. Beckford to Sir Isaac Heard, 21 May 1800, reprinted in Melville, *Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 225.
109. *The Gentleman's Magazine* 71, April 1801, 297.
110. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 249.
111. West to Nicholas Williams, 5 January 1801, reprinted in Melville, *Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 238.
112. Diary of Anne Hamilton, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, e.4, fols. 2–15.
113. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1806, II, 1128.
114. James Storer, *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire* (London: W. Clarke, 1812), 9.
115. Descent of Mrs Beckford from William Latimer 1st Lord Latimer, College of Arms 4 Jan 1797, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS b8. Fols. 12–13.
116. 17 October 1817, reprinted in *Life at Fonthill*, ed. Boyd Alexander (London: Hart-Davis, 1957).
117. See Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 191 and endnote 1, 286.
118. For proposal to the Duke see Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 190–1.
119. For both the 1822 and 1823 sales see Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, chapters 10–11.
120. Notes on the sale of Fonthill, Bodleian Library, Beckford MS, c.30, fols. 124–5.
121. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 167.

Chapter 5

1. Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 92, pt. 2 (October, 1822): 291, in Robert J. Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill* (Croydon: Fonthill Media, 2016), 126.
2. Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, WRO 413/277.
3. Edward D. Ingraham (ed.), *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the English Ecclesiastical Courts* (Philadelphia: Nicklin and Johnson, 1822).
4. See Jon Millington, *William Beckford: A Bibliography* (Crockerton, Warminster: Beckford Society, 2008), 123.
5. John Timbs, *English Eccentrics* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866).

6. *The Annual Register, or, a view of the history, politics, and literature of the year 1826* (London: Baldwick, Cradock and Joy, 1827), 267.
7. *The Times*, 7 July 1836: lists houses Farquhar owned in Stratford Place, Gloucester Place, Harley Street, Howland Street, Golden Square and Warwick Street.
8. "John Farquhar," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
9. *The Times*, 1 October 1822.
10. "John Farquhar," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
11. James Everard, Baron Arundell, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1829), Vol. IV, part I, 27.
12. Aubrey Menen, *Fonthill* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 47.
13. "Fonthill," *Morning Herald*, 9 September 1823, 3.
14. See Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, 127.
15. J. P. Neale, *Graphical Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, the Seat of John Farquhar, Esq. With an Historical Description and Notices of Works of Art Formerly Preserved There* (London: 1824), 9.
16. For full list of responses to the 1823 sale see Millington, *William Beckford: A Bibliography*.
17. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill*, 141.
18. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 22 September 1823.
19. Charles Knight, *Passages of a Working Life during Half a Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1874), 310–11.
20. John Constable to Mrs Constable, 29 August 1823, in C. R. Leslie, R.A., ed., *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable* (London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 105.
21. Leslie, *Memoirs*, 105.
22. *Devon and Wiltshire Gazette*, 9 October 1823, quoted in Robert Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire: The Life of a County Member of Parliament 1773–1852* (East Knoyle: Hobnob Press, 2005), 143. Benett was to become tenant of Farquhar paying him rent of £3,663 a year.
23. Agreement dated 9 July 1819: Earl Grosvenor to pay Earl of Rosebery £71,750. Grosvenor Estate, 1049/2/box 6, consulted at Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
24. Sale of Manor of Gillingham 24 August 1821, Grosvenor Estate, Adds 2852/3. On 29 August 1822 the *Bath Chronicle* published a rumour that Earl Grosvenor had also bought Fonthill Abbey.
25. 'Valuation of Mr Whitaker's Estates at Motcombe by Mr John Gatehouse, 1820, £41,617.10.0 plus timber; Valuation of a capital mansion and sundry farms situate in the parish of Motcombe ... belonging to the trustees of the late Wm. Whitaker Esq.' In Grosvenor Estate Adds 2852/2. 6 July 1825, first payment of £11,000 made for Motcombe estate (total £51,000), Grosvenor Estate, 729/5/4/6.
26. Richard Peyton, Cooks Court, 5 April 1825, 'Report upon an Estate at Motcombe in the County of Dorset the Property of The Right Honorable the Earl Grosvenor,' Grosvenor Estate, Adds 2852/4. Peyton found 'the Tenants are generally speaking an easy unenterprising set of people. The buildings are very old and in much decay and the land has been greatly neglected.'
27. Gervase Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 32.
28. Neale, *Graphical Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*.
29. *The Times*, 8 December 1835.
30. Ingraham, *Reports of Cases*, 121.
31. Ingraham, *Reports of Cases*, 138.
32. *The Times*, 9 October 1824.
33. Arundel and Hoare, *History of Modern Wiltshire*, 27.
34. J. C. Loudon, "Notes on Gardens and Country Seats," *The Gardener's Magazine* XI (September 1835), 441–9, cited in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2003), 368.
35. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill*, 145, quoting Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill* vol. 2 (London: 1859), 258.
36. Wiltshire History Centre, WRO 413/69.
37. Mortimer's will, dated 2 July 1829, stated he had purchased the property from Farquhar, however it was 'not yet conveyed.' George Mortimer's will, 2 July 1829, National Archives: Prob 11/1814.
38. Some details of purchase can be found in Grosvenor Estate, 729/5/1.
39. Grosvenor Estate, 729/5/1 and 729/5/4 WCA 22.
40. P. M. Chitty to Farquhar, 26 February 1826: 'I hope you are improved in health since I had the pleasure of seeing you in London,' Grosvenor Estate, 729/5/1.
41. Farquhar moved from Upper Baker Street to Newland in 1823.
42. National Archives, Prob 31/1238/1398.
43. National Archives, Prob 31/1238/1398.
44. Farquhar's library was sold at Sotheby's on 1 March 1827: *Catalogue of the Entire Astronomical, Chemical, and Philosophical Library of the Late John Farquhar Esq. of Fonthill*.
45. Ingraham, *Reports of Cases*, 156.

46. Ingraham, *Reports of Cases*, 156.
47. See Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire*.
48. Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire*, 155.
49. Barry Williamson, *The Arundells of Wardour from Cornwall to Colditz* (East Knoyle: Hobnob Press, 2011), 149. Philip Chitty, the Shaftesbury solicitor of Earl Grosvenor and Arundell, wrote to Grosvenor on 14 September 1826 of his optimism that Lord Francis Gower might rent Wardour. This also fell through. See Grosvenor Estate, 729/1/1
50. Williamson, *The Arundells of Wardour*, 149.
51. 24 December 1827; Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire*, 157.
52. Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire*, 157.
53. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 5570, 28 April 1828.
54. C. Clark and W. Finnely, *Reports of Cases Heard and Decided in the House of Lords* vol. IV (London: W. T. Clark, 1849), 666–7.
55. Clark and Finnely, *Reports of Cases*, 684.
56. 1829 sale particulars, Fonthill Estate Archives.
57. *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, 10 October 1826, reported the manufactory had been recently completed.
58. *The Times*, 5 October 1826.
59. John Britton, *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire; with Heraldical and Genealogical Notices of the Beckford Family* (London: 1823), 32.
60. See Kenneth Rogers, “Wiltshire and Somerset Woollen Mills,” *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* lxiv (1976): 81. Wiltshire Cuttings i.63. v.30; Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, WRO 1780 sale catalogue; the article makes reference to the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* of 27 October 1825, 7 May 1829, 9 July 1829, 29 April 1830.
61. *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 7 May 1829.
62. Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, WR 413/69.
63. Britton, *Graphical and Literary Illustrations*, 32.
64. Arundell and Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire*, 28.

Chapter 6

1. James Combes to James Morrison, 30 May 1837, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
2. For further material on James Morrison, see Caroline Dakers, *A Genius for Money: Business, Art and the Morrisons* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).
3. Philip Beresford and William D. Rubinstein, *The Richest of the Rich* (King’s Lynn: Harriman House, 2007), 178.
4. See Fonthill Estate Archives A/07.
5. The surviving claimants were James Mortimer, John Fraser, Charlotte Mortimer, Mary Mortimer, Elizabeth Trezevant and Charlotte Fraser, wife of Sir William Templer Pole. James Mortimer maintained a link with Fonthill, occupying a small country house, Wyke Hall, a few miles further west into Dorset.
6. Document in Fonthill archive.
7. James Combes to Charles, eldest son of James Morrison, 19 November 1844, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
8. Wyatt Papworth, *John B. Papworth, Architect to the King of Wurttemberg; A Brief Record of his Life and Works* (London: 1879), 79.
9. Papworth, *John B. Papworth*, 79.
10. Papworth, *John B. Papworth*, 139.
11. Edward Boykin (ed.), *Victoria, Albert and Mrs Stevenson* (New York and Toronto: Rinehart, 1958), 26.
12. See accounts of Snells and Seddons in Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0204.
13. James Combes to James Morrison, 2 May 1838, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
14. Anonymous, *Coade’s Gallery or Exhibition in Artificial Stone, Westminster Bridge Road, Specimens from the Manufactory at King’s Arms Stairs Narrow-Wall Lambeth* (1799), 22, no. 37. Quoted in the sale catalogue entry for ‘Polyphemus’, Christie’s, 5 November 2014, sale 10474, lot 100.
15. Richard Alsop, see James Combes to James Morrison, 17 January 1836, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
16. John B. Papworth, *Rural Residences* (London: 1818), 21.
17. James Combes to James Morrison, 10 May 1840, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
18. J. B. Papworth to James Morrison, April 1840, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0205/1.
19. James Lampard to James Morrison, 19 April 1843, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0210.
20. Notes on drawing of Fonthill Bishop school, J. B. Papworth, RIBA, 104/1.

21. Colonel Chettle, "Two Centuries of Fonthill Gifford," n.d., 16, in Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, MSS 207, box 17.
22. Boykin, *Victoria, Albert and Mrs Stevenson*, 29.
23. *The Times*, 10 December 1830.
24. John Claudius Loudon, "Notes on Gardens and Country Seats," *The Gardener's Magazine*, XI (September 1835), 441, in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2003), 362.
25. Charlotte Lansdown, *Recollections of the Late William Beckford of Fonthill, Wilts and Lansdown, Bath* (Bath: 1893), 38–48, in Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill*, 374.
26. James Combes to James Morrison, 14 March 1832, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
27. John B. Nichols, *Historical Notices of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire* (London: 1836), 39.
28. John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: J. Rutter, 1823), 39
29. Charles Morrison to James Morrison [1835] Fonthill Estate Archives.
30. J. C. Loudon, "Notes on Gardens and Country Seats," in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill*, 364–7.
31. Robert Moody, *Mr Benett of Wiltshire: The Life of a County Member of Parliament 1773–1852* (East Knoyle: Hobnob Press, 2005), 256.
32. James Combes to James Morrison, 20 March 1838, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
33. James Morrison to John Benett, 7 July 1838, Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, 413/69.
34. See Chippenham 413/69.
35. James Combes to James Morrison, 31 December 1838, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
36. Charles Morrison to James Morrison, 9 October 1840, Fonthill Estate Archives, B/04/0872. 'I have read your & S's financial statements & plans, but am not able to understand them in every part – principally because I do not know in what position you stand, or what arrangements you propose to make with respect to 2 formidable items, the pay of the balc of the Basildon purchase money, & the £123,000 Over [Overend and Gurney] bills. I shall therefore say nothg on that head.'
37. 28 May 1838 contract between Marquess of Westminster and James Morrison; deeds of sale of Berwick St Leonard dated 20 January 1844 and 7 August 1845, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/08/0235-7.
38. James Combes to James Morrison, 25 March 1838, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
39. James Combes to James Morrison, 20 May 1837, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
40. Mabel Morrison, *The Quest of Joy* (London: Faber), n.d. [ca. 1937], 18.
41. Charlotte Lansdown, in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill*, 372.
42. Gervas Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 12.
43. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 52.
44. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 54.
45. Motcombe builder Uriah Maskell was awarded the contract to build a new church in 1846; when he died in 1867 he left over £9,000; see Laurence Clark, *A Motcombe Miscellany* (East Knoyle: Hobnob Press, 2012), 95–6.
46. Clark, *A Motcombe Miscellany*, 106–7.
47. John Benett to unnamed correspondent, n.d. [1844], Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, 413/69.
48. John Benett to John Parkinson, 22 August [1844], Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, 413/69.
49. John Benett to John Parkinson, n.d. [1844], Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, 413/69.
50. James Combes to James Morrison, 20 February 1845, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203. The sale was the only good news for Benett at the time. His eldest son and heir had become a Roman Catholic and died on 26 December 1844; his daughter died less than a month later.
51. Wiltshire History Centre, Chippenham, 413/376.
52. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 162.
53. James Combes to James Morrison, 27 March 1845, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203: 'The marquis' solicitor has apply'd for an answer to his question the other day viz. whether you are disposed to part with Berwick and Hindon.'
54. James Combes to James Morrison, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
55. Philip Chitty to James Morrison, 1845, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/08/0235-7.
56. Beresford and Rubinstein, *The Richest of the Rich*, 133.
57. J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 282.
58. James Morrison eventually owned over 100,000 acres, including estates at Fonthill, Basildon, Malham, Hole Park, Islay and Cholsey.
59. See Dakers, *A Genius for Money*.
60. David Brandon to James Morrison, 16 May 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/09/0333: 'to inspect the church at Basildon'.
61. See Michael Darby, "Owen Jones and the Eastern Ideal," Ph.D. diss., University of Reading, 1974, 158.
62. Owen Jones to James Morrison, 23 January, 30 January 1845, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0214.
63. Owen Jones, 'Dairy, Fonthill', no. 1705, International Exhibition, London, 1862.
64. John Martin Robinson, *The Wyatts: An Architectural Dynasty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 204.
65. See A.174, Prints and Drawings Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

66. James Combes to James Morrison, 28 June 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
67. James Combes to James Morrison, 19 July 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A07/0203.
68. Rev. W. Coxe Radcliffe to James Morrison, 1 March 1847, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0211.
69. See letters between James Combes, James Combes Junior, David Brandon and James Morrison for details of the progress of the building, all in the Fonthill Estate Archives.
70. David Brandon to James Morrison, 17 September 1849, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/09/0333.
71. 23 November 1850 settlement to include 'pictures prints statues maps books jewels coins medals articles of vertu plate china glass and other household goods and furniture now in or about ... Fonthill,' Fonthill Estate Archives. No inventory was made at the time, but Alfred certainly acquired two of his father's paintings, Van Dyck's *Queen Henrietta Maria* and Rembrandt's *Jewish Rabbi*, later included in Alfred's own inventory of heirlooms, Fonthill Estate Archives, M/2/1401.
72. Emily Grant to Mary Ann Morrison, 14 December 1850. Fonthill Estate Archives, H/01/1244.
73. David Brandon to James Morrison, 18 August 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/09/0333.
74. James Combes to James Morrison, 22 May 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
75. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 14. Anthony Trollope could well have been thinking of the Marquess of Westminster in his depiction of Mr Palliser (nephew of the Duke of Omnium) in his six 'Palliser' or 'Political' novels published between 1864 and 1880.
76. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 15.
77. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 20.
78. Diary of the Marchioness of Westminster, 16 April 1846, private collection in Somerset.
79. James Combes to James Morrison, 7 May 1846, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0203.
80. Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 22.
81. Nesfield was so busy he could only manage one visit to James Morrison at Basildon in 1846. See Fonthill Estate Archives, A/09/0936.
82. Diary of the Marquess of Westminster, 14 April 1848: 'We walked to the Stone Sculptor Mr Raymond Smith in the New Road & Home'; 8 March 1853: 'met Mr Nesfield at Raymond Smith's'. Private collection in Somerset.
83. N. Antonetti, "William Andrews Nesfield and the Origins of the Landscape Architect," *Landscape History* 33 (2012).
84. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 13 January 1847, private collection in Somerset.
85. W. Coxe Radcliffe, Rector of Fonthill Gifford, to James Morrison, 1 March 1847, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/07/0211.
86. Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 32.
87. James Combes Junior to James Morrison, 27 September 184: 'The Stalbridge estate and another ... is not yet disposed of – Ld Westminster has been nibbling at them for some time, but from what I can learn he is now lying off.' The Stalbridge estate was conveyed to the Marquess of Westminster on 10 October 1854. Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, RO D/484/15.
88. Lady Theodora Grosvenor, *Motcombe Past and Present* (Shaftesbury: 1867), 92.
89. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 1 September 1855: 'brought from Mr [Fuonis] a pasteboard model of Fonthill given to us by Mrs Whieldon'. Private collection in Somerset. This is the model acquired by John Benett when he bought the Abbey estate and included in his inventory of 1852. Presumably it was then acquired by Mrs Wheildon of Wyke Hall, Gillingham. Her first husband was James Farquhar, nephew of John Farquhar; Wyke Hall had been renovated by James Farquhar and the Farquhar coat of arms displayed inside and out.
90. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 6 March 1857, private collection in Somerset.
91. Diary of Marchioness of Westminster, 6 March 1857, private collection in Somerset.
92. Diary of Marchioness of Westminster, 11 March 1857, private collection in Somerset.
93. *The Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 26 July 1888.
94. Diary of Marchioness of Grosvenor, 27 April 57, private collection in Somerset.
95. The giant sequoia, or Wellingtonia (named after the 1st Duke of Wellington). The seeds were first brought to England in 1853.
96. Jill Allibone, *George Devey* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1991), 25.
97. Diary of Marchioness of Westminster, 27 April 1857, private collection in Somerset.
98. "Selim." "Two Cottages Dwellings for Labourers, Under One Roof," in *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture* vol. 1, ed. J. C. Loudon (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman), 1846, 184–5. Selim also contributed a design for the restoration of the manor house at Berwick St Leonard. This would wait for the attention of Hugh Morrison and Detmar Blow 60 years later, see Chapters 7 and 18 in this volume.
99. Information from Camilla Beresford and David Mason, *Durability Guaranteed Pulhamite Rockwork – its Conservation and Repair*, ed. John D. Stewart and Jennifer White, 7 January 2008, <https://historicing-land.org.uk/images-books/publications/durability-guaranteed-pulhamite-rockwork/>.
100. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, private collection in Somerset. On 30 April 1860 the Marquess wrote 'Ly W went in the Phaeton ... to Fonthill to meet Mr Pulham about rockery work for the American Garden. I rode over & Thinned Trees'. On 16 April 1862 'we met Mr Pulham to arrange the rockery & works'.

101. James Pulham, *Picturesque Ferneries and Rock-Garden Scenery* (London: ca. 1877).
102. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 11, 12 September 1862, private collection in Somerset.
103. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 23 June, 25 and 27 September 1862, private collection in Somerset. The urns are listed, but the description is vague, suggesting they were bought at the Paris International Exhibitions of 1855 or 1867. The diaries suggest the 1862 International Exhibition in London is a more likely source.
104. Grosvenor Papers, 1049/2/3/53.
105. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 18 August 1865, private collection in Somerset.
106. See Christie's sales 27 May and 23 September 2010. But they are more likely to have been bought at the 1862 International Exhibition than the 1851 Great Exhibition (before the new Abbey was built).
107. Diary of Marchioness of Westminster, 15 July 1865, private collection in Somerset.
108. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, 14 September 1863: 'settled to rebuild church at Fonthill – Ly W went to see Mr Ratcliffe about it'. Private collection in Somerset.
109. James Everard, Baron Arundell, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1829), 22.
110. *The Builder*, 14 August 1880, quoted in Robinson, *The Wyatts*, 218.
111. Robinson, *The Wyatts*, 218.
112. Robinson, *The Wyatts*, 225.
113. Diary of Marquess of Westminster, private collection in Somerset.
114. 'The improvements which have been carried out in the gardens and grounds [of Fonthill Abbey] during the interval from the year 1865 – 1881 testify to the skill and ability of the late gardener Mr Annandale,' *Journal of Horticulture*, 26 July 1888.
115. Grosvenor Papers, 1049/6/8.
116. Hugh, born 1825, married 1852 to his first cousin Lady Constance Leveson-Gower, in the presence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert; Eleanor, born 1820, married 1842 Lord Prudhoe, who became Duke of Northumberland; Mary, born 1821, married 1842 Lord Parker, who became Earl of Macclesfield; Elizabeth, born 1824, married 1846 Richard Lawley to become Baron Wenlock; Caroline, born 1828, married 1848 William Leigh, to become Baron Leigh; Octavia, born 1829, married 1852 Sir Michael Shaw Stewart; Agnes, born 1831, married 1858 Sir Archibald Campbell – he died 1866 – she then married a doctor, Philip Frank, in 1871; Jane, born 1834, married 1855 Baron Muncaster – he died 1862 – she then married Hugh Lindsay in 1863.
117. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 29 April 1867, private collection in Somerset: '[to] the Old Castle [Wardour] got off & inspected it thoroughly (with a view to the Gentleman's Mag)'.
118. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 13 August 1867, private collection in Somerset.
119. The 3rd Marquess, the future Duke of Westminster, had an income of £37,000 a year from country property and £115,000 from London. He carried on the work of his father – at Eaton building 48 farmhouses, 360 cottages, 8 schools, 7 village halls and 3 churches. See Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 1.
120. Fonthill Archive, F/1/1100. The property was made up as follows: Fonthill estate £157,690; Porton estate £16,380; additional inheritance from James Morrison £245,000; Chesapeake and Delaware Railway Shares £10,227; Philadelphia City Loan shares £20,986; Delaware Division Canal Bank shares £16,363.
121. For further details of Alfred Morrison's collection see Caroline Dakers, *A Genius for Money*. By coincidence, the Marquess of Westminster's youngest son, Richard de Aquila Grosvenor, witnessed the burning of the Summer Palace in 1860.
122. For further information on Owen Jones, Jackson and Graham see Clive Edwards, "The firm of Jackson and Graham," *Furniture History* XXXIV (1998): 238–65.
123. See 'estimate of account' in Fonthill Estate Archives, total £4,232, F/2/1121.
124. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 28 August 1864, private collection in Somerset.
125. Receipt from Jackson and Graham for £2,500 dated 10 July 1868, presumably for London work, Fonthill Estate Archives, F/2/1121.
126. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 53.
127. Walter Hinds Godfrey, "George Devey FRIBA," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (19 September 1906): 516.
128. For all Devey drawings relating to Fonthill see RIBA PB 809/DEV [49] 1–11.
129. Devey invoice, December 1864, Fonthill Estate Archives F/2/1121.
130. Fonthill Estate Archives F/2/1121.
131. Account book of George Devey, RIBA Prints and Drawings, DeG/1/1.
132. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 2 September 1866 and 10 September 1866, private collection in Somerset.
133. W. W. G., "Wiltshire Downs and Down Farming," in "Scrapbook of Agricultural Press-cuttings 1882–1883," Fonthill Estate Archives.
134. Madeline Wyndham to Mary, Lady Elcho, 22 October 1885, Stanway Estate Papers.

135. Caroline Dakers, *Clouds: The Biography of a Country House* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 72.
136. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 18 November 1869, private collection in Somerset.
137. See Caroline Dakers, "George Aitchison 1825–1910: An Overview," in *George Aitchison: Leighton's Architect Revealed* (London: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2011), 20–1.
138. *The Builder*, 11 May 1872.
139. His first wife (married 1874) was Beatrice Vesey, youngest daughter of the 3rd Viscount de Vesci of Abbey Leix; his second (1879) was Eleanor Hamilton-Stubbs, a neighbour of the Vescis in Moyne.
140. The Marchioness of Westminster to Robert Annandale, 15 May 1874, Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D1452/1.
141. Diary of Lady Theodora Grosvenor, 13 August 1874, private collection in Somerset. Disraeli visited the Marchioness again in 1878 at Barcote.
142. Lady Theodora Grosvenor laid the foundation stone on 25 May 1871.
143. *The Architect*, 12 November 1879, 267, in Robinson, *The Wyatts*, 226.
144. Diary of Marchioness of Westminster, 30 August 1875, private collection in Somerset.
145. 9 November 1876, entry in the journal of Lady Layard, <http://www.browningguide.org/browningcircle.php> – complete journal in British Library.
146. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 169.
147. The Marchioness of Westminster to Robert Annandale, 22 January 1877, Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D/1452.1.

Chapter 7

1. Grosvenor Estate, 1049/2/3/53 (papers consulted at the Cheshire Archives and Local Studies).
2. Laurence Clark, *A Motcombe Miscellany* (East Knoyle: Hobnob Press, 2012), 8.
3. Journal of Lady Layard, 14 October 1892, <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupid?key=olbp44302>.
4. Elspeth Huxley, *Nellie: Letters from Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 9.
5. George Aitchison, "Untitled," *Builders' Journal* (24 June 1896), 317.
6. Hilary J. Grainger, *The Architecture of Sir Ernest George* (Reading: Spire, 2011), 190.
7. Hermann Muthesius, *The English House* (St Albans: Granta Publishing, 1979), 90. The old house was demolished and the materials used by George Prideaux for his new house in Motcombe – see Huxley, *Nellie*, 19.
8. Mortgage agreement dated 18 January 1894, Grosvenor Estate, ADDS 2576/6.
9. Huxley, *Nellie*, 20.
10. In 1894 the property comprised Stalbridge (4,769 acres and a rental income of £9,363); Motcombe (8,835 acres and a rental income of £15,363); and Shaftesbury (rent £4,492). Grosvenor Estate, ADDS 2576/6.
11. Lady Alice's aunt was Beatrice Vesey, the first wife of Richard Baron Stalbridge. Stalbridge was Lady Octavia Shaw Stewart's brother.
12. Silver-gilt trays and tazza, sold Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury, 27 January 2010; late sixteenth-century Flemish school, *The Knight of the Golden Fleece*, sold Christie's, 6 July 2010; Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Lady and her Maid Chastising a Spaniel*, sold Christie's, 6 July 2010; Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, sold Sotheby's, 7 December 1927, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; Jan van Huysum, *Still Life with Flowers*, sold Sotheby's, London, 7 December 1927, on loan to Dulwich Picture Gallery.
13. Murillo, *The Vision of Saint Anthony of Padua*, sold Christie's, 7 December 2010, lot 196, as 'studio of Murillo', and Giovanni Bellini, *The Madonna and Child in a Landscape*, bought by Agnews from the Dudley sale, sold to Sir Michael Shaw Stewart for 1,100 guineas, sold Christie's, 6 July 2010, for £3,513,250.
14. See Christopher L. Maxwell, "The Dispersal of the Hamilton Palace collection" (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2014).
15. In the 1911 census her unmarried son Archibald was staying at Fonthill Abbey.
16. At Wardour, the 12th Lord Arundell died in 1906 without an heir. His widow was left the estate for her lifetime. A cousin, Gerald Arundell, was named as heir and lived with his wife in the east wing, unable to prevent the Dowager making erratic decisions about the estate up to her death in 1934. Wardour never recovered: most of the estate was sold in 1946, the New Wardour Castle was sold to the Jesuits in 1947 and most of the contents of New Wardour Castle were sold in 1948. At Pythouse, Vere Fane Benett died in 1894, a few years after taking out a mortgage of £104,000 to pay for extensions to the house, a yacht and an estate in Madeira. He left the estate to his widow who lived until 1932. She married again and moved out in 1905 but their son Jack Benett was not legally recognised as owner of the property until 1938. He died in 1947, his widow in 1957, when the mansion was sold to the Mutual Houses Association and converted into apartments.
17. Huxley, *Nellie*, 26–7.

18. Among his purchases was an exquisite rock-crystal vase once owned by Rubens, and now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.
19. Entry in diary of Hugh Morrison, 22 December 1897, Fonthill Estate Archives, M/01/1379.
20. Unidentified source, in scrapbook of obituaries kept by Hugh Morrison, Fonthill Estate Archives, M/01/1385.
21. Will of Alfred Morrison, Fonthill Estate Archives, F/05/1179.
22. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/2/1415.
23. Colonel Benett Stanford of Pythouse, "Notes for History of Fonthill," Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, MSS 207, box 17.
24. Colonel Benett Stanford, Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, MSS 207, box 17.
25. E.O.G., "Notable Personalities. The Late Charles Morrison," *The Agricultural and Horticultural Review*, August 1909.
26. Hugh's brother Archie Morrison was left Basildon and the art collection of James Morrison, also £270,000 trust legacy to provide him with an income to live at Basildon, an agricultural estate at Cholsey and leases on London commercial properties.
27. *The Builder*, 6 February 1914.
28. Reg Harris, "Memoirs," deposited in Fonthill Estate Archives.
29. Lady Mary Morrison to Hugh, 24 June 1909, N/01, Fonthill Estate Archives.
30. Mabel to Hugh Morrison, 6 June 1909, G/01, Fonthill Estate Archives.
31. Mabel eventually bought Shawford House near Winchester, a large country house dating from the late seventeenth century, with 60 acres and a model farm. In 1923 she downsized to Littleton, Highcliffe-on-Sea, an eight-bedroom house. She died in 1934. Fonthill Estate Archives, G/1/1202; G/1/1212; G/1/1209.
32. Caroline Dakers, *Forever England: The Countryside at War 1914–1918* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 200.
33. Lord Margadale to Peter Walker, Secretary of State for the Environment, 12 June 1972. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
34. Newspaper cutting from the *Salisbury and Wiltshire Journal*, 3 April 1915, in Fonthill Estate Archives.
35. M/21418, Fonthill Estate Archives.
36. Newspaper article, 21 July 1921, in *Wiltshire Cuttings* 16, 192, Wiltshire Museum, Devizes.
37. Huxley, *Nellie*, 3.
38. Grosvenor Estate, ADDS 2576/9.
39. When the house was acquired by Dorset County Council for Shaftesbury School, the Owen Jones pieces were sold through Sotheby's.
40. Cecil Beaton, *Ashcombe: The Story of a Fifteen-year Lease* (Wimborne: Dovecote Press, 1999), 6.
41. Viscount Hambleden was another patron of Detmar Blow, commissioning North Bovey House on Dartmoor.
42. Christie's, 19 March 1936, *Fine Chinese Enamelled Porcelain*; 7 May 1936, *Fine French and English Furniture*; 8 December 1938, *Porcelain and Objects of Art*.
43. At university, 'in spite of every influence exerted by his family, he could not be helped to a degree. He spent far too much time on sport, and far too much of his allowance on fox-hunting' – Patrick Cosgrave, "Obituary of Lord Margadale," *The Guardian*, 29 May 1996.
44. Fonthill Estate Archives, A/080269.
45. James Morrison's agent James Combes wrote to him on 8 April 1838: 'I always suspected the place was built above Hindon by Mr Beckford and I dare say such was the fact, and now it is finished and fit for occupation it is to be sold – the valet is not dead but says he does not like the place.' Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203.
46. Fonthill Estate Archives, A/8/0293.
47. Sotheby's, 7 December 1927.
48. See Maxwell, "Dispersal of the Hamilton Palace Collection."
49. Conveyance of Motcombe estate, 19 November 1925, Grosvenor Estate, Adds 2576/12; Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D-HDS/SP/125/40.
50. Sale particulars, 14 March 1929, Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D/484/13/7.
51. Clark, *Motcombe Miscellany*, 73.
52. See reports in *The Times*, 13 July 1936 and 14 July 1936.
53. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/24/2517.
54. John Harris, *No Voice From the Hall: Early Memories of a Country House Snooper* (London: John Murray, 1998), 4.
55. See Fonthill Women's Institute History, S/24/2523, Fonthill Estate Archives; Rex Sawyer (nadderstories), "Tisbury at War," BBC WW2 People's War. Contributed on 14 April 2005, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/97/a3895897.shtml>.
56. Patrick Cosgrave, "Obituary of Lord Margadale," *The Guardian*, 29 May 1996.
57. Will of May Beatrice Shaw Stewart.
58. A/08/0241 and further material from the Fonthill Estate Archives unless otherwise cited.
59. J. G. Morrison to G. N. Rawlence, 5 September 1946, Fonthill Estate Archives.
60. J. G. Morrison to G. N. Rawlence, 24 September 1946, Fonthill Estate Archives.

61. April 1947 agreement, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/17/2139.
62. Stephen Scammell, report to G. N. Rawlence on the options proposed by Imrie, 31 March 1947, Fonthill Estate Archives.
63. H. W. Pook to Rawlence & Squarey, 18 November 1940, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/17/2140.
64. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/17/2140.
65. Bothams & Brown to Sir Dawson Bates, 25 June 1953, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/17/2140.
66. Fonthill Estate Archives, A/08/0269.
67. Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Houses* (London: Aurum, 2002), 19.
68. Letter with illegible signature regarding Hays House, to Mr Cox, Fonthill Estate Office, 21 June 1956, Fonthill Estate Archives S/17/2140.
69. Cosgrave, "Obituary."
70. Cosgrave, "Obituary."
71. Christie's: 31 May 1965, *Chinese 18th and 19th Century Porcelain*; 2 July 1965, *Important Pictures by Old Masters*; 12 July 1965, *Fine Arms and Armour*; 23 July 1965, *The Collection of Coins and Medals (Part 1) formed by the Late Alfred Morrison Esq. Sold by Order of his Grandson The Right Honourable The Lord Margadale of Islay, T.D. removed from Fonthill House*; 1 October 1965, *Ethnographica, Antiquities and Islamic Pottery*; 1 March 1966; 1 May 1966, *Objects of Art Important French and Other Continental Furniture Tapestries, Rugs and Carpets*; 4 April 1967, *Coins and Medals*.
72. J. Mordaunt Crook, "Review of Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Houses* (London: Aurum, 2002)," *The Times Literary Supplement* (21 June 2002): 20.
73. 27 November 1970, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/11/2018.
74. 27 November 1970, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/11/2018.
75. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
76. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1927.
77. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
78. G. F. McDonic to Lord Margadale, 9 June 1971, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1927.
79. "How Fonthill was Missed," *The Times Diary*, 12 June 1972.
80. Trenwith Wills to Lord Margadale, 25 November 1971, Fonthill Estate Archives S/7/1926.
81. In the opinion of Michael Drury; see [Chapter 18](#) in this volume.
82. Young, "How Fonthill was Missed."
83. Also see Lord Margadale to Stephen Weeks: "The house contained 125 rooms and was totally uneconomic to run," 4 April 1972, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
84. Lord Margadale to David, Earl of Perth, 20 November 1972, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
85. Other sales at Christie's in 1971 were 22 June 1971, *Important Old Master Engravings, Etchings and Lithographs*; 25 June 1971, *Highly Important Pictures by Old Masters*; 18 October 1971, *The Collection of Chinese Enamelled Porcelain, Cloisonne and Canton Enamels and a Jade Brush Pot formed by the late Alfred Morrison, Esq. which totalled £76,920*; 10 November 1971, *Dolls, Toys, Automata, Costume, Lace and Textiles*; 16 November 1971, *Japanese Swords, Sword Fittings, Prints and other Works of Art*; 19 November 1971, *Fine Pictures by Old Masters*; 23 November 1971, *Commemorative Medals, Orders and Decorations*; 26 November 1971, *Important Pictures by Old Masters*; 30 November 1971, *Fine Gold Boxes and Works of Art*; 7 December 1971, *African, Oceanic and American Indian Art, Classical, Egyptian and Western Asiatic Antiquities and Ancient Jewellery*; 10 December 1971, *Fine English Pictures c.1700–c.1850*; 15 December 1971, *Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures*.
86. John Cornforth, *The Inspiration of the Past* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 85.

Chapter 8

1. Roy Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries* (London: Phoenix, 1998), 141.
2. Ruth Adams, "The V&A, the Destruction of the Country House and the creation of 'English Heritage'," *Museum and Society* 11, no. 1, March 2013, 7.
3. Adams, *The V&A*, 7.
4. Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries*, 141.
5. "Demolition," *The Observer*, 13 October 1974.
6. Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Houses* (London, Aurum: 2002), 172.
7. John Martin Robinson, *The Last Country Houses* (London: Bodley Head, 1984), 73.
8. Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1927.
9. Simonne Wills sent elevations of the new house to Lady Margadale on 16 January 1973; S/7/1929.
10. Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly* (Barcelona, 1986), 28. See also Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada, "Building of the Month August 2004: Alison and Peter Smithson's Upper

- Lawn Pavilion.” Twentieth Century Society, accessed 12 January 2018. <https://c20society.org.uk/botm/alison-peter-smithsons-upper-lawn-pavilion>.
11. Conveyance dated 3 August 1977, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/08/0241.
 12. See Erica Brown, “For a Victorian Spirit, A Serendipitous Collection,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1983, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/02/10/garden/for-a-victorian-spirit-a-serendipitous-collection.htm>. Information also from Anna Buruma, archivist of Liberty London.
 13. Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Oxford: Verso: 2009), 2.
 14. John Martin Robinson in *The Aristocracy: Survival of the Fittest*, BBC television, 19 February 1997.
 15. J. Mordaunt Crook, “Review of Giles Worsley, *England’s Lost Houses*,” in *The Times Literary Supplement* (21 June 2002): 20.
 16. Alastair Morrison, 3rd Lord Margadale, pers. comms., 2017.
 17. Stephen and Benetta Morant, pers. comms., 2017. Fanny Nisbet was the first wife of Horatio Nelson, who visited Fonthill Abbey in 1800, but not with Fanny; he was accompanying his mistress Emma Hamilton and her husband Sir William Hamilton.
 18. François Pinault, founder of the luxury goods company PPR, which includes Gucci, bought the West House in 2011 for £20 million.

Chapter 9

1. PAST Landscapes is a collaborative research project based at Salisbury Museum, which aims to understand south-west Wiltshire in the later prehistoric and Roman periods.

Chapter 10

1. Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford’s Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (Norwich: Michael Russell (Publishing) Ltd, 2003), 92.
2. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Milford, 1918). ‘Pied Beauty’.
3. Isobel Geddes, “The Landscape’s Rock Foundations,” *Journal of the Bath Geological Society* 31 (2012): 22.
4. The Journal of Elizabeth Hervey, Stafford Record Office D6584/C Journal 21 July 4 1797: ‘a new terrace, a very bleak spot in my opinion, nor can think it will be tolerable ‘til the plantations have at least 30 years growth.’
5. Ploughland is not a term used with great precision, referring as it does to the amount of land that could be ploughed in a season by a team of oxen, six to eight in number. That has been taken to amount to somewhere about 120 acres (see *Oxford English Dictionary*; under Carucate). It is not an exact term of measurement and relates to tax assessment rather than surveying. For a discussion about ploughlands in this part of England see “Introduction to the Somerset Domesday,” *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 1* (1906), 383–432. Accessed 2 July 2014, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117314>. Clearly, the measurement could not be exact since it would depend on ground conditions, and the quality of the plough team.
6. Thomas Tusser, *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie* (London: n.p., 1557); Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (London: n.p., 1573).
7. Quite apart from any religious observance, under the so-called Cecil’s Fast, an Act of 1563 to ‘increase the Navy and fishing’, it became an offence not to eat fish on Wednesdays, Fridays or during Lent. People living away from coastal areas were not exempt and so had to rely on fish ponds for the supply of the necessary fish.
8. Public Record Office SP 14/192 ff 107-9; see also Jane Freeman and Janet H. Stevenson, “Parishes: Fonthill Gifford,” in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume XIII, South-West Wiltshire: Chalke and Dunworth Hundreds*, ed. D. A. Crowley (London: Victoria County History, 1987). <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol13/pp155-169>.
9. For a fuller discussion of this topic see Margaret Willes, *The Making of the English Gardener: Plants, Books and Inspiration. 1560–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
10. Christopher Michael Woolgar, Dale Sergeantson and Tony Waldron, *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
11. Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002).
12. Like many terms the meaning of a ‘coronary garden’ has enlarged over time. Originally it was a place for the growing of plants to make wreaths and victor’s crowns, hence the name. At some stage it came to describe a place for the growing of flowers suitable for the making of garlands. By the seventeenth century it had come to mean a place for the growing of special plants, including valuable recent introductions of a kind that one might not wish the general run of visitors to see (or have the opportunity to pinch).

13. Now published as John Evelyn, *Elysium Britannicum, or the Royal Gardens*, ed. John E. Ingram (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
14. Edward Pocock, a churchman, became professor of Arabic at Oxford University. He was chaplain to the English merchants in Aleppo from 1630–5 and returned to the Near East for three years in 1637, basing himself in Constantinople.
15. These measurements have been carried out by Roy Wilde and they lead him to suggest a likely planting date of 1639. It is evident that, in any event, there was the planting of *Cedrus libani* at Fonthill in the second half of the eighteenth century, as was the fashion of the day.
16. John Phibbs, *Place-Making: The Art of Capability Brown* (Swindon: Historic England, 2017), 104.
17. Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), chapter 6.
18. Boyd Alexander, *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain 1787–1788* (Stroud: Nonsuch Publishing Ltd., 1954, reprinted 2006), 72.
19. Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Mere*, Vol. II (1822): 63.
20. Jean Huber (1721–86), soldier, artist and confidant of Voltaire at Ferney, became a father figure for Beckford during his stay in Geneva. He and his two sons, François (1750–1831), an artist, and Jean-Daniel (1754–1845), an authority on the honey-bee, were dedicated naturalists.
21. Timothy Mowl, *William Beckford: Composing for Mozart* (London: John Murray, 1998), 133.
22. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (London: Penguin Classics, 2004. First published 1782).
23. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or La Nouvelle Heloise*, trans. Judith H. McDowell (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987). ‘I thought I saw the wildest, the most solitary place in nature’ ... ‘It is true’, she said, ‘that nature has done everything, but under my direction and there is nothing here that I have not ordered ...’ Book IV, Letter XI.
24. Gerald Luckhurst, “Monserrate, an English Landscape Garden in Portugal 1790–1901,” Ph.D. diss., University Of Bristol, 2015. <http://uk.bl.ethos.684645>.
25. Literally a ‘Friesian horse’. The people of Friesland, having few horses themselves, created portable barriers with wooden spikes to defend themselves against cavalry.
26. “An Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill,” *The European Magazine and London Review*, 1797, 104.
27. William Bankes, “William Bankes’ Account of His Surreptitious Visit to Fonthill,” *Beckford Journal* 1 (1995). First published 1811.
28. From the Journal of Elizabeth Hervey (Beckford’s step-sister), Stafford Record Office C 6584 Journal 22, 28 July 1797.
29. It appears that in the early stages of the construction of the Abbey some visitors would not be allowed to see the building work. Stafford Record Office C 6584 Journal 22, 1 August 1797.
30. It is said that from Stop Beacon, with a glass, both Exeter Cathedral and the Isle of Wight can be seen.
31. Paulus Potter (1625–54), a Dutch painter and etcher celebrated for his paintings of animals within landscapes. Meister’s reference to his work suggests that there were quite a number of grazing animals to be seen on his tour.
32. Henry Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England* (London: Longman, 1799), 302.
33. A fever recurring every three days, usually associated with malaria but here just an example of Beckford’s literary embroidery.
34. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 38: Beckford to Douglas, 18 July 1807.
35. Michael Symes, “The Many Faces of the Landscape Garden,” in *The English Landscape Garden in Europe*. (Swindon: Historic England, 2016).
36. Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, entry 1000322.
37. Fiona Cowell, *Richard Woods (1715–1793), Master of the Pleasure Garden* (Martlesham: Boydell Press, 2010).
38. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 32. Beckford to Franchi (his secretary), 2 October 1807.
39. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 172. Beckford to Franchi, 25 November 1816.
40. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting* (London: n.p., 1798).
41. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 109. Beckford to Franchi 17 June 1812.
42. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 82. Beckford to Franchi 6 July 1810.
43. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 81. Beckford to Franchi 22 June 1810.
44. For a fuller discussion of Beckford’s planting at the Abbey see Kazuhiko Yamaguchi, “The Fonthill Legend: William Beckford’s Landscape Architecture,” *Shinshu University Journal of Educational Research* 6 (2000): 97–113.
45. Journal of Elizabeth Hervey, Stafford Record Office C 6584, 1797.
46. Laurent Châtel, *William Beckford; The Elusive Orientalist* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 19
47. Min Wood, “Landscape as Biography,” *Beckford Journal* 16 (2010).

48. J. Sidney Taylor, *Morning Chronicle*, 15 September 1823, reproduced in Robert J. Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill; Architecture, Landscape and the Arts* (Fonthill Media, 2016), 193.
49. Henry Pickering, *Ruins of Paestum: and Other Compositions in Verse* (Salem, MA: Cushing, 1822), 53–5 (“On the Alienation of Fonthill”).
50. Min Wood, “The Search for Elysium; the Naturesque in England and Wales,” M.A. diss., Bristol University, 2010.
51. James Stephens Curl and Susan Wilson, *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
52. Mark Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening 1650–1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).
53. Douglas D. C. Chambers, *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden; Botany, Trees and the Georgics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 112. Letter from Bartram to Collinson 1 September 1741.
54. Michael Symes, *A Glossary of Garden History* (Princes Risborough: Shire Publications, 2000).
55. Later also adopted by Prince Hermann Pückler-Muskau; see his *Hints on Landscape Gardening*, trans. Bernard Sickert (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917). First published 1834.
56. Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.
57. William Robinson, *The Wild Garden*, 4th edn (London: John Murray, 1894).
58. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 172. Beckford to Douglas, 25 November 1816.
59. In spite of the attention he had lavished on Bitham Lake, and the important part it played and still plays in the landscape within the Barrier, fearing the expense of repairing the embankment Beckford went as far as giving orders for the lake bed to be turned into a meadow. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822*, 206.
60. John Claudius Loudon, “Notes on Gardens and Country Seats,” *The Gardener’s Magazine* XI (September 1835): 441–9.
61. H. A. N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill* (London: Werner Laurie, 1956), 201.
62. For an account of the Pulham family see Claude Hitchens and Jenny Lilly, *Rock Landscapes, The Pulham Legacy* (Woodbridge: Garden Art Press, 2012).
63. A lingering reminder of these were the two huge gryphons which stood in the Old Park until the 1980s.
64. Kate Feluś, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden; Beautiful Objects and Agreeable Retreats* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
65. The *Davidia involucrata* or Handkerchief Tree was not introduced until 1901, and therefore must be a planting by the Grosvenors, who were, on the evidence of contemporary photographs, taking good care of the American Ground at that time.

Chapter 11

1. A portrait of the Alderman Beckford, of ca. 1760–70 and attributed to Tilly Kettle (1734–86), is in the Parliamentary Art Collection. It was bought in 1952 for £5. Beckford is seen holding in his right hand, a plank of wood, a piece of 3 x 2 inches, a builder’s level or measure, which is marked with numbers at the top. It was exhibited in *William Beckford* (Bath: Holburne of Menstrie Museum, 1966), 18.
2. See, for instance, Ian Warrell, *Turner’s Wessex. Architecture and Ambition* (London: Scala, 2015), 76–119.
3. Written by Arthur M. Templeton, Junior, which was a pseudonym for an unknown writer; see “A Second Visit to Fonthill Abbey, New European Magazine, 1823,” in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford’s Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2003), Appendix I, 306.
4. Gouache and watercolour on several sections of seventeenth-century handmade laid paper, attached to a wooden panel, 43.3 x 72.3 cm. Areas of the image were latterly overpainted with gouache. Conservation work on the picture has been carried out by Heather Norville-Day, print, drawing and watercolour conservator, to whom the author is most grateful for information concerning the painting.
5. John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House* (London: Sotheby, 1979), 88–9, 99, n.2.
6. See Andrew Clark, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, described by Himself, collected from his Diaries and Other Papers* (Oxford: Printed for the Oxford Historical Society at the Clarendon Press, 1894), vol. III, 1682–1695, 206–7.
7. See Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day. A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 393.
8. Derek Howse, *Francis Place and the Early History of the Greenwich Observatory* (New York: Science History Publications, 1975), 23. The volume illustrates the complete set. See also Simon Turner, “View of Tangier by Robert Thacker and Thomas Phillips,” *Print Quarterly* XXXII (2015): 395–411.
9. British Library, Harley MS 5947.
10. See Antony Griffiths, *The Print in Stuart Britain, 1603–1689* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 277–8.
11. John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, 92a and 92b.

12. John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, 89.
13. Gouache on panel, signed lower left, 39.5 x 55.5 cm.
14. It was exhibited in *The Age of Charles II*, Royal Academy, 1960, (547), as by 'R. Thacher', *The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary*, catalogue ed. John Dixon Hunt and Erik de Jong, published as a double issue of *Garden History* VIII (April to September 1988), nos. 2 and 3, Apeldorn Rijksmuseum Paleis Het Loo, 31 August–30 November 1988 and London, Christie's 3 January–3 February 1989, 248–250, no. 101a, with plate, wrongly captioned as 101b. See also Mark Laird, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 28, figs. 12, and 182, and *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle*, eds. Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 150, fig. 142.
15. John Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire* vol. I (London: published by the proprietors, 1801), 234–5.
16. James Storer, *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire* (London: W. Clarke, 1812), 12.
17. John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: J. Rutter, 1823) 16, and Appendix A, 105.
18. Published as 'Fonthill (in 1566)' in Storer, *Description of Fonthill Abbey*.
19. Illustrated in John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire – I. Alderman Beckford's Houses," *Country Life* 140 (24 November 1966): 1370, fig. 2. Another engraving, with slight differences, and mistakenly entitled *Fonthill Abbey (in 1566)*, was engraved by J. & H. S. Storer, and published by Sherwood & Co. in 1822.
20. Oil on canvas, 162.5 x 196 cm., signed bottom right of centre, inv. no. 7074.
21. John Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire*, 234.
22. Phillips, Seventeenth Day's Sale, 1 October 1823 (lot 722).
23. Phillips, 9 July 1825 (lot 26).
24. Christie's, 5 March 1900 (lot 94), bought Parsons. It was later with S. J. Smith & Son of 42 Duke Street, St James's, London and sold by them at Christie's, 12 December 1903 (lot 85), bought Johnson for £9.9s. – this was probably Oscar Johnson, the dealer.
25. From whom it was bought by Gooden & Fox, dealers, London.
26. Harris, 'Fonthill, Wiltshire', Holburne of Menstrie, 19.
27. Watercolour and graphite on medium, slightly textured, cream wove paper, 22.7 x 22.7 cm., acc. no. B1975.2.25.
28. Elizabeth Einberg, "Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of George Lambert," *Walpole Society* LXIII (2001): 143 (P1740B).
29. Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 109 cm. See J. Harris, "Neglected Views of Britain," *Country Life* (11 July 1991): 81–2.
30. John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 16.
31. Phillips, 11 July 1825 (lot 109).
32. Christie's, 15 June 2001 (lot 57).
33. Einberg, "Catalogue Raisonné," 142–3 (P1740A).
34. Both oil on canvas, 86.3 x 124.4 cm. The attribution was very kindly communicated by Charles Beddington, the specialist on the works of Joli, on an inspection of the paintings on 17 February 2017.
35. See Edward Croft Murray, "The Painted Hall in Heidegger's House at Richmond - I and II," *Burlington Magazine* 78 (April and May 1941), 105–113 and 154–9 for Joli's work in England, and which also lists English subjects painted by him.
36. Francis Russell, "Canaletto and Joli at Chesterfield House," *Burlington Magazine* 130 (August 1988): 627–30.
37. Phillips, 22 August 1807 (lots 600, 601, 602, 603).
38. For his father's collection, see Jeannie Chapel, "William Beckford: Collector of Old Master Paintings, Drawings, and Prints," in *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 230–1.
39. Henry Venn Lansdown, *Recollections of the late William Beckford of Fonthill, Wilts and Lansdown, Bath* (Bath: Facsimile Edition, 1969), 14, and Sidney Blackmore, "The Bath Years: 1822–44," in Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 270.
40. See Charles Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England: A Venetian Artist Abroad* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006), 140–2.
41. See Michael Liversidge and Jane Farrington, eds, *Canaletto & England* (London: M. Holberton in association with Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1993), 103.
42. John Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire*, vol. I, 234. In his notes for this publication, in the John Britton Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Eng. Misc. d222, 13, he described them as 'Large Landscapes of Views of the Old House at fonthill.' Information kindly supplied by Philip Hewat-Jaboor.
43. They were listed by James Storer, 12.
44. Phillips, 25 September 1823, 136 (lot 291).
45. James Everard, Baron Arundell, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1829), vol. 2, pl. III. It is illustrated in John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire – I. Alderman Beckford's Houses," *Country Life*, 140, 24 November 1966, 1370, fig. 3.
46. Included in list of Alfred Morrison's heirlooms, 1896, Fonthill Estate Archives.

47. Beckford to Franchi, 13 November 1814, in Boyd Alexander, ed., *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822* (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), 164.
48. Bodleian Library, MS Beckford, c.58, Inventory of 19–20 Lansdown Crescent, Bath, vol. 5, fol. 81, no. 48 ‘18 Views by de Cort’. The six known watercolours are *Pencil and wash drawing*, Christie’s, 8 July 1986 (lot 46), with a number of other views dated 1791 and 1792. Two other views (lot 45) of the *Portico of Fonthill House*, one with an inscription. Works on paper, Christie’s, 2 July 2013 (lot 72) *Fonthill Splendens. Two Views from the Portico towards the Right Wing; and View from the Right Wing across the Entrance*, and two more drawings (lot 73) of *Fonthill Splendens 1791–1798*, of views across the lake.
49. Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire*, vol. I, 238. See also inventory for 19–20 Lansdown Crescent, op. cit., for further works in the collection by de Cort.
50. Oil on panel, 56 x 75.6 cm.
51. Nos. 421 and 69.
52. See Templeton, “A Second Visit to Fonthill Abbey,” Appendix I, 308.
53. Phillips, 15 October 1823 (lot 328) bought by Nixon; presumed bought in.
54. Phillips, 9 July 1825 (lot 86); presumed bought in.
55. MS Beckford, c. 58, op. cit., fol. 12, Small Library ‘View of Fonthill – de Cort’.
56. See Gustav Waagen, “Catalogue of Pictures, Sculpture and Other Works of Art at Basildon Park,” n.d., Fonthill Estate Archives.
57. It was exhibited in *The IIIth National Loan Exhibition*, The Grosvenor Gallery, Winter 1914–15 (11). It appeared in two later exhibitions, *The Artist and the Country House from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day*, Sotheby’s, 1995 (91), and *William Beckford, 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, New York and Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 2001–2 (4).
58. Christie’s, 8 December 2010 (lot 259), bought in.

Chapter 12

1. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) “Westminster Abbey,” in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London*, vol. 1 (London: author, 1924), 37.
2. J. L. Chester, *The Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Register of the Collegiate church or Abbey of St Peter Westminster* (London: n.p., 1876), 193–4. Note 8 says that there is no record of Anne’s burial in the Register, ‘which is defective at that period’.
3. C. Avery, “Hubert Le Sueur, The ‘Unworthy Praxiteles’ of King Charles I,” *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, Vol. 48, (1980–2), 163; see also 203, doc. 63.
4. Avery, “Hubert Le Sueur,” 163 and 188, Cat. no. 41.
5. An inspection was undertaken by Susan Jenkins, Charles Avery and Patricia Wengraf on 5 February 2016.
6. John Dart, *Westminster Abbey or The History and Antiquities of The Abbey Church of St Peters Westminster*, vol. 2 (London: n.p., 1723), 181, illustrated engraving no. 56.
7. R. Ackermann, *The History of the Abbey Church of St Peter’s Westminster Its Antiquities and Monuments* (London: 1811), vol.2, 173, illustrated plate 40: ‘East Side of the Chapel of St Paul’, F.Mackenzie del.; J.Black Aquatint.
8. J. P. Neale and E. W. Brayley, *The History and Antiquities of the Abbey Church of St Peter Westminster*, vol. 2 (London, n.p.: 1818–23), 177.
9. J. B. Nichols and Son, *Collectanea topographica e genealogica* vol. 11 (London: 1835), 13; reference kindly provided by Dr. Luis Ramón-Laca Menéndez de Lúcar, Lecturer in the Department of Architecture, University of Alcalá.
10. The National Archives, PROB/11/321, Valladolid 16 June 1652. The will was proved in England on 15 August 1666 (according to Chester, *Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Register*, 193–4, note 8).
11. Probably Francis Seymour, 1st Baron Seymour of Trowbridge (1590?–1664), third son of Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp.
12. English College of Valladolid Archive: Series II, L5, No. 11, letter from John Newport in London to Father Rector, dated 22 December 1676, with thanks to Fr Peter Harris, Honorary Archivist of the English College, Valladolid.
13. Chester, *Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Register*, 193–4, note 8 records that, ‘The monument erected by Lord Cottington’s nephew and heir states that his remains were brought to this country in 1679, but the date of interment, in both official and unofficial registers, is distinctly 1678’.
14. Dart, *Westminster Abbey*, 181.
15. Lever-arch file, Westminster Abbey Library – Ref. 2/1.026 (no 6) [206] Francis, Lord Cottington.
16. Lever-arch file.

17. As suggested in email correspondence in December 2015, Dr. Luis Ramón-Laca Menéndez de Luarca, Lecturer in the Department of Architecture, University of Alcalá.
18. See Patricia Wengraf, "Francesco Fanelli & Sons in Italy and London, on a Grander Scale," in *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, ed. M. Leithe-Jasper and P. Wengraf, catalogue of an exhibition at the Frick Collection, New York, 2004, 31–53.
19. Geoffrey Fisher, quoted in Nikolaus Pevsner and Simon Bradley, *The Buildings of England London 6: Westminster* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 154.
20. Avery, 163.
21. Westminster Abbey Muniments (WAM) Chapter Minutes, vol. 15, f. 288. The fine for Watt's monument by Chantry was £141.11s.4d, paid on 26 May 1825 (WAM, Funeral Fee Book).
22. Report of the Surveyor of the Fabric 1962.
23. Report of the Surveyor of the Fabric March 1962–March 1964.
24. Westminster Abbey Muniments 51003.
25. John Vicar's pamphlet "God's Ark over-topping the World's Waves," quoted in John Field, *Kingdom Power and Glory: A Historical Guide to Westminster Abbey* (London: James & James, 1999), 98–9.
26. W. Bray, ed., *Memoirs Illustrative of the Life and Writings of John Evelyn Esq. FRS*. 2nd edn vol. 1 (London: n.p., 1819), 315.
27. Chester, *Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Registers*, 522: an unpublished note states that she died between 18 December 1658 and 22 November 1659. WAM 6368 and 6376, burial fees 'for the Lady Bradshaw £13:06:08'.
28. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews. Vol. 1 (1660). London: G. Bell & Sons, 1970, 309.
29. A. Richardson, "The Last Ceremony of Honour," *Records of Huntingdonshire* 3 no. 7 (1999): 3–15.
30. WAM 44030 (A) 1661.
31. Richardson, "The Last Ceremony of Honour," note 6, 13.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Bray, *Memoirs* vol. 1, note 3, 330.
34. Pepys, *Diary* vol. 2 (1661), 31, note 4. For the fate of Cromwell's head see Pepys, *Diary* vol. 5 (1664), 297 – apparently it remained on display at Westminster Hall for about 25 years.
35. See Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey* (London: John Murray, 1882), 209, note 6. The houses stood until 1739 between the north transept and the west end on the north side of the Abbey, and the backyard is now the green between the churchyard of St Margaret's at Westminster and the Abbey. Also thanks to Richard Foster; see his "An Historical Sketch of the North Precinct of Westminster Abbey with Special Reference to its Prisons," in *Westminster: The Art, Architecture and Archaeology of the Royal Palace and Abbey – The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions XXXIX*, Part 1, ed. Warwick Rodwell and Tim Tatton-Brown (Leeds: Maney, 2016), 362, Figures 9 and 10.

Chapter 13

1. Manuscript of Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford Esqr, 1846*. Bodleian Library, Oxford. MS Beckford c.86.
2. Charles Leslie, *New History of Jamaica* (London: J. Hodges, 1740), 267.
3. Horace Walpole to Bentley, 23 February 1775. In *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* vol. 35, ed. William Stanley Lewis and Warren Hunting Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 211; this was written just 10 days after the fire at Fonthill.
4. University College London's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership, as well as researching slave-ownership, is examining the impact of slavery's role in shaping British history and the legacies which reach into the present. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs>. Members of the Beckford family are included within its scope.
5. Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 15.
6. John Burke lists: Pitt, Baron Rivers; Ellis, Baron Seaford; Ellis, Baron Howard de Walden; Courtenay, heir presumptive to earldom of Devon; and Carleton, Baron Dorchester. John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland* vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1835), 679.
7. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 21.
8. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 22.
9. *Gentleman's Magazine*, Dec 1735, 737a. This has a spending power of £25,800,000 if converted to 2015 prices (National Archives currency convertor).
10. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 35–8.

11. The three brothers would have a presence in England. Richard (1712–56) was MP for Bristol (1754–6) and owned a grand London town house, 1 Greek Street. Julines (ca. 1717–64) was MP for Salisbury 1754–64, and purchased a country estate, Stepleton in Dorset. Francis (ca. 1719–86) married firstly Lady Albinia Bertie, daughter of the Duke of Ancaster and Kesteven, and secondly the heiress Susanna Love of Basing Park, Hampshire.
12. Wiltshire History Centre, Abstract of Title of William Beckford to his Estate in Wiltshire. 1990/2/3.
13. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 147.
14. For his landholdings 1754–80, see Gauci, *William Beckford*, 148 (Table 6.1).
15. Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son* (London: Centaur Press: 1962), 201.
16. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 156. At the time of his death his mortgage with Hoare's stood at £48,000.
17. National Archives. PROB/11/959/139.
18. J. W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 6.
19. Mrs Beckford to Sir William Hamilton, 26 Dec 1780. Alfred Morrison, *The Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents (Second Series) Hamilton & Nelson Papers* (Printed for Private Circulation, 1893). vol. 1, 65–6.
20. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 203.
21. Letter to Thomas Wildman, Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 127.
22. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 210.
23. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 156–7.
24. Boyd Alexander, ed., *Life at Fonthill 1807–1822* (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), 128.
25. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 47 (n. 2).
26. Christie's, *A Capital and Truly Valuable Collection of Original High-Finished Drawings ...by the Younger Cozens...* April 10, 1805.
27. Catalogues for the book sales are included in Robert J. Gemmett, ed. *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons. Vol.3. Poets and Men of Letters. William Beckford* (London: Mansell with Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 1972).
28. Sidney Blackmore, "William Beckford in London," in *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Center, 2001), 256–7.
29. Robert J. Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill* (Fonthill Media, 2016), 88–102.
30. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 115.
31. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 106.
32. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 276.
33. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 291.
34. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 197.
35. Alexander, *Life at Fonthill*, 340.
36. "William Thomas Beckford." Legacies of British Slave-Ownership database, accessed 18 May 2017. <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/22232>.

Chapter 14

1. Some years back it was intimated that Isaac de Caus may have been responsible for the stables of the early house (John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire - I," *Country Life* (24 November 1966): 1370–74), but the late architectural historian Howard Colvin rejected this view. See Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 4th edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 306–8. Colvin's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* continues to reflect his conclusion. However Giles Worsley, in his book *The British Stable* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005) and in the *Georgian Group Journal* revived the suggestion, though there is still no direct evidence. See [Chapter 3](#) for further discussion.
2. Tour No. 76. On Monday 12 June John Loveday was en route to Wardour Castle via Fonthill and Tisbury. I am grateful to the executors of the late Sarah Markham for a copy of the transcript of this tour and for permission to reproduce this extract.
3. John Britton, *The Beauties of Wiltshire, Displayed in Statistical, Historical, and Descriptive Sketches: interspersed with Anecdotes of the Arts*, 3 vols (London: Vernor & Hood, 1801, 1825), vol. I, 234: 'A large and fine Landscape, by Lambert, representing Fonthill as it appeared in the year 1740; the figures by Hogarth.'
4. Deed of Covenant to produce Title Deeds, 20 January 1744, old series (i.e. 1745), Wiltshire History Centre (hereafter referred to as WHC), 413/277.
5. James Pelham to Newcastle, Claremont, 22 June 1750, British Library (hereafter referred to as BL), Add MS 33066, fol. 137^v.
6. Richard Pococke's visit of 2 July 1754, BL, Add MS 22999, fol. 66^v.
7. See [Chapter 11](#) for attribution of the paintings. I have some concerns about attributing the two Fonthill paintings to Joli, although they certainly embrace the spirit of the mid-eighteenth century Italian school,

- especially Canaletto and his followers. Aside from two views of Richmond (and decorating the entrance hall of Heidegger House there), all of Joli's works in England are of London scenes, not further afield (see Ralph Toledano, *Antonio Joli: Modena 1700–1777 Napoli* (Torino: Artema, 2006), 234–5 and 274–80). There is also a time factor. The window for Joli to have depicted certain Fonthill features as shown in these paintings, and completed the canvases, is very limited. The church was not completed until May 1749, and maybe even later given that it was not consecrated until September that year (see WHC D1/60/1 and D1/61/4/15). Joli, it seems, returned to Europe shortly after the death (5 September 1749) of John James Heidegger. Another key feature, the rotunda, was not created until almost five years later after Joli left England (see BL Add MS 22999, fols 66–67). If Joli were the painter, the compositions may be part capriccio, to represent the owner's intended works; otherwise, it may be that features were added in or completed later. Certainly the earlier square prospect tower in Lambert's painting would have appeared incongruous. Either would account for showing the church in its pristine condition, and the later rotunda being in place (and it would certainly help explain its non-conformist roof).
8. Michael Cousins, "A Maturing Landscape: Wotton in 1797," in *The Grenville Landscape of Wotton House, New Arcadian Journal* 65/66 (2009): 89–99.
 9. See John Andrews and Andrew Dury, *A Topographical Map of Wiltshire, on a Scale of Two Inches to a Mile from an Actual Survey* (London: n.p., 1773), in 18 imperial sheets, where this feature is still quite evident.
 10. The Lambert painting that was auctioned at Christie's on 15 June 2001 (lot 57, realised £71,950) is useful in that it shows that the garden temple would have been deep enough to accommodate seating.
 11. As with many garden structures, this temple may have acquired a different use in later life as a banqueting house, used for drinking tea. Unpublished Diary of Sophia, Countess of Shelburne (1746–71), vol. 5, 14 July 1769 to 15 September 1770, 6, Bowood House Archives. I am grateful to Min Wood for our interchange of views on the possible evolution of this building.
 12. James Everard, Baron Arundell, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire. Hundred of Dunworth and Vale of Noddre* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1829), Plate III: Fonthill. Redivivus A.º 1755. / Published by Sir R. C. Hoare Bar.º January, 1829. John Harris, "Fonthill, Wiltshire – I," *Country Life* (24 November 1966), 1370–4.
 13. These are probably the paintings referred to by Britton, op. cit., 234, as "Two other views of the same mansion and its environs, in 1753, as improved by the late Mr. Beckford previous to the fire."
 14. The equestrian statue bears a marked resemblance to that of Marcus Aurelius at Wilton, but there are visible differences such as the horse's raised leg. That the figure was of the Alderman attired in Roman garb has to be a distinct possibility.
 15. Joyce Godber, "The Travel Journal of Philip Yorke 1744–63," in *The Marchioness Grey of Wrest Park* (The Bedfordshire Historical Society, 1968) [vol. XLVII], 159, visit of 1 August 1760.
 16. The date of the visit can be determined from an accompanying cash book (KPL 283), Worcester Archive and Archaeological Service (The Hive), reference: 899:310, accession number: BA 10470/2 (KPL 294). Note book of Edward Knight Jnr.
 17. See Chapter 4.
 18. 1740, Government Art Collection 7074.
 19. BL, Add MS 6767, fols 38–37. The account is written in the rear of James Essex's "Antiquities of Cambridge," and while often considered anonymous, the writing corresponds with that of Essex's less-polished manuscripts, plus there are other indications in the work to suggest that both sections of the book were contemporaneous.
 20. Lt. Col. R. H. Cunnington, "The Cunningtons of Wiltshire," *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, vol. LV, no. cC (June 1954), 227. In his diary of 1834, William Cunnington wrote: 'went into the caves at Fonthill and found some shells etc. at Tisbury Lane'. This was William Cunnington III (1813–1906), an amateur mineral collector.
 21. WHC, 9/35/165, letter 14. Henry Hoare to Lord Bruce, Stourhead, 29 August 1763. See also Robert Wilson-North and Stephen Porter, "Witham, Somerset: From Carthusian Monastery to Country House to Gothic Folly," *Architectural History* 40 (1997): 93.
 22. Sir John Soane's Museum, S. M. Adam volumes 51/12, 51/13 and 51/14 (which features an artistic backdrop of cascades); a date range of 1758–70 has been given. A fourth, associated design, 2/183, while 'tagged' as for Fonthill, is more likely to be a rough sketch by Robert Adam for a bridge at Croome for Lord Coventry. I am grateful to Amy Frost for bringing these drawings to my attention.
 23. Tate Collection D02196 (Turner Bequest XLVII 19). See also A. J. Finberg, *A Complete Inventory of the Drawings of the Turner Bequest*, 2 vols. (London: HMSO, 1909), vol. I, 121; and, David Blayney Brown, ed., *J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours* (Tate Research Publication, April 2015). I am grateful to Caroline Dakers for bringing this drawing to my attention.
 24. Kate Felus, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden: Beautiful Objects & Agreeable Retreats* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 77–8. I am grateful to Lord Margadale for confirming this.
 25. Botany Library, Natural History Museum, MSS Col. 'An Account of the first Introduction of American Seeds into Great Britain. By Peter Collinson...', fol. 20: 'Alderman Beckford 5 5 –'.

26. The National Archives [hereafter referred to as TNA], PRO 30/8/7, fols 169–69^r, Hester Pitt to William Pitt, Hayes; the letter is undated, but Vere Birdwood gives 1760 as the year (see *So Dearly Loved, So Much Admired. Letters to Hester Pitt, Lady Chatham From Her Relations and Friends 1744–1801*, ed. Vere Birdwood (London: HMSO, 1994), 226.
27. William Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Beauty...* (London: T. Cadell Jnr. And W. Davies, 1798), 116. In the Dedication (iv), Gilpin states that the book ‘has lain by me these twenty years’.
28. St Giles’s Muniments FC1, letters from William Beckford to Lord Shaftesbury, Spanish Town, 25 May and 9 July 1749; John Cope, William Beckford’s steward, to Lord Shaftesbury, Spanish Town, 30 July 1749. I am grateful to Suzanna Fleming for these references.
29. WHC, PR/Tisbury: St John the Baptist, 812/8; Bishops Marriage Licence Bonds for the Diocese of Sarum, D1/62. I am grateful to Linda Keightley for sharing her work on the Lane family tree with me.
30. WHC, 383/4, fols 9–9^r. ‘A Bill for stone P work done for y^e use of Henry Hoare Esq.^{re} 1748 About y^e Grotto at Stower Head by W.^m Privet & Co.’
31. Michael Cousins, “John Castles (‘Master of the Grottos’) and the Eighteenth Century Grottoes of London,” *The London Gardener... For the Years 2013–14*, vol. 18 (London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust, 2014), 22–41, particularly 30.
32. Richard Warner, *Excursions from Bath* (Bath: Printed by R. Cruttwell, 1801), p. 211. Warner was actually making a comparison with the grotto and cascade at Bowood, but failed to differentiate Lane father and son.
33. Charles Hamilton was the fourteenth child, youngest son of nine, of the 6th Earl of Abercorn.
34. The first recorded payment to ‘Jos Lane’ was for £43.2s.10d on 16 January 1764, which would be for work of the previous year. Royal Bank of Scotland, Drummonds Accounts, DR/427/48.
35. Michael Cousins, “The Cascade and Grotto at Bowood,” *Follies Magazine* no. 59 (autumn 2004): 18–21. There are strong associations that lend support to the Lanes’ progress with grotto-building: Henry Hoare’s Stourhead was less than 15 miles from Fonthill and as neighbours reciprocal visits were made. Painshill’s owner, Charles Hamilton, was also a friend of Henry Hoare, and he gave assistance in aspects of Stourhead’s layout. Based on their similar interests, gardens, planting, the arts, etc., it is sensible to assume that the subject of ornamental buildings and features such as grottoes was a frequent topic of discussion.
36. BL, Add MS 42087, fols 45–45^v. Lord Lyttelton to George Grenville, Bowood, 25 July 1769. Lyttelton visited Fonthill again in July 1772 (Huntington Library, Montagu Papers, MO 1369, Lyttelton to Elizabeth Montagu, Hagley, 11 July 1772).
37. Laurent Châtel, “The Mole, the Bat, and the Fairy or the Sublime Grottoes of ‘Fonthill Splendens,’” *The Beckford Journal* 5 (Spring 1999): 54.
38. Bowood House Archives, unpublished Diary of Sophia, Countess of Shelburne, vol. 5, 14 July 1769 to 15 September 1770, 4–9; the visit to Fonthill House was 25–30 July 1769. I am grateful to Kate Fielden, Bowood’s former curator, for providing a transcript of these diary entries, and to The Trustees of the Bowood Collection for permission to quote from this.
39. London School of Economics, MS Coll Misc. 38 (4 vols), vol. ii, 114–21. John Parnell, *Journal of a tour thro’ Wales and England Anno: 1769*. Parnell visited on 28 September 1769.
40. TNA, C12/1325/21, 12 December 1770 [Taken without Oath by Order dated 4th Dec^r 1770].
41. Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill...*, 2 vols (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1859), vol. ii, 80–81.
42. BL, Add MS 42168, fols 12–14. Mrs Lybbe Powys, “Five Days Tour”; her visit to Fonthill occurred 7 August 1776.
43. Andrews and Dury, *Topographical Map of Wiltshire*, n.p.
44. Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England*, 116.
45. [Sir Richard Sullivan], *Observations made during a Tour of England, Scotland, and Wales. In a Series of Letters* (London: Printed for T. Becket, 1780), 50–1; [2nd edn (1785), pp. 126–7, 129]. The tour was made in 1778.
46. Bodleian Library, MS. Beckford c. 84, fol. 110.
47. Anonymous, “Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill,” *The European Magazine and London Review*, xxxi (February 1797), 104–5.
48. Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill, Author of ‘Vathek’* vol. ii (London: Charles K. Street, 1859), 80.
49. John B. Papworth to James Morrison, 10 Caroline Street, 20 February 1838: ‘I think I understand M^r Coombes letter to mean that the removal of the Earth mound is to cover bare sloping surfaces at the Quarry so that verdure may be produced instead of shewing the Rock part, that is neither picturesque nor fertile _ there are many places ~~there~~ of the Kind at the spot, & it will be an improvement, necessarily.’ Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0205.
50. Henry Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England, Translated from the French of Henry Meister* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 302. [*Souvenirs de mes Voyages en Angleterre*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Orell, Gessner, Fussli & Comp., 1795), vol. ii, 244].

51. Anonymous, "Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill," 105. It was also noted in this publication that 'Further improvements, however, are in due time to be made upon this water; its size to be still enlarged, and its form more varied.'
52. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 248.
53. Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, MS Trv q 4 SWE. *Rev. John Swete, Tour through England & Scotland*, vol. v, 71–2. The accompanying description implies that the tour ran from 1783 to 1874; in fact it started 1 May 1783 and completed that year. His visit to Fonthill occurred around mid-October, based on dating evidence available.
54. Anonymous, "Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill," 105.
55. Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford at Fonthill* vol. II, 97.
56. *The Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents formed by Alfred Morrison* (second series 1882–93) vol. I ([London]: Printed for Private Circulation, 1893–6), A–B, 192–3. Letter 33, Portman Square, 19 May 1784; letter 34, Fonthill, 10 July 1784; letter 35, Fonthill, 13 October 1784.
57. WHC, PR/Tisbury St John the Baptist, 812/14. Joseph was buried at Tisbury on 28 July 1784, aged either 66 or 67.
58. Johan Frederik Willem van Spaen "A Dutchman's Visits to Some English Gardens in 1791": Extracts from the Unpublished Journal of Baron Johan Frederik Willem van Spaen van Biljoen, with a Biographical Introduction by Heimerick Tromp," *Journal of Garden History* 2, no. 1 (January–March 1982): 41–58. The visit took place on 28 July 1791.
59. Meister, *Letters*, 303–4 [*Souvenirs...*, 245–6].
60. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 247 and 251.
61. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 247. See also Anonymous, "Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill," 105, describing this area near the end of the century: "This whole range of scenery, but particularly the quarry part, the wood having now attained a very considerable growth, may, in point of beauty and original effect, challenge any garden scenery in the kingdom.'
62. "Fonthill Property," *The Times*, 4 October 1822, 3.
63. Meister, *Letters*, 304–5 [*Souvenirs...*, 247].
64. *The Times*, 4 October, 1822, 3.
65. It is marked as such on the first edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1st edn (1887), LXIV.11.
66. Combes letters, folder 2, James Combes to James Morrison, [Fonthill], 4 May 1837, Morrison Estate Archives, A/7/0203.
67. Elizabeth Hervey, *Melissa and Marcia or the Two Sisters: A Novel*, 2 vols. (London: W. Lane, 1788), vol. II, 204–12. Lady Harriet Marlow [William Beckford], *Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast, and Interesting Emotions of Arabella Bloomville. A Rhapsodical Romance; interspersed with Poetry*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), vol. II, 63–72 (Chapter 6: "Captivating Scenery").
68. Christopher Thacker, *Masters of the Grotto: Joseph & Josiah Lane* (Tisbury: The Compton Press Ltd, 1976), 27–28; Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (Norwich: Michael Russell (Publishing) Ltd, 2003), 66–67.
69. Hervey, 210. Mowl, 36 and 62, for example, treats as fact the seasonal substitution of 'lily and violet' with 'tuberose, jessamine, and orange trees...' and that "The pots were concealed in the earth, and they appeared natives of the cave'.
70. Anonymous, "Account of the Works Now Executing at Fonthill," 104.
71. Margaret Maria Elizabeth (1785–1818), Susan Euphemia (1786–1859).
72. Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford* vol. II, 80–1.
73. Likewise Redding's statement that 'Mr. Beckford had, therefore, some experience in planting' is strangely placed and isolated, appended to his creation of the Alpine Gardens when his planting work about the Abbey was considerably richer, more varied, and of a significantly greater scale.
74. Meister, *Letters*, 305 [*Souvenirs...*, 248].
75. Britton, *Beauties of Wiltshire*, 244–5. This should not to be confused with his father's eight-column rotunda which was on the high ground to the west of Splendens.
76. Mowl, 34–5. Mowl's account of the grottoes is quite at odds with the facts. Laurent Châtel, 64, rightly notes the significant grammatical error in the English translation, which changes the context of Meister's original French description.
77. John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: by the author, 1823), 108.
78. Staffordshire Record Office D6584/C76, journal 22, entry for 20 August 1797. I am grateful to Dr Dianne Barre for providing this reference.
79. Thacker, *Masters of the Grotto*, 25.
80. Lot 255, Jamaica Letter Books, Manuscript. Christie, Manson, Woods sale catalogue, *Important Autograph Letters*, 2 April 1975. William Beckford to James Wildman, 5 August 1790. Quoted by Gemmett, 67.
81. This, however, seems not to have been a serious consideration until some years later: "Interesting News from Various Parts of the Country [Tower on Stops' Beacon, near Fonthill]," *Gentleman's Magazine* 66, pt. 2 (September 1796): 784.

82. Beckford clearly pampered his companion in such a manner – one of the small gardens in the Abbey grounds ‘had a small hot-house in it, not much bigger than a cucumber frame [...] for a favourite dwarf’ (see John Claudius Loudon, *The Gardener’s Magazine*, vol. xi, no. 66 (September 1835), 444).
83. Devon Heritage Centre, 2741M/FC16/2a–2b fols 2^v–3, Maria Ley (of Treyhill, Cornwall) to her brother William. Although undated, other commentary in the letter indicates it was written ca. 4 June 1799.
84. Michael Cousins, “The Cascade and Grotto at Bowood,” op. cit. According to the *OED*, a tumbler is a dialect term for a ‘detached mass of rock; a rolled stone or boulder’. Although Warner uses the term ‘tumblers’ in the construction of Bowood’s rockwork, it should not be applied by default to the materials used in Fonthill’s tunnels.
85. Everard and Hoare, *History of Modern Wiltshire*, 129–30.
86. While absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, a survey of the estates of the then owner, Francis Yerbury (Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Wilts. C. 2, fol. 29, Survey by James Sartain and Son, 1777), shows no such feature or setting that would suggest that the grotto was present at that time.
87. Barnard’s father, Ezekiel Dickinson (1711–88) purchased the estate in 1751; the earlier house of 1720 was never completed, and was demolished when it was replaced by the present house by James Wyatt in 1796. It is unlikely that the grotto preceded the house.
88. Michael Cousins, “The Grotto, Ascot Place, Berkshire: Another Lane Grotto?” *Follies Magazine* 67 (summer 2007), 10–14.
89. John Claudius Loudon, “Notes on Gardens & Country Seats, Visited from July 27 to September 16 1833,” *The Gardener’s Magazine* xii, no. 79 (October 1836): 505. In *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (London: Longman, Orme, Green, and Longmans, 1838), 441, Loudon revises Lane’s income to ‘nearly a pound a day, when employed’. Morrison would later (1844) buy a coloured copy of ‘Repton’s Landscape Gardening’ from Mrs Loudon (Fonthill Estate Archives, A/2/0112).
90. WHC, PR/Tisbury: St John the Baptist, 812/19. P2/L/779, ‘last Will and Testament’ of Joseph Lane, in which he left bequests of £100 to his surviving daughters from his second marriage, Rebecca and Deborah (plus an estate called ‘Jerrards’ to Rebecca), and a second estate called ‘Dowdings, with the Cyder Mill and Press and Mash Tubb’ to Josiah, who was executor. The remainder of his goods were to be equally divided among all his children, but with Josiah ‘to have the Liberty of purchasing the other Shares at a proper Valuation’. I am grateful to Linda Keightley for her transcript of this document.
91. Loudon, *The Gardener’s Magazine* xii (October 1839): 503.
92. Meister, *Letters*, 304. The Hermitage is bereft of any opening from above, and although the nearby tunnel did have a number of oculi, its floor does not lend itself to being laid with mosaic, and certainly not one where a mariner’s compass (invariably round) would sit comfortably either physically or with the description: ‘in the centre’. The floor of the cold bath behind the lakeside grotto, however, would fit that bill admirably, as does Loudon’s description of ‘[t]he orifice in the roof of this cave, by which it is lighted’. Note the orifice, i.e. singular; the tunnel had more than one oculus (only one is left open with a grille, the others having been filled in, but when any of these works happened is open to question). Even the comment that the orifice ‘is unprotected by any fence or grating, and may be considered as a trap for the destruction of men or other animals’ is still appropriate for this grotto, considering its size. The comment about animals may be pertinent as this is the side of the park where Beckford had the menagerie and also the deer park, although whether the latter was ever stocked has not been established. Loudon could, of course, have been referring to another quarry cave entirely.
93. Wyatt Papworth, *John B. Papworth, Architect to the King of Wurtemberg: A Brief Record of his Life and Works* (London: privately printed, 1879), 79–84; 90–2. From 1828–9 Papworth had been engaged to make alterations at the Morrisons’ town house in Harley Street. Papworth, however, was not the sole architect engaged by Morrison; William Atkinson it seems was also involved with works at Fonthill. See Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203, Combes letters, folders 1 & 2. This section draws heavily on the archive, and references are given only where appropriate.
94. Papworth, *John B. Papworth*, 80. Elsewhere the hot-house was repaired, a former greenhouse converted into an orange house, and a further orange house proposed.
95. Combes letters, folder 2, 15 June 1837, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203.
96. Combes letters, folder 2, 22 November 1837, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203.
97. Combes letters, folder 2, 5 February 1838, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203. The covering also included ‘The piece from the Lodge to the entrance at the House, ... a Considerable portion of the enclosure below the Gardens, part of the Terrace, part of Ice House [in] Park, and several Hundred Loads in patches in the Park south of the House...’. Morrison had ‘apply’d to three places for Deer viz. – Longleat, Hale, and Avingdon [Avington, Hampshire, belonging to the Marquis of Buckingham]’. Despite being offered ‘10 Couple of Deer ... fine fallow Deer Black & Spotted’ by the latter for 40 guineas, there were difficulties in acquiring them. See Folder 3, letters of 27 March, 5 and 14 April 1839.
98. The sale by Rushworth & Jarvis started 21 July, and lasted four days.
99. Papworth to James Morrison, 20 July 1843, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/9/0318. In *Coade’s Gallery, or Exhibition of Artificial Stone, Westminster-Bridge Road...* (London: S. Tibson, 1799), 22, this work is

described as a group and occupied 'a space of 20 feet in height by 12 in width, the *Polyphemus* is a statue of 10ft 6in. a cave is formed in the rock, at the entrance of it lays the *Acis* and *Galatea*, much larger than life'. Papworth's proposal suggests that they were separate pieces. The fragment of the torso of Polyphemus was sold by Christie's in 2014 for £69,700.

100. W. King's bill for 'Goods b' by Auction', 3 Day, lot 119 and 4 Day, lot 195, Fonthill Estate Archives. According to Caroline Dakers (from information conveyed by Lord Margadale), one head has been recovered; the majority, it is feared, were broken or stolen during the Second World War when soldiers were billeted in the park.
101. Combes letters, folder 2, James Combes to James Morrison, Fonthill, 30 May 1837, Fonthill Estate Archives, A/7/0203.

Chapter 15

1. Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford* (London: Centaur Press, Ltd., 1962), 116.
2. Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 92. This is a letter from Beckford at Lucca to Miss Burney, 22 September 1780.
3. Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 17 vols. ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), III, 1091 (entry for 16 November 1798). At several points in the later 1790s, Farington reported that Beckford asserted (repeatedly) his ambition to be an 'encourager of the arts' (III, 726, 734). See also Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 160.
4. The complexities of the terms 'aristocracy' and 'aristocrat' are too many to broach here, whether considering how eighteenth-century people used the term or how historians have used it in general and in reference to Beckford: Amanda Goodrich, "Understanding a Language of 'Aristocracy', 1700–1850," *Historical Journal* 56 (2013): 369–98.
5. Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 113–25; John Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), 87–91; Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
6. David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 9–36.
7. On the success of the eighteenth-century British aristocracy, see J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) and John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
8. William Beckford, *The Vision, Liber Veritatis*, ed. Guy Chapman (Cambridge: The University Press for Constable and Company, 1930), 89–138.
9. The key source is Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).
10. Beckford's speech on the Address, 1761, quoted in Gauci, *William Beckford*, 107: 'When I talk of the sense of the people, I mean the middling people of England – the manufacturer, the yeoman, the merchant, the country gentleman – they who bear all the heat of the day and who pay all taxes to supply all the expenses of court and government. They have a right, Sir, to interfere in the condition and conduct of the nation ... the people of England taken in this limitation are a good-natured, well-intentioned and very sensible people, who know better perhaps than other nations under the sun whether they are well-governed or not.'
11. Of course, it could have been much worse, as the contemporary case of Edward Onslow (1758–1829) attests: a public display of homosexual attraction led to the loss of his parliamentary seat and permanent self-exile in France. Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, 3 vols. (London: HMSO for the History of Parliament Trust, 1964), III, 226–7.
12. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 40–41; James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford* (Tisbury: Compton Russell, 1976), 71; Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill, Author of "Vathek"*, vol. I (London; Charles K. Street, 1859), 77–8, 149–51.
13. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 95, where Beckford is quoted as writing that he preferred 'the company of young pathics "to all goods or titles and to all glory present and future"'. Beckford had a 'reluctance to exchange his life of super-sensibility and poetic melancholy for the public activities into which he was being pressed by his family', according to Lees-Milne, *William Beckford*, 16.
14. In his contribution to the collection *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard (New Haven and London: For the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture by Yale University Press, 2001), Watkin made the point that Beckford is usually

considered ‘a unique and exotic creature, a brilliant but bizarre eccentric’. In that essay, Watkin related Beckford to John Soane and Thomas Hope (outsiders who designed their own houses which then served in significant part as repositories for collections). Watkin’s goal was to remove Beckford from the status of isolated eccentric.

15. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 31–2.
16. Alexander, *England’s Wealthiest Son*, 12. Late in life, his vocation was still on his mind: Redding recorded Beckford’s ‘impatience feeling ... of his not having done enough in the way of acquirement, of his having thrown away his times and opportunities’ (Alexander, *England’s Wealthiest Son*, 137).
17. William Beckford, *Vathek*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82. *Vathek* was written in 1782 in French and had a complicated publishing history in the 1780s (x–xii).
18. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 92.
19. William Hauptman, “Clinging Fast ‘to My Tutelary Mountains’: Beckford in Helvetia,” in *William Beckford*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard, 73–87, at 77. (This is in a letter at Geneva, 1778.) In an unsent letter of about 1779, he asserted that ‘I will exclude myself if possible from the World’: Timothy Mowl, “William Beckford: A Biographical Perspective,” in *William Beckford*, ed. Derek E. Ostergard, 17–31, at 23.
20. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 187. On another occasion, Beckford wrote: ‘I would rather live in hermit solitude, than in the turmoil of faction and political intrigue’: Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford* vol. II, 160.
21. Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford*, II, 4.
22. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 4. He wrote this at the age of 17. It was preceded by the remark: ‘he was determined not to be what to-day is called a “horse” man, nor “to despise poetry and venerable Antiquity, murder Taste, abhor imagination, distrust all the charms of Eloquence unless capable of mathematical demonstration, and more than all ... be vigorously incredulous”’.
23. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 42.
24. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 105.
25. William C. Lowe, “Bertie, Willoughby, Fourth Earl of Abingdon (1740–1799),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2280>, accessed 4 Aug 2016]; on Sandwich and other aristocratic musical amateurs, William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 127–130, 147–158. Both Abingdon and Sandwich contributed to the aristocratic tenor of the London music scene described by Simon Veigh in *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
26. P. J. Marshall, “Lyttelton, William Henry, First Baron Lyttelton and First Baron Westcote (1724–1808),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17311>, accessed 4 Aug 2016]; Christine Gerrard, “Lyttelton, George, first Baron Lyttelton (1709–1773),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17306>, accessed 4 Aug 2016].
27. Michael Symes, “William Pitt the Elder: The Gran Mago of Landscape Gardening,” *Garden History* 24 (1996), 126–36.
28. The Earl of Abingdon, for instance, was an active politician in the House of Lords for four decades. The Earl of Sandwich was, famously, the first lord of the Admiralty. Henry Cavendish (1731–1810), a duke’s grandson, is an interesting case: a great scientist, he was socially ill at ease; his life was nonetheless embroiled in the public science of the later eighteenth century.
29. Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics*, 147.
30. Jason Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), xii.
31. Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” *Historical Journal* 45 (2002), 869–98.
32. Edgar Wind, “Shaftesbury as a Patron of Art,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2 (1938), 185–8.
33. Bonamy Dobrée, *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, 6 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1932), IV, 1420.
34. Alderman Beckford suggested both the expectation and the disappointment in a letter to John Kirke, 1754, quoted in Gauci, *William Beckford*, 77: ‘I had much rather shew all the respect and regard in my power to a lover of liberty and his country (although poor) than to the first nobleman in the kingdom who had barter’d away the freedoms of the people and his own independency, for the sake of empty titles or the lucre of place, pension or employment.’
35. Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford*, II, 321.
36. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 24. Beckford admired the elder Pitt but dismissed both the younger Pitt and Charles James Fox (Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford*, II, 241).
37. In *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal* (1834), in Malcolm Jack, ed., *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London: William Pickering, 1993), 253.
38. Alexander, *England’s Wealthiest Son*, 145.

39. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 151, 218–9; Melville, *Life and Letters*, 350; Peter Kitson, “‘Candid Reflections’: The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760–1838*, ed. Brychan Carey, Markman Ellis and Sara Salih (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11–25; Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 125–44; M. H. Port and R. G. Thorne, “BECKFORD, William (1760–1844), of Fonthill, nr. Hindon, Wilts.,” *The History of Parliament Online* (<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/beckford-william-1760-1844>; 7 October 2017).
40. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 138; Mowl, “William Beckford,” 28; Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford*, I, 202, II, 103.
41. Gauci, *William Beckford*, 140, tells us that, when Fonthill burned in 1755, a contemporary noted that the loss of a country house could have a devastating impact on the local economy: prior to the fire, Beckford had pumped £5,000 per annum ‘in improvements ... whereby the poor labourers of the several neighbouring parishes have been constantly employed and their families happily supported’.
42. Thomas Martyn, *The English Connoisseur: Containing an Account of Whatever Is Curious in Painting, Sculpture, &c. in the Palaces and Seats of the Nobility and Principal Gentry of England, Both in Town and Country*, 2 vols. (London: For L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1766), I, vii.
43. Thomas Mortimer, *The Universal Director; or, the Nobleman and Gentleman's True Guide to the Masters and Professors of the Liberal and Polite Arts and Sciences; and of the Mechanic Arts, Manufactures, and Trades, Established in London and Westminster, and Their Environs* (London: for J. Coote, 1763), v.
44. Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 168–70.
45. Lawrence E. Klein, “Sociability, Politeness, and Aristocratic Self-Formation in the Life and Career of the Second Earl of Shelburne,” *Historical Journal* 55 (2012), 653–77, at 674. Even Joseph Priestley acknowledged that ‘inequality of condition is not without its use’. Priestley strongly admired the ‘middle classes of life’. But he noted that when ‘persons of higher life’ evade the considerable drawbacks of their ego-boistering education, they ‘can lose sight of [themselves], and truly feel and act for others’ – a character he called ‘godlike’: Joseph Priestley, “Memoirs of Dr Priestley,” in *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols., ed. John Towill Rutt (London: G. Smallfield, 1817–32), I, 205–6.
46. Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2005), 29–46, 90–105; Klein, “Sociability, Politeness and Aristocratic Self-Formation,” 660.
47. William Hazlitt, most notably, in *Criticisms on Art* (London: John Templeman, 1843), 284–99; also, Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 246, 251.
48. Melville, *Life and Letters*, 238.

Chapter 16

1. John Martin Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746–1813): Architect to George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 237–8.
2. *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. LXXI, 1, March 1801, 206–8, and April 1801, 297–8.
3. John Britton, *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire; with Heraldical and Genealogical Notices of the Beckford Family* (London: 1823), 28.
4. John Britton, *Graphical and Literary*, 28.
5. William Beckford, *Vathek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.
6. John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (Shaftesbury: 1823), 21; Beckford, *Vathek*, 5, 101.
7. Henry Venn Brown Lansdown, *Recollections of the Late William Beckford of Fonthill, Wilts. And Lansdown, Bath* (Bath: n.d.), 41.
8. For a recent account of *Vathek* in relation to eighteenth-century Orientalism, see Peter J. Kitson, “Oriental Gothic,” in *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Edinburgh: 2016), 171. This mixture of Gothic and Classical spaces within Wyatt's Gothic country houses is not irregular: see Matthew M. Reeve and Peter N. Lindfield, “‘A Child of Strawberry Hill’: Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent,” *The Burlington Magazine* 157, no. December (2015), 836–42.
9. Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746–1813)*, 242–38; John Wilton-Ely, “The Genesis and Evolution of Fonthill Abbey,” *Architectural History* 23 (1980), 40–51; Robert J. Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill: Architecture, Landscape and the Arts* (Croydon: Fonthill Media, 2016), 13.
10. W. S. Lewis, “The Genesis of Strawberry Hill,” *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 5, no. 1 (1934), 57–92.
11. Cyrus Redding, “Recollections of the Author of ‘Vathek,’” *The New Monthly Magazine* 71, no. 282 (1844), 149.
12. Redding, “Recollections,” 149.

13. *Pencil Sketch of Vathek's Tower* by William Beckford, 1843. Collection of Philip Hewat-Jaboor. The authors would like to thank Amy Frost of Beckford's Tower Archives and Library for bringing this image to our attention, and Philip Hewat-Jaboor for permission to reprint it in this chapter.
14. Redding, "Recollections," 150.
15. W. H. H., "Conversations of the Late W. Beckford, Esq. With Various Friends," *The New Monthly Magazine*, 72, 516.
16. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Beckford d. 9, ff. 1–16, 17–32.
17. For some recent readings of the queerness of Beckford's romance, see: Max Fincher, *Queering Gothic in the Romantic Age* (Basingstoke, 2007); Jeffrey Cass, "Homoerotics and Orientalism in William Beckford's *Vathek*: Liberalism and the Problem of Pederasty," in *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogic Practices*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 107–20; George E. Haggerty, "Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis," *Studies in the Novel* 18 (1986), 341–52.
18. Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford* (London: Centaur, 1962), 276.
19. William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London: n.p., 1772), 31.
20. Christopher Wren, *Parentalia: Or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens: Viz., of Matthew, Bishop of Ely, Christopher, Dean of Windsor, Etc. But Chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren in Which Is Contained, Besides His Works, a Great Number of Original Papers and Records* (London: n.p., 1750), 306.
21. William Halfpenny and John Halfpenny, *Chinese and Gothic Architecture Properly Ornamented. Being Twenty New Plans and Elevations, on Twelve Copper-Plates Containing a Great Variety of Magnificent Buildings Accurately Described* (London: n.p., 1752), Preface.
22. For this, see Kitson, "Oriental Gothic," 171, and Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, 15.
23. Farmington, Lewis Walpole Library, Babb-Beckford no. 101.
24. Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. William Stanley Lewis and Warren Hunting Smith, vol. 11 (London: 1944), 22.
25. John Britton, *Graphic and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey*, 39.
26. Sandro Jung, "The Architectural Design of Beckford's *Vathek*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 2 (2011–12), 302, 306.
27. Beckford, *Vathek*, 84.
28. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Beckford c. 46, f. 35.
29. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Beckford c.46, f.35.
30. Three stories related to the original novel by Beckford but not published together until 1912 by Lewis Melville.
31. William Beckford, *Vathek; an Arabian Tale with Notes Critical and Explanatory* (London: n.p., 1819), vi.
32. Beckford, *Vathek*, 5. This parallels his assessment of the tower at Antwerp Cathedral: Beckford wished 'to stretch myself out upon its very summit, and calculate, from so sublime an elevation, the influence of the planets'. Quoted in Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 130.
33. Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 323–5.
34. See Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, 23–23.
35. William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents; in a Series of Letters, from Various Parts of Europe* (London: n.p., 1783), 47.
36. William Beckford, *Dreams*, 107.
37. For the cost of Fonthill's construction, see Gemmett, *William Beckford's Fonthill*, 115, and for the cost of £273,000 see Redding, "Recollections," 155. Concerning Beckford's architectural megalomania, see Wilton-Ely, "The Genesis," 47.
38. Wilton-Ely, "The Genesis," 41; Beckford, *Vathek*, 5–6.
39. London, Royal Institute of British Architects, Sa55/5, 1–2.
40. Nikolaus Pevsner, Bridget Cherry, D. D. A. Simpson and Desmond Bonney, *Wiltshire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 246.
41. Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington, September 1796–December 1798*, vol. 3, ed. Kathryn Cave, Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 916. See Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746–1813)*, 234.
42. New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.1880.
43. London, Royal Institute of British Architects, Sa55/5, 3.
44. Wilton-Ely, "The Genesis," 42.
45. Edinburgh, New Register House, Hamilton MS, Beckford Correspondence: William Beckford to Sir Isaac Heard, 21 May 1800.
46. Edinburgh, Beckford to Heard, 21 May 1800.
47. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Beckford c. 29, fol. 171r.
48. Rutter, *Delineations*, 110–11.
49. Rutter, 24.
50. Beckford, *Vathek*, 84–5.

51. Beckford, *Vathek*, 84.
52. Rutter, *Delineations*, 110–11.
53. Beckford, *Vathek*, 86.
54. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Beckford c. 18, f. 15v.
55. Oxford, ff. 17r–v.
56. Oxford, f. 17v.
57. Oxford, f. 18r.
58. Oxford, f. 19v.
59. Redding, “Recollections,” 150.

Chapter 17

1. Begun 1796, collapsed 1825, and subsequently largely demolished.
2. This replaced the first Fonthill House, destroyed by fire in 1755, itself demolished 1807. For an account of the disappearance of the houses on the Fonthill estate, culminating with the demolition of Detmar Blow’s 1904 house built for Hugh Morrison (1869–1931), see Simon Blow, “Blow by Blow,” *Guardian Weekend*, 24 February 1979, 11. See also this volume, Chapters 4–8.
3. See Derek E. Ostergard, ed., *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Center, 2001), the catalogue for the eponymous exhibition held at Dulwich College Picture Gallery and at the Bard Graduate Center, New York.
4. Caroline Dakers, *A Genius for Money: Business, Art and the Morrisons* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).
5. For more on Alfred Morrison, see, for example, Clive Wainwright, “Alfred Morrison: A forgotten Patron and Collector,” in *Grosvenor House Art and Antiques Fair Handbook* (London: Burlington Magazine Publications, 1995), and Olivier Hurstel and Martin Levy, “Charles Lepec and the Patronage of Alfred Morrison,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 50 (2015): 194–223.
6. Bet McLeod, “A Collectors’ Corner: Aspects of the Beckford Legacy at Hamilton Palace,” *Beckford Society Journal* 21 (2014): 24–36; Bet McLeod, “A Collector’s Obsession,” *Apollo* (June 2010): 52–7.
7. See Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 438–48.
8. The present author gave an overview of Morrison as a collector in a lecture, “Alfred Morrison (1821–97): An Overlooked Patron and Collector of Decorative Arts,” Art Institute of Chicago, 10 May 2016.
9. “Treasure-hunting: Recovering Beckford’s Collections,” given by the present author and Philip Hewat-Jaboor. The symposium was held at Central Saint Martins, London, and at Fonthill.
10. Accession number W.13:1-1980.
11. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 64.
12. See Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 126, fig. 107. Two of the ten cabinets are at Charlecote Park.
13. Phillips, 23 September–22 October 1823, lot 1347 (£252) to Robert Hume; Robert, 2nd Earl Grosvenor, and by descent; Christie’s (London), 5 July 2012, lot 12. The catalogue entry for the sale at Christie’s was based on information supplied by Bet McLeod. Earl Grosvenor was buying land in Dorset, close to Fonthill, early in the nineteenth century, and his son Richard acquired the Fonthill Abbey estate.
14. Christie’s (London), *Important Silver and Objects of Vertu*, 6 December 1989, lot 208.
15. See Michael Jaffé, “William Beckford’s Lapis-Lazuli Cup,” in *National Art Collections Fund Review* (1990): 124–7. Also see Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 39.
16. Christie’s, South Kensington, 20 September 1994, lots 70–3. Among other lots from the sale, a tazza entitled *La Fantaisie* is now in the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum (Hurstel and Levy, “Charles Lepec,” figs. 6–8), and two plates are divided between the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Hurstel and Levy, “Charles Lepec,” figs. 8 and 12) and the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Limoges (Hurstel and Levy, “Charles Lepec,” figs. 8 and 11).
17. See Hurstel and Levy, “Charles Lepec,” 196, quoting Daniel Alcouffe.
18. Hurstel and Levy, “Charles Lepec,” 194–223.
19. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 88.
20. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 53.
21. Dukes, Dorchester, 27 September 2012, lot 986.
22. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 63.
23. Bodleian Library, MS Beckford, c. 58, Inventory, compiled by English & Son of Bath and R. Hume of London, 1844, Book 2, p. 31 (within a large compilation of items under the heading ‘Various Oriental & Other China mounted chiefly in Silver Gilt’): ‘A Brown & White Coffee pot. Tea cup and saucer – lined – very rich.’

24. Hamilton Muniments, Hamilton District Library, NRA (S) 3438, Hamilton Palace Inventory 1876, Tapestry Rooms, Sitting Room, 'Articles of Vertu in Ebony and Pietra Dura Cabinet, from the Beckford Collection': A small China Cup & Saucer Chocolate Ground with raised white Flowers, both lined with silver gilt and engraved.
25. Ostergard, *William Beckford*, 148.
26. Other furniture from the 1820s and 1830s, all of fine oak and some with gilded wood and metal embellishments, has emerged over the past few decades: this includes a wall cabinet probably from Lansdown Tower, acquired by a private collector at Sotheby's in the 1970s; a hanging cabinet identified in a private collection, probably from Lansdown Crescent, now at Lansdown Tower, and a pair of pier cabinets identified at Kivells, Holsworthy, Devon, 16 December 2014, lot 33.
27. See Caroline Dakers, "Furniture and Interior Decoration for James and Alfred Morrison," *Furniture History* XLVI (2010): 197 and fig. 11.
28. Edmund English and Willes Maddox (illustrations), *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* (Bath: E. English and London: T. McLean, 1844), pl. 4.
29. Lansdown Tower sale, English and Son, 20 November 1845 and following seven days, day seven, lot 500.
30. Bet McLeod, "Some Further Objects from William Beckford's Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum," *The Burlington Magazine* CXLIII, no. 1179 (June 2001): 367–70.
31. Marbles identified by Robin Sanderson, 2002.
32. *The Builder*, 9 May 1874, 385.
33. Fine Art Society, *Spring '84* (London: Fine Art Society), 40. Another element from the room that passed anonymously through Christie's South Kensington in the late 1970s was the narrow cabinet, still in the John Scott collection, exhibited by the Fine Art Society in *Architect-Designers: Pugin to Mackintosh* (London: Fine Art Society and Haslam & Whiteway, 1981), 12–13. More recently, the Toledo Museum of Art (2006) acquired an identical cabinet, and a private collector acquired a larger cabinet, lacking some elements, also from Christie's South Kensington, 13 November 2007, lot 159.
34. Plymouth Auction Rooms, 5 November 2014, lots 291 and 292.

Chapter 18

1. 'Approximate Estimate' dated 29 March 1902. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/2/1416. Additional costs included the architect's fees at £350 and a clerk of works at £150.
2. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/01 1379.
3. Draft letter from Hugh Morrison to Mr Squarey of Lawrence and Squarey, Salisbury, on the back of the estimate dated 29 March 1902.
4. W. R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 122.
5. Sydney Blow, *The Ghost Walks on Fridays* (London: Heath Cranton, 1935), 106.
6. W. R. Lethaby, A. H. Powell and F. L. Griggs, *Ernest Gimson: His Life and Work* (Stratford on Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1924), 8.
7. Michael Drury, *Wandering Architects* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000, rev. edn 2015).
8. Edith Olivier, *Four Victorian Ladies of Wiltshire* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), 62.
9. See for example *The Times*, 9 April 1901.
10. Basil Stallybrass, "Discoveries Near Fonthill," *Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Magazine*, 34, 414.
11. Mark Bowden, *Pitt Rivers: The Life and Archaeological Work of Lieutenant-General Augustus Lane Fox Pitt Rivers DCL FR S FSA* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 163.
12. Lawrence Weaver (attributed), "Little Ridge, Wiltshire, a Seat of Mr Hugh Morrison," *Country Life* (26 October 1912), 570–1.
13. Stallybrass, "Discoveries Near Fonthill," 414.
14. Weaver, "Little Ridge," 568.
15. Weaver, "Little Ridge," 573; "The dining room is lined with oak panelling, with lightly-carved stiles, that recalls the days of the old manor house. A recessed cupboard, still standing in its ruinous walls, had formed a cache where a remnant of old panelling was discovered surviving. This was faithfully reproduced – Stephens, the joiner, with his men, carrying out the work to perfection by treating in traditional manner oak from trees felled long before in the park and seasoned in the estate yard."
16. Weaver, "Little Ridge," 573. Stallybrass 'was assisted by most capable local men – by Charles Lamb and his son, of an old race of plasterers who could model and cast anything, and who, though seemingly spoilt by modern influences, were only too ready to be brought back to the right traditional lines; and so enthusiastic

did they become over this effective but inexpensive form of decoration, that they perhaps outstrode the imagination of their forbears in the craft.'

17. Weaver, "Little Ridge," 573.
18. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/02 1416.
19. Stallybrass, "Discoveries Near Fonthill," 422.
20. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/01 1379.
21. Fonthill Estate Archives, M/01 1384.
22. Blow drawings, RIBA Drawing Collection, T424.
23. This and subsequent references are taken from Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
24. Lord Margadale to Mrs S. Wills, 15 November 1971, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
25. Robin Young, "How Fonthill was Missed," *The Times Diary*, 12 June 1972.
26. Young, "How Fonthill was Missed."
27. Lord Margadale to Peter Walker, Secretary of State to the Environment, 12 June 1972, Fonthill Estate Archives, S/7/1926.
28. Letter from Edwin Lutyens to his wife dated 24 August 1917, quoted by Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley (eds), *Letters of Edwin Lutyens* (London: Collins, 1985), 354.
29. Simon Blow, "A Blow by Blow Account of a Duke's Desertion," *The Spectator* (25 January 1986), 22.

Chapter 19

1. Alison Smithson, "In the Time of the Presentation of Upper Lawn Book: Barcelona," unpublished lecture, December 1986, Smithson Family Collection.
2. See Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds), *Team 10 1953–1981: In Search of A Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005).
3. See Max Risselada, "The Pavilion – Upper Lawn, Fonthill Estate," in *Alison & Peter Smithson, From the House of the Future to a house of today*, ed. Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2004), 152; Dean Hawkes, "The Architecture of Climate: Studies in Environmental History, Smythson and the Smithsons," Proceedings of 25th Conference on Passive and Low Energy Architecture (PLEA), Dublin, 2008. Downloaded 17 September 2017, http://www.academia.edu/16937507/Paper_No_151_The_Architecture_of_Climate_Studies_in_environmental_history_Smythson_and_the_Smithsons; Lorenzo Wong, Peter Salter and Peter Smithson, *Climate Register: Four Works by Alison and Peter Smithson* (London: Architectural Association, 1994); Rocio Escandon, Juan Jose Sendra and Rafael Suarez, "Energy and Climate Simulation in the Upper Lawn Pavilion, an Experimental Laboratory in the Architecture of the Smithsons," *Building Simulation* 8 no. 1 (February 2015): 99–110.
4. The only other monograph of the house to be written permits Beckford and his presence at Fonthill a single paragraph; Bruno Krucker, *Complex Ordinarity: The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Alison and Peter Smithson*, (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2002), 29.
5. Alison and Peter Smithson, *Upper Lawn Solar Pavilion Folly* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya, 1986). The book is largely written and compiled by Alison, with assistance from Enric Miralles.
6. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 28.
7. Bruno Krucker in conversation with Peter Smithson, *Complex Ordinarity*, 29.
8. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 15.
9. Peter Smithson, 13 October 1985, *Upper Lawn*, 9.
10. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 9.
11. Alison Smithson's notes for *Upper Lawn* publication, Smithson Family Archive.
12. Wednesday 30 May 1787, *The Journals of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain 1787–1788*, ed. Boyd Alexander (London: Hart-Davis, 1955), 41.
13. See Ben Highmore, "Rough Poetry: *Patio and Pavilion* Revisited," in *Alison & Peter Smithson: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Max Risselada (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2011), 124–48.
14. "Patio and Pavilion," reprinted in Alison and Peter Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation: Mies' Pieces, Eames' Dreams, The Smithsons* (London: Artemis, 1994), 109.
15. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 16.
16. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 1617. Original Smithson Family Archive.
17. Alison Smithson, "Three Pavilions of the Twentieth Century: the Farnsworth, the Eames, Upper Lawn," lecture given in 1985, published in Smithson and Smithson, *Changing the Art of Inhabitation*, 141.
18. Peter's thoughts on 'Life in a polythene bag' are printed in Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 22.
19. Alison Smithson, "Upper Lawn Cottage: Aims," Smithson Family Collection. See also Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 20.

20. Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 24.
21. Smithson, "Three Pavilions," 141.
22. Smithson, "In the time of the Presentation of Upper Lawn Book," op. cit. Alison Smithson's interest in Saint Jerome is explored by Max Risselada in van den Heuvel and Risselada, *Alison & Peter Smithson, From the House of the Future to a house of today*, 54.
23. Smithson, "Three Pavilions," 142.
24. Text from the original pamphlet is reprinted in van den Heuvel and Risselada, *Alison & Peter Smithson*, 224–9.
25. Van den Heuvel and Risselada, *Alison & Peter Smithson*, 227.
26. Beckford owned *St. Jerome Awakened from a Trance by an Angel Sounding a Trumpet* by Guercino, as noted by John Britton in *Beauties of Wiltshire* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1801), 226. He also owned pictures of the saint by Domenichino and Veronese.
27. Smithson, "Three Pavilions," 141.
28. Smithson, "In the Time of the Presentation of Upper Lawn Book."
29. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, "Pavilion and Route," *Architectural Design* (March 1965): 143–6.
30. Smithson, "Three Pavilions," 142.
31. Upper Lawn Journals, in Smithson Family Archive. Extracts printed in Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 28–60.
32. Alison Smithson, *AS in DS – An Eye on the Road* (Delft University Press, 1983, reprinted Zurich: Lars Muller, 2001).
33. Upper Lawn was restored in 2001 by Sergison Bates Architects; see Jonathan Sergison & Stephen Bates, *Papers 2: Sergison Bates Architects* (London: Sergison Bates Architects, 2007) and Jonathan Sergison and Stephen Bates, "Upper Lawn: The Invisible Restoration," in *2G:34 Sergison Bates* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2005), 92–105.
34. Published in Smithson and Smithson, *Upper Lawn*, 26. The original is believed to be in the Smithson Family Collection but has not yet been located.

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ARCHIVE MATERIAL

Fonthill Recovered relies heavily on archive material. The two collections consulted by a number of contributors are in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Beckford) and in the Fonthill Estate Archives in Wiltshire (Morrison). These collections and all the other archives used for research are separately noted in the end-notes to each chapter.

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Note of explanation:

The emphasis of the index is on Fonthill, the owners of Fonthill and the architects of the Fonthill houses.

Fonthill is used as a major heading, eg Fonthill landscape, Fonthill houses, Fonthill visitors' accounts, with cross-referencing to architects (where known) and owners.

Wives are indexed under their married surnames. Members of the aristocracy are indexed under their surnames, eg. Grosvenor, not Westminster.

Artists and designers are indexed where specific works are referenced.

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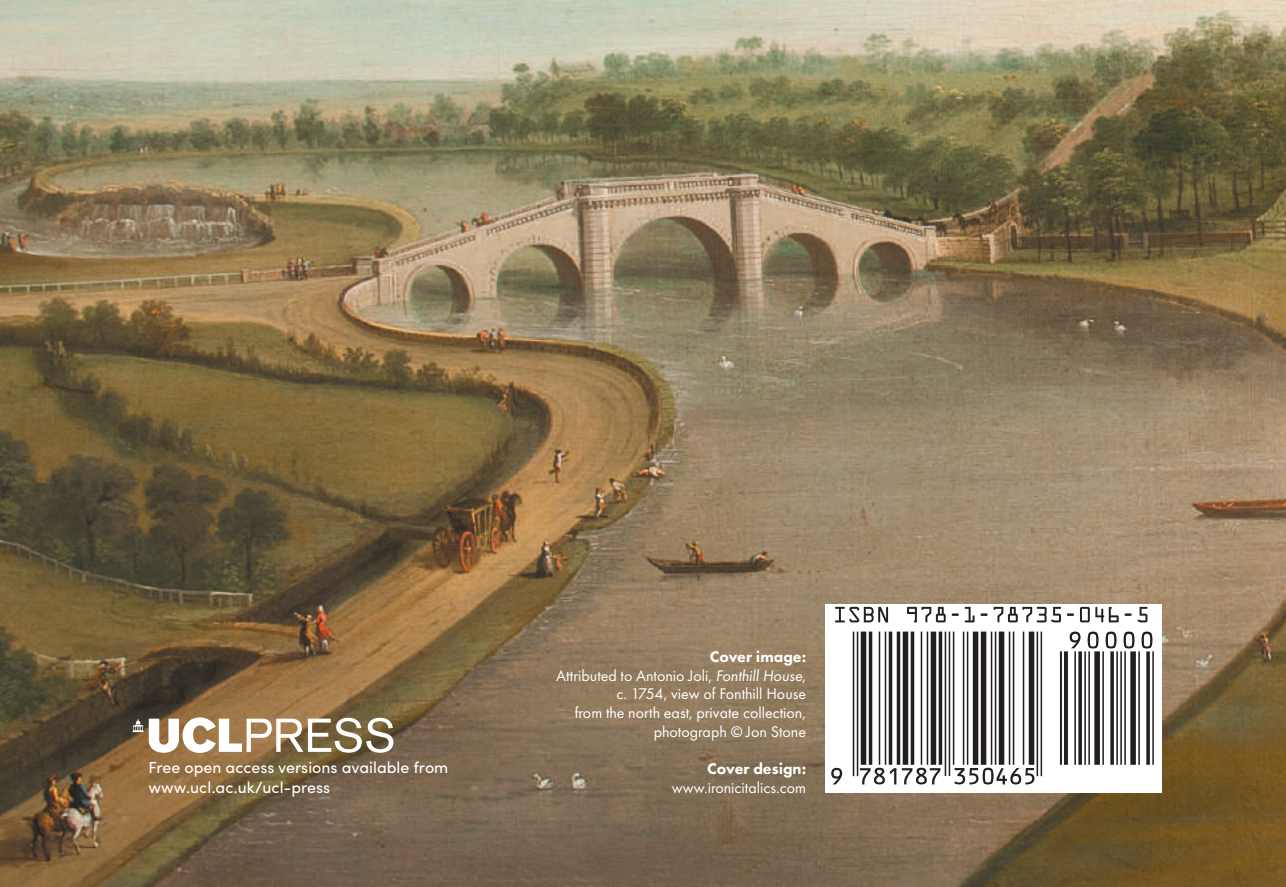
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Fonthill, in Wiltshire, is traditionally associated with the writer and collector William Beckford who built his Gothic fantasy house called Fonthill Abbey at the end of the eighteenth century. The collapse of the Abbey's tower in 1825 transformed the name Fonthill into a symbol for overarching ambition and folly, a sublime ruin. Fonthill is, however, much more than the story of one man's excesses. Beckford's Abbey is only one of several important houses to be built on the estate since the early sixteenth century, all of them eventually consumed by fire or deliberately demolished, and all of them oddly forgotten by historians. Little now remains: a tower, a stable block, a kitchen range, some dressed stone, an indentation in a field.

Fonthill Recovered draws on histories of art and architecture, politics and economics to explore the rich cultural history of this famous Wiltshire estate. The first half of the book traces the occupation of Fonthill from the Bronze Age to the twenty-first century. Some of the owners surpassed Beckford in terms of their wealth, their collections, their political power and even, in one case, their sexual misdemeanours. They include Charles I's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the richest commoner in the nineteenth century. The second half of the book consists of essays on specific topics, filling out such crucial areas as the complex history of the designed landscape, the sources of the Beckfords' wealth and their collections, and one essay that features the most recent appearance of the Abbey in a video game.

Caroline Dakers is Professor of Cultural History at Central Saint Martins (University of Arts London). Her recent books include a new edition of *Forever England* (2016) and *A Genius for Money: Business, Art and the Morrisons* (2011). She has curated exhibitions at Leighton House Museum, London such as *George Aitchison: Leighton's Architect Revealed* (2012) and *Artists at Home: The Holland Park Circle* (1999-2000).



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Cover design:

www.ironicalics.com

ISBN 978-1-78735-046-5



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