

2021-2022



THE BYZANT

The Shaftesbury & District
Historical Society

Gold Hill Museum, Gold Hill, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 8JW

Registered Charity No 1156273

75th Anniversary Edition

Readers are invited to contribute articles or letters for inclusion in the next issue of The Byzant. These should be of an historical nature but need not be confined to the locality or based on original research. Please send submissions to Gold Hill Museum or email enquiries to: enquiries@goldhillmuseum.org.uk

Compiled and Edited by Susan L Stamp., Trustee

Gold Hill Museum

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Chairman's Chat

Welcome to another issue of *The Byzant* and, still, the pandemic is alive and, as I write this, most certainly rife in the local area even if its impact is not quite as overwhelming as at this time last year.

As ever, my thanks go to our wonderful stewards without whom the museum could not have opened on 31 May, initially under strict Covid restrictions which thankfully were eased in July. It's been a successful season with healthy visitor numbers, probably reflecting the relief at being able to get out and about, and generous donations. I've picked a few gems from the Visitors' Book which you can read overleaf.

Also included: one of our new trustees tells us how the society started some 75 years ago, our president gives us the lowdown on the Beckfords and the sale of Fonthill Abbey, our secretary reflects on lectures past and future, and our buildings manager, a keen amateur historian, has contributed a couple of interesting articles on local matters.

Over the last year the archives have been transformed by Ann Symons who first joined us in 2014 to help create the *Shaftesbury Remembers* website. She's trained a team of willing helpers and, although the audit has been completed, the immense task of classifying and cataloguing is ongoing. We've nominated her for a Dorset Museums Association volunteer award in recognition of the many hours she has contributed.

I must also mention Jeanette Hardiman, featured in one of Ian's articles, who has single-handedly catalogued well over 1300 books and is now creating key words to aid ease of access when the catalogue goes online.

Linda Wilton has been a capable and efficient treasurer but next year we'll be looking for a replacement as she has confirmed her intention of stepping down. So if you know anyone who fits the bill please let us know; they'll get a good handover and plenty of support.

Sadly, our tenants of fourteen years, Dennis and Ruth Hughes trading as *The Beadster*, fell victim to the effects of lockdown and, despite their best efforts, had to concede that their business was no longer viable, closing in September. They still have an online presence, and we wish them well. Happily, Anita Horak, already trading as *Kit & Kaboodle* further down the High Street, has taken on the lease and opened as *Down the Steps* on 13 November, selling artists supplies and local artisans' products. We look forward to a long and prosperous relationship.

I trust that you, our members, have managed to avoid the worst effects of Covid-19. We're ever grateful for your support and I'd welcome any feedback about any aspect of the society and its operation that you may wish to offer.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a healthy new year.

Elaine Barratt

December 2021

Reflections on the 2021 Visitors' Book

Looking through the Visitors' Book, I'm surprised at how many people came from the Far East as well as Canada, the USA and Europe during this year of pandemic restrictions on travel.

So many of the comments talk about the friendliness of the stewards as well as delight in what the museum has to offer but few are as specific as this: 'A gem of a museum. Really well laid out, informative and very lovely staff. Loved the fact that the Upjohns business became Pfizer and the Public Health Act 1875 of infectious diseases mandated a 5/- fine! Keep up the good work Gold Hill Museum.'

In June there was a message, totally unrelated to the museum, exhorting anyone who cared to read it to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ and born again (with an Acts 2:38 reference) however, according to another visitor, we already have: 'A little piece of heaven tucked away.'

How about this for a change from the usual 'Tardis' description? 'like Mary Poppins' bag.....small on the outside but lots on the inside'

The following however, for sheer ingenuity, beats the lot: 'Best thing since sliced bread, better we didn't have to pay any dough to get in. This is our toast to Shaftesbury museum and I feel like I knead to say thank you to prove we came.'

Elaine Barratt

The Shaftesbury & District Historical Society

Charitable Incorporated Organisation no: 1156273.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held Tuesday 24th August 2021

in the Garden Room Gold Hill Museum at 14:30.

Present: Sir John Stuttard, Elaine Barratt, Ian Kellett, Linda Wilton, Sheena Commons, Dave Hardiman, Mark Smith, Sue Stamp. Cath Toogood (minutes). There were also 21 (twenty one) society members present.

Apologies: Vicky de Witt, Rupert Tapper, Ros Marshall, Edred and Ida Bowman, Patricia Steven, Barbara Ambrose, Denis Carey,

Chairperson's Welcome: Elaine opened the meeting welcoming everyone adding it was good to meet again in person and to see so many attending.

Minutes of the last AGM were agreed as a true record of the 2020 AGM that was held via Zoom. Ian commented that everyone had received a copy as they were published in the December 2020 edition of the Byzant.

Sheena Commons proposed, Tony Durie seconded, all in agreement. Elaine signed them.

Election of Trustees: Elaine and Linda were seeking re-election in their present roles as Chairperson and Treasurer. **Tony Martin's** area of interest is in Collection Care. Tony is a retired Army Major and was curator of his Regimental Museum located in Dover Castle. He is also a volunteer steward. **Rupert Tapper** is interested in the Archiving. Rupert has taught Classics and History. All had submitted their resume. Elaine, Linda and Tony withdrew from the room whilst members discussed and voted. Ian commented that we were indeed very fortunate to have Elaine as Chair as she had undertaken much hard work and put in many hours to make the Museum as it is today. He also gave thanks to Linda who has been very diligent in keeping the accounts and sorting out some outstanding problems with BT and others.

Chairperson's Report:

Elaine commented it was good to be back in the Garden Room and meeting in person rather than via Zoom which, although useful during these times, was not accessible to everyone. Ray's resignation came as a surprise and there was no handover so we were forced to look at what was in the archives and enabled to form teams of willing volunteers, ably guided by Ann Symons, to sort through everything and bring a new order as boxes were spread throughout the first floor galleries, enabling social distancing, the process is ongoing and we await training in conservation of documents. This could never have been achieved by one person.

Jeanette Hardiman has re-catalogued our considerable library using the upgraded MODES database and is now organising other volunteers to input key words for easier cross-referencing. We will be making a valuable community resource, accessible to all.

Our well-established community resource, **Shaftesbury Remembers the Great War**, available within our website continues to grow with Chris Stupples' input topping 1200 individual entries.

Necessary repairs to and treatment of the fabric of the building were effected under Dave Hardiman's able supervision. Janet and her team of gardeners continued to maintain our lovely garden. Mark Smith got to grips with his funding remit, successfully obtaining a grant to renew our monitors and ensuring that they were installed and working. Sue Stamp produced a brilliant newsletter just before Christmas. Sheena Commons, assisted by Claire Riley, put together the temporary Dolls Houses and Childhood exhibition and Ian Kellett kept us in the public eye with his website blogs. He also masterminded the excellent, professionally-made, promotional video now embedded in our website. Gordon Ewart-Dean, frustrated by a lack of admin duties, has been helping with the archives and library. Cath Toogood continues to take the minutes at our committee meetings and has also been involved with the archives. Linda Wilton, our able treasurer, is still sorting out problems with poorly-communicating corporations, this time BT. She had intended to step down last year but, happily, due to circumstances, she stayed. However next year she assured me that we will be looking for a new treasurer so if anyone knows a suitable candidate....

Thanks go as ever to Keri Jones who takes every opportunity to promote the museum. This year Andy Hargreaves has given us the benefit of his considerable IT expertise, always available at short notice to sort out equipment and databases. Elaine thanked the members who continue to support the society and, of course, to our president Sir John Stuttard who takes an active part in governance and is unfailingly supportive.

It was Elaine's aim to build teams in all areas to aid succession planning; we have made a start but there is a long way to go as we move on to collection care and display.

More than half of our wonderful stewards were willing to step up during August last year when we opened three days a week: this was remarkable, given most were in the vulnerable age group, but sadly it proved impossible to carry on as it was surprisingly busy and three stewards were needed each session due to COVID procedures.

The pandemic made it difficult to fulfill the stated objectives of opening the museum to the public, providing research facilities, offering winter lectures and organising a learning outreach education programme, but the opportunity was taken during restrictions to lay down foundations of an improved facility to the community.

(The Blue Plaque presentation is outside of this year's report and will therefore be included in next year's report.)

Sue Stamp proposed the Chairperson's Report be accepted, Janet Swiss seconded.

Treasurer's Report: A copy of the accounts was available for all to see. Linda told the meeting the accounts had all been reconciled and relevant Sage Account records and documents deposited with Andrews & Palmer Accountants who had audited them for the Charities Commission.

In the short time we were open, four weekends in August, donations were £543:33, shop sales £618:99. We did receive a Grant of £25,000 from Dorset Council. We are maintaining a healthy bank balance: Community Account £37,249.18, Business Money Manager £20,846.44. M&G investment fell a little due to the Stock Market following COVID but has recovered and at 31st March 2021 the value was £37,935.79. We will not be able to claim Gift Aid through the GASDS scheme due to small amount of public donations in 2020/21. The GASDS to reclaim for 2019/20 was £1455. Footfall was 1026 (adults 912, children 114).

The repairs and maintenance bill was higher as maintenance was needed in several areas with considerable work needed in The Beadster. The Accountant's bill was high as Andrews & Palmer had not invoiced us for three years. We have a new Zettle till system in place with a card reader, it is user friendly, and most stewards are managing it well. New gallery monitors are in place; they cost £1566 and will be funded partly from a SW Museums Development grant. New shelving and storage for the library has been purchased with a £500 grant from Dorset Museums Association. We changed our Broadband Provider to XINIX who offer a much better contract. Our connection is now fibre, ultrafast. Linda is still battling with BT.

Membership Fees: the fees will not change for 2021-2022.

Winter Lecture Programme: Ian commented the pandemic may well become worse before it gets better, if this is the case and some of the lectures need to be cancelled the members will be notified. At this time all speakers have been contacted and have agreed to come, although of course this may change. Ian asked if any were cancelled would holding them on Zoom be an acceptable alternative? Out of those present around half would be able to watch on Zoom.

Deborah Jones suggested that those who had Zoom could open their homes to those who did not, provided the COVID procedures were followed and all had been fully vaccinated. Ian will take a look and cross that bridge when we get there. The Teulon Porter lecturer will come in person from Cambridge, he is very interesting in his field and highly respected. If this lecture goes ahead it will be in the Town Hall as usual; it has the advantage of being big and airy. There is a late addition to the programme being added in April 2022: Sidney Blackmore lecturing on the Fonthill Fever. Next year is the 200th anniversary of the Fonthill sale. We will be running an exhibition and are hopefully being loaned the artefacts to display as the tower where they are usually displayed is shut for renovations. **Gill Hunt** asked if priority could be given to members wanting to attend lectures, **Ian** replied it has been suggested that members only be admitted until 14:20 then open up to outsiders. Ian was aware of the point. **Deborah Jones** asked if consideration could be given to the larger rooms in the Arts Centre? Quaker meeting house and St Peters Hall was suggested also, Ian commented these come with a price attached. **Linda Wilton** commented that we could afford it. **Roy Mitchell** added it may well be a false economy if we can afford it not to consider hiring a hall if we expect a bigger turnout, as if our members are unable to get seats we may lose them for good. It was also asked if the lecture could be recorded for a later date?

Appointment of Accountants: Andrews & Palmer of Gillingham have been acting as the Society's Accountants, they are to remain so, they are always helpful and accommodating.

Dave Hardiman proposed Mark Smith seconded. All in agreement.

AOB:

Ann Symons gave a vote of thanks to Elaine for all the hard work she puts into the museum. Elaine keeps things going; she works out the steward rota, looks after the shop ordering, does the cleaning and has even found more stewards. **Thank you Elaine. A round of applause from the floor followed.**

There being no other business the meeting closed at 15:00.

The Origins of the Shaftesbury & District Historical Society and the Gold Hill Museum



Inside the entrance of the museum a board names Noel Teulon Porter as the founder of the Society. In a file in the library is a short document recollecting him by Frank Hopton. Frank himself was a history teacher at Shaftesbury Grammar School and long-serving member of the society and committee. He won the 1988 Mansel-Pleydell Prize for his essay 'The 1830 Parliamentary Election in Shaftesbury'. His recollections of Noel Teulon Porter are reproduced in this issue.

Noel Teulon Porter:

"His name is unknown to most people in Shaftesbury, but the Historical Society and the Museum are his legacy and his monument." (Frank Hopton)

In May 1946 the SDHS was formed and on June 5th it held its inaugural meeting (see separate article in this issue). Brenda Innes writes in her book 'Shaftesbury, An Illustrated History' "Farley Rutter... said the idea originated when the road at the top of St. John's Hill was widened and two shafts were found which baffled local archaeologist... much excavating was done and very soon the Borough Council let them have the room at the town hall 'formerly used by the billeting officer' for a museum. with a rapidly expanding collection the museum moved to gold hill [in February 1954 – see photo] and... the members decided to buy Sun and Moon cottage when it came on the market in 1957. Their hours of hard work turn to the old pub and doss house, on a site that has been occupied for about 800 years, into a good local museum."

According to an article in the Bournemouth Echo of February 1954 on the opening of the Society's first Gold Hill museum, Colonel Drew said "Concentrate on your town and district...your committee and hon. curator should stoutly refuse to accept the odd ostrich egg or boomerang, which are features of less fortunate museums"!



*Opening the museum on Gold Hill.
February 1954. From left to right:
Colonel Drew, curator of Dorchester
Museum, Miss Priest-Shaw the curator
of Shaftesbury Museum, Sir Leonard
Woolley, President, Mr Teulon Porter is
named 'Father of the museum' on the
back of the frame and Mr Farley Rutter,
Chairman*

There is (obviously) much more which could be said about all the early members named above and others, and other early articles in local newspapers on the proceedings of the Society and the Museum. If there is more that members could supply about any them, or any other past members whose stories could illustrate the history of these institutions, please do let us know by letter or email to library@goldhillmuseum.org.uk.

Rupert Tapper

Library and archives SDHS Gold Hill Museum

Attached to this article:

Frank Hopton's recollections

Transcript of The Western Gazette' record of the inaugural AGM of the Society

The unfortunate Matron of Westminster Memorial Hospital.

Here's a story of troubling events that took place in 1923, when questions were raised over the competence of the matron at the Westminster Memorial Cottage Hospital.

During 1923, there seems to have arisen, a feud between the matron at the hospital and one of the Doctors, which had led to an allegation about the matron's competence and an ongoing saga of other unfounded complaints and allegations.

The hospital was built in memory of Richard Grosvenor, 2nd Marquess of Westminster and named after him; it was formally opened in 1874. There was no NHS in those days and patients were charged a fee. No parish poor were admitted and they had to be cared for either at home or in the local workhouse infirmary.



The hospital was later extended to provide an operating theatre and x-ray facility. In 1919, to assist with the hospital funding, the Shaftesbury Carnival Committee donated money from the annual carnival. This continued and by 1922, the Carnival Committee's contribution amounted to almost 25% of the annual running costs of the hospital, which they felt gave them the right to a say in the running of the hospital.

Lady Theodora Guest (aged 84) was a daughter of the founders and was President of the hospital committee and, in the autumn of 1923, she stated publicly about the matter, that she was 'sick & tired of it all'. She let it be known that she had left a substantial sum of money to the hospital in her will, because she valued it as a memorial to her Father & Mother, who she said 'would be horrified' to see the current state of the hospital committee. Unless the matter was sorted, she threatened to change her will.

In a committee meeting at the Town Hall on 6th, September, 1923, Lady Theodora addressed the meeting and referred to the difficulties in connection with the hospital, that had occurred during the previous 6 months or so.

She said that the first thing that arose was a 'Cock & Bull' story in a charge against the matron, that a child had not been properly nursed. That was investigated and, as they thought, done with. However, it seemed that some people were not satisfied and the position of matron was then made very uncomfortable by them.

She went on, another attack on the matron's competence was made, which was also found to be groundless. Then, as they could find no fault with her as a nurse, her opponents attacked her ability as a matron and accused her of a 'lack of tact'. Things were made very uncomfortable for the matron, and she was very unfairly treated.



It appears that a particular gentlemen, Dr W.J.Harris, was a primary antagonist and opponent of the matron. He had attended a meeting of the Carnival Committee and addressed them of his concerns about the matron and her running of the hospital, which resulted in the Carnival Committee demanding that the matron be asked to resign, or they would not hold a carnival that year and there would be no funding from them.

Instigated by the hospital committee, an investigation was held during the first half of 1923, into the running of the hospital, which had resulted in a satisfactory report, with no fault being found. However, Dr Harris called the report a 'Whitewash', saying that all was certainly not satisfactory; nor had it been for the last 6 months.

Lady Theodora felt that the Carnival Committee seemed to think that the hospital committee were to be subservient to their orders and intimidation. She also said that a particular gentlemen, (Dr Harris), had taken against the matron, in order that she might be made to go.

Many had testified publicly to the skill and capability of the matron. Dr Hobart stated that he was 'Astonished at the excellence of the nursing at the hospital'. The methods of attack on the matron were described as 'miserable and cowardly.

The Reverend Ehlvers stated that, in his opinion, she was a clever nurse, but not so clever matron. He proposed that she be asked to resign.

A vote was held by the committee. 16 voted for her resignation; however, 17 voted against, in support of the matron.

Despite the vote of support; on the 19th, September, 1923, the matron wrote to the hospital committee and the Wester Gazette published her letter.

It reads as follows:-

'Sir – I beg to tender my resignation of my position as matron here, which office I have held for practically seven years, my engagement terminating 9th, October, 1923. My health will no longer stand the intolerable strain to which I have been subjected during the past 9 months. The extraordinary proceedings, which, to my mind, resembles continual persecution; for I must point out I have never been informed of any specific charge against me. Meetings have been held; I have been discussed; naturally I have read the newspapers and marvelled at the way prominent people of Shaftesbury have appeared to have thrown self-respect, dignity, common courtesy and justice to the winds in their mode of attacking a woman.

In almost 20 years professional public work my reputation has borne the strictest scrutiny. I still retain self-respect and dignity as a nurse, a matron and a woman. Probably it has not dawned on a few members the great injury that may have been done to me by these peculiar proceedings – probably permanent injury, that no patch of peace can cover! I say few, for I know the confidence and sympathy of the majority is with me. I thank them for their support.

If there is a specific charge, doubtless my (almost 1,100) past patients and their friends, also all subscribers and donors, would like fair play for the hospital.

If no charge then 'fair play' for me!

I have done my best; I have surmounted many difficulties here as matron and nurse. I

I am completely worn out, therefore it only remains for me to resign. I fear I may fall in efficiency in my duties if I remain.

I ask all 'have I done my duty, or have I not?'

I am sir, yours truly.

Lucy Mary Gowan.

Matron.

Well; what a carry on! Sounds to me like the poor woman got on the wrong side of one Doctor, who then used his influence to besmirch her character and competence and sway others against her. She was victimised and hounded out of her job.

The hospital closed for a while afterwards and reorganised, reopening with a new matron installed. The annual running costs of the hospital totalled about £1,300 at that time; the matron's salary was £100 per year.

Lucy Gowan was a single woman aged about 46 at the time. She moved on and found less stressful work elsewhere and, no doubt, a happier life.

David Hardiman
Trustee
Gold Hill Museum

Some Recollections of Noel Teulon Porter, the Founder of the Museum and the Historical Society

by

Frank Hopton

Noel Teulon Porter, T.P. as he was always known came from Cambridge to Shaftesbury in 1945 to live in Highlands, in Great Lane. The house has magnificent views and is clearly visible from Park Walk.

He was an impressive looking man with strong features; his body was thick set and powerful. However, he was badly disabled, having one leg much shorter than the other. Miss Leonora Schafarik, one of our members and Mrs T.P.'s niece believes it was caused by an accident when he was a child. In character he was unassuming and preferred to remain in the background yet he also had firm opinions.

Miss Schafarik knew her uncle as a kind, friendly and generous man who was always interested in people from all walks of life. He had a private income, she thinks, from properties he owned in Cambridge. Miss Schafarik used to visit her aunt Theresia in Cambridge and she remembers how a dozen or more people were entertained to lunch regularly - lonely people and she remembers particularly the large cauldron of delicious soup simmering on the stove.

Very little is known about T.P.'s life before he moved to Shaftesbury though he did tell me once that he was bedridden for a long time when he was a boy and people brought him plants and grasses. He could identify 600 varieties - I think it was 600 - certainly it was a large number.

One part of T.P.'s life as a young man known because he wrote about himself in his introduction to the book 'As I seem to remember' by Sir Leonard Woolley, the distinguished archaeologist, who came to live in Sedgemoor Manor. This book was published for the Society in 1962. Sir Leonard Woolley renewed his friendship with T.P. and became the first president of the Historical Society. T.P. first met Leonard Woolley when they were young men before the 1914-1918 war, working on an archaeological excavation at Corbridge near Hexham. "it was Woolley's first dig", T.P. wrote, "at first and never since, I had the advantage of him as I had already been a workman on a quarry gang for two years.

Perhaps that is why he became known at Corbridge as 'The Gent'. While I having fallen into a dirty ditch on my arrival was 'Mucky Lad' or 'Mucky' for short... we did not meet again for many years, when I took the Chair for him at Cambridge at his very first lecture".

In Shaftesbury T.P. was a familiar figure, riding around the town on his vintage Norton motorbike specially adapted because of his short leg. He became well known because he was always encouraging people to let him have bygone objects of local interest and getting children to bring him any curious objects they happened to find. This was the first stage of the museum collection. It was displayed on a table upstairs in the town hall if my memory is correct. T.P.'s efforts led to the foundation of the Historical Society, followed by the purchase of the Sun and Moon cottage, with Farley Rutter's local knowledge and financial advice.

A few personal memories may be of interest. The headmaster of the Grammar School had been approached by T.P. to get the History master [Frank] to go and see him about joining the Historical Society, I did so. We walked in his garden [Highlands, Great Lane] and he told me – firmly that the History syllabus should start with local history in Form 1 and then broaden to national and world history in succeeding years. I went to the AGM in 1955 and found myself on elected to the Committee.

On another occasion when I visited him at Highlands, he was working in the garden on his hands and knees weeding a row of carrots. He was an expert gardener and he told me – firmly - that the handles of garden tools must be rubbed down with linseed oil - boiled linseed - every time after use and he did exactly that before we went into the house.

Another vivid memory is of calling on him too early, just after six o'clock. Mrs T.P. opened the door, put a finger to her lips and whispered, "T.P. is listening to the news but do come in." We sat down in silence. T.P. was lying on a sofa, his short leg balanced on his flexed good leg, smoking a cigarette, his total attention concentrated on the BBC News until it ended. T.P. and Theresia both smoked and smoked elegantly with cigarette holders.

T.P. kept up a wide-ranging correspondence and employed a secretary from time to time. He used to write to the British Museum, to scholars like L.F.Salzman, another of his friends, who was the general editor of the Victoria County History Series, and to the Ordnance Survey Department because he had discovered a fortified site at Sedgell not marked on the maps.

He wanted to excavate the ditch around the site and would I provide VI formers to do the digging in the summer holidays. VI forms were small in the 1950s, but David Roberts volunteered. We cycled down to Sedgemoor, spades across the handlebars. As we crossed the site T.P. identified a weed, which he said was always a sign of human habitation. An example, I thought, of his wide-ranging knowledge.

We were advised - very firmly - when we stopped for lunch, that Webb's Wonderful lettuce was the only variety worth eating. We dug all day...finishing about 4pm. David and I pushed our bikes up the hill from Semley. T.P. passed us with a cheery wave and the one and only find of the day – alas! – a fragment of blue and white China pottery.

T.P. was indeed a knowledgeable character as well as being a friendly man. His name is unknown now to most people in Shaftesbury, but the Historical Society and the museum are his legacy and his monument.

F.C. Hopton



The Serpent
Gold Hill Museum



Guildhall Square



Park Walk



Gold Hill and the Guildhall



Bleke Street

The Beckfords of Fonthill and the great sales of 1822 & 1823

2022 marks the bicentenary of the first great Fonthill sale, an event which gripped the nation.

In summer 1822, the country's wealthiest commoner, William Beckford junior (1760-1844), commissioned the auctioneer, James Christie of Pall Mall, to arrange a sale of the contents of his enormous folly, Fonthill Abbey, in west Wiltshire. Beckford had a reputation. He had been shunned by society following a scandal involving the eleven year old son of the Earl of Devon in 1784. As a result, Beckford had lived, with his wife and daughters, in voluntary exile in Switzerland, Portugal and France. There he gained a taste for Gothic architecture, and he collected truly magnificent works of art, which he brought to Fonthill Abbey, an extreme example of folie de grandeur. Living the life of a recluse in Fonthill Abbey, alone after the death of his wife, there were few visitors. An exception was in Christmas 1800 when Admiral Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton were guests at his late father's house, Fonthill Splendens, before the completion of the construction of the new Abbey. Beckford junior later had his father's house, which was closer to the main London Road and the lake, pulled down. During his time abroad at the end of the 18th century, Beckford junior had amassed a collection of priceless paintings, sculptures, furniture, precious books and objets d'art. Today, these can be found in the world's great museums. But in 1822 they were at Fonthill Abbey – and few people had ever seen them.

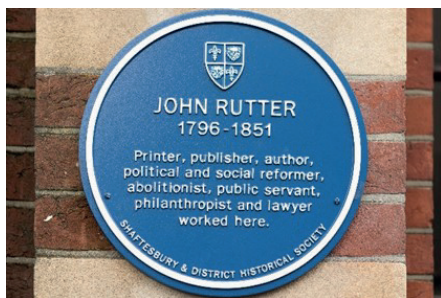


Like his father, William Beckford senior (1709-1777), who was Lord Mayor of London twice, the family had sugar estates in Jamaica, the source of their wealth. They were the largest slave owners on the island. Yet, despite this, Beckford senior was a 'liberal', championing, with William Pitt the Elder (Lord Chatham) and Sir John Wilkes, the cause of electoral reform. By all accounts Beckford senior treated his slaves fairly (by the horrific standards of the day) while Beckford junior never visited Jamaica. The trading in slaves by British ships was made illegal in 1807 and a law to abolish slavery in the British Empire was passed by Parliament in 1833.

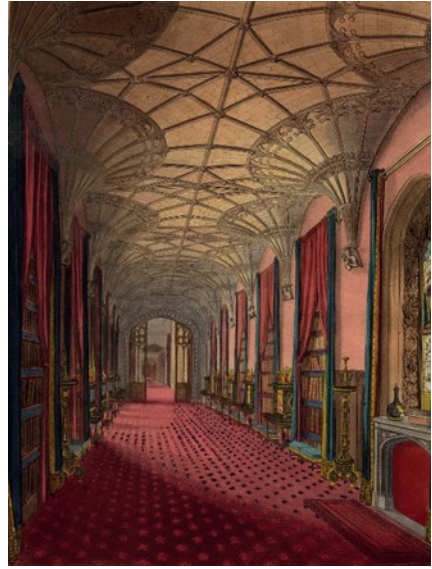


The construction of the Abbey had taken over two decades to build, as Beckford junior's grandiose ideas took hold and, by 1818, he was in debt to the tune of £145,000 (about £15 million in today's money). The declining sugar revenues from his Jamaican estates and his lavish lifestyle had caused him to borrow to finance the completion of the enormous and extravagant Abbey and to acquire the priceless treasures stored there. Beckford was falling out of love with Fonthill and turning his mind to his next project (which turned out to be Beckford's Tower on a hill overlooking Bath). He decided to sell everything, via an auction, to generate the funds.

Here in Shaftesbury, where a blue plaque now marks his former premises on the Commons, the reformer, abolitionist and philanthropist, John Rutter (1796-1851), made his living as an author, publisher and printer. He had already written a number of books, including guides. After an introduction to Beckford, probably through Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead, John Rutter was commissioned to write a description of the exterior, interior and possessions of Fonthill prior to the intended ten-day auction sale in September 1822. A 72-page guidebook, entitled *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, and Demesne, Wilts; The Seat of William Beckford, Esq. Including a List of its Numerous and Valuable Paintings, Cabinets, and Other Curiosities*, was published in 1822



Previously closed to visitors but, in the summer of 1822, open for viewing prior to the sale, the Abbey attracted the public's interest and fascination. Beckford's lifestyle, the alleged scandals over his sex life, his enormous collection of paintings and fine art, the sheer size and grandeur of the building made Fonthill an alluring place to visit.

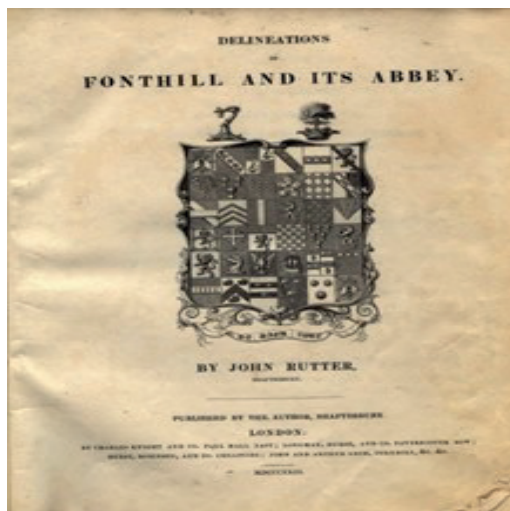


With its soaring neo-Gothic halls crammed full of Renaissance paintings, exquisite furniture, a library, sculptures and fine objects d'art, there was frenzied interest from the public. 7,200 copies of Christie's illustrated catalogue were sold for a guinea each (£110 in today's money) as up to 700 people visited Fonthill Abbey each day during August and September 1822. Rutter's publication *A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne, in the County of Wilts* similarly sold well and it ran to a sixth edition in the same year.

Immediately prior to the planned date of the auction (starting 17th September 1822) Christie postponed the event twice (eventually to 8th October), at Beckford's insistence. However, on 6th October, hand bills were circulated cancelling the auction. William Beckford had always hoped for a private sale. Indeed, he had been in discussion with the agent of his daughter, Susan's, husband, the 10th Duke of Hamilton. But the wily factor was wary of the condition of the Abbey and Beckford's efforts were rebuffed. In the autumn of 1822, the pre-auction hype had, no doubt, been intended to encourage another potential purchaser to come forward, at a higher price than might be realised from the auction proceeds of just the contents.

Behind Christie's back, Beckford had been negotiating with a rival auctioneer. Henry (known as Harry) Phillips, who used to work for Christie, had found a private buyer. Beckford sold the Abbey, all its precious contents and 5,000 acres of land for £300,000 (£31 million in today's money) to a wealthy Scottish trader, John Farquhar, who had made his fortune selling gunpowder to the East India Company, 'having attained the particular favour and confidence of the late Warren Hasting, Esq'. Christie must have been furious at being led along, with the loss of a large commission. The public felt cheated. But these sentiments did not seem to worry Beckford who was not known for his kindly or caring disposition. It is believed that he realised a handsome profit on his total outlay for the building of the Abbey and on the acquisition of contents over the previous 25 years.

Then a year later, in September and October 1823, Harry Phillips organised at Fonthill Abbey a 37-day sale by auction of over 4,000 books, many objets d'art from the Abbey and also much brought in from elsewhere. The demand from the public to see the Abbey and its contents was again very great and, according to the *Literary Gazette* of 30th August 1823, Phillips sold 2,000 tickets for 10s.6d. each (£55 each in today's money). It is thought that nearer the date of the auction this number was well exceeded and *The Times* reported 'He is fortunate who finds a vacant chair within twenty miles of Fonthill; the solitude of a private apartment is a luxury which few can hope for...The beds through the county are (literally) doing double duty – people who come in from a distance during the night must wait to go to bed until others get up in the morning. Not a farmhouse – however humble – not a cottage near Fonthill, but gives shelter to fashion, to beauty, and rank.'



In the run up to Phillips' auction in September 1823, Rutter published *A New Descriptive Guide to Fonthill Abbey and Demesne*. Higher quality versions of this edition were available at between one and three guineas, depending on size and the number of illustrations. An even grander edition was published as *Delineations of Fonthill and Its Abbey*. The auction sale was a great success, realising £330,000. Even Beckford bought back some of the items which he had sold to Farquhar the year before.



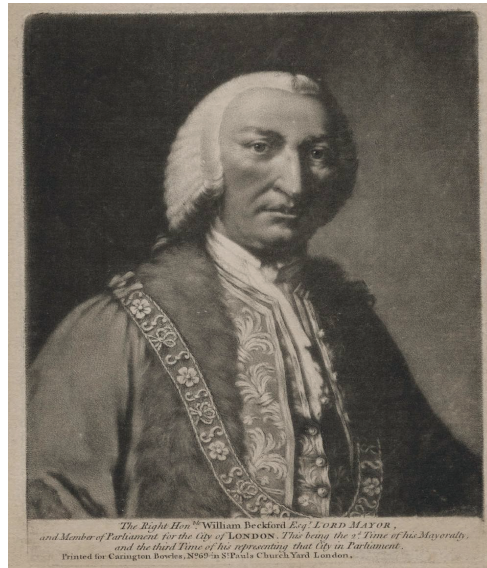
But Farquhar's euphoria was not to last long. Just two years later, on 21st December 1825, the central high tower of the Abbey collapsed in a storm, destroying a large part of the rest of the building with it.

Sir John Stuttard

Honorary President, Shaftesbury & District Historical Society

[The above article was taken from the book about John Rutter, *The Turbulent Quaker of Shaftesbury*, by John Stuttard, which relates more about the two Beckfords, the construction and description of Fonthill Abbey and its contents, as well as the theory behind its collapse in December 1825. The story of the two auction sales, in 1822 and 1823, will be the subject of an exhibition at Gold Hill Museum in 2022 and 2023, entitled *Fonthill Fever*, beginning in April 2022. This will be preceded by a lecture by Sidney Blackmore, Secretary of the Beckford Society, on 05 April 2022.]

ALDERMAN WILLIAM BECKFORD (1709-1770)



Born in Jamaica, young William Beckford was sent to England at the age of nine to be educated at Westminster School. From there in 1725 he went up to Balliol College, Oxford, where he obtained an MA. In 1736, after the death of his father, he returned to Jamaica to secure and manage the family's estates. As a sugar planter owning over 20,000 acres Beckford was prosperous, with an income of some £14,000 a year and a workforce of 3,000 slaves. He obtained experience as a local politician after election to the island's assembly and he sought to enhance the transatlantic sugar trade and to secure the defence of the islands from invasion by Spain and France.

But Jamaica was too small to match Beckford's ambitions and he also realised that to protect his West Indian interests he had to be based in England. So, in 1744 he crossed the Atlantic again and travelled to London. Shortly afterwards he acquired Fonthill Estate in Wiltshire for £32,000. He was aware that political influence would enhance his business interests. His determined ascent in British politics was rapid. In 1747 he sought and gained the support of the Earl of Shaftesbury who was patron of the pocket borough of Shaftesbury in Dorset, not far from Fonthill. He was duly elected as Member of Parliament, serving Shaftesbury until 1754 when he became one of the City of London's four MPs.

He was elected an Alderman of the City's Corporation and became Sheriff of London in 1756, prior to his first term of office as Lord Mayor in 1762. An indefatigable, fiery and frequent speaker in the House of Commons, he became known as *The Alderman*. His political stance was based, at least initially, on his desire to protect the interests of the sugar planters in the West Indies as well as of those absentee landlords based in London. But he is perhaps best remembered for his role in supporting the radical journalist and politician, John Wilkes, both in the City and later, most memorably, before King George III in May 1770. Beckford was celebrated as a great libertarian and reformer and a true man of the City.

As he rose through the political ranks, *The Alderman* became a firm friend of William Pitt the Elder who had consistently argued for protection and expansion of the country's colonial interests, against the Spanish and the French. Thus, *The Alderman*, who championed the colonies as an integral part of Great Britain, became Pitt's natural supporter. They were also united in their loathing of the practice of patronage by the land owning families and by the Monarch. They spoke up for the country's commercial interests and claimed to represent the "*Voice of the People*". In 1764, they were further united in condemning the expulsion from the House of Commons of John Wilkes MP for Aylesbury for seditious libel and, later, when Parliament refused to accept him as the duly elected member for Brentford. Beckford welcomed Wilkes' election as an Alderman. John Wilkes was later to progress within the City and served both as Sheriff and as Lord Mayor.

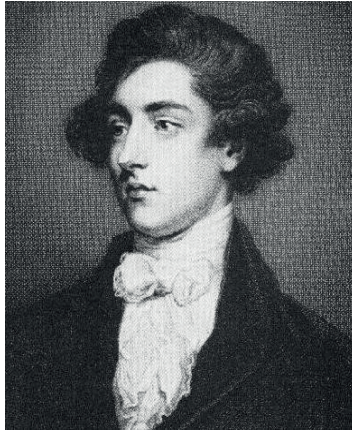
The Alderman's enduring legacy was the start of the process of achieving electoral and parliamentary reform. He had campaigned for liberty. He was less popular in Westminster. But, he had championed the City, its commerce and trade. He had helped put the "great" in Great Britain. William Beckford was recognised as one of the City's most effective Lord Mayors. In expounding libertarian and democratic principles, and in common with the contemporary mindset on the matter, *The Alderman* did not find any conflict with his ownership of plantations which employed over 3,000 slaves – the source of his wealth and power. The real movement to abolish the slave trade, through Acts of Parliament in 1807 and 1833, was to postdate Beckford's life.

In June 1770, after catching a chill during a visit to his Wiltshire estate Fonthill *Splendens*, Beckford died of rheumatic fever at his London home in Soho Square. At a meeting of the Court of Common Council of the City of London, a motion was passed unanimously that a statue of the late Right Honourable William Beckford, Lord Mayor, should be erected in Guildhall in the City of London. . His is the only statue in the great hall of a Lord Mayor; the others are senior politicians, such as William Pitt the Elder (Lord Chatham), William Pitt the Younger and Sir Winston Churchill as well as the great military leaders Admiral Nelson and the Duke of Wellington.

Just recently Beckford's statue in Guildhall has been the source of controversy, because of the enormous wealth derived from his sugar plantations in Jamaica based on African slaves. Many wish the statue to be removed. In January 2021, the City of London Corporation voted to resite the statues away from the great hall of Guildhall. However, in early October 2021, the Corporation made a U-turn on its former decision and voted to keep the statue in place and, instead, adopt a policy of "retain and explain". *The Alderman* was a controversial figure when he lived. But now, some 250 years later, albeit for different reasons, controversy about *The Alderman* has been re-awakened.

Sir John Stuttard
Honorary President
Shaftesbury & District Historical Society

William Beckford, of Fonthill Abbey, (1760–1844)



The younger William Beckford (1760-1844) was the only legitimate son of Alderman William Beckford of Fonthill Splendens, an estate north of Tisbury, in West Wiltshire. William Beckford's mother was Maria March, granddaughter of James Hamilton, the 6th Earl of Abercorn. When his father died in 1770, the younger William, aged 9, inherited the Fonthill Estate, sugar plantations with slave labour in Jamaica and a further £1 million in investments and cash, about £6 billion in today's money. His income was estimated to be £27,000 per annum, the equivalent of £4.5 million today. He was believed to be the country's wealthiest commoner.

Young William got off to, what you might say, was a good start. Allegedly, but improbably, he was briefly trained in music by Mozart and he learnt about the classics, architecture and art. He was privately educated at home with few childhood friends. William became, what we would call today, a spoilt child. There was no-one to moderate his fierce temper. He lived as a child in a dream world, in the grandeur of Fonthill Splendens, with its magnificent paintings, sculptures and wonderful grounds. There he would fantasise about the orient, tales of bravery and of chivalry and he developed a love of beauty and the countryside. He studied the arts and went on the Grand Tour - twice. He was interested in literature, having been encouraged to read widely, and enjoyed poetry and amateur dramatics. He loved music, played the piano and harpsichord well and was a great mimic. He was also not without connections: his godfather was Lord Chatham who oversaw his private education. He was an aesthete, educated in a love of music, literature, the fine arts and architecture.

Bisexual, William Beckford is a controversial character, spending many years in voluntary exile on the continent after revelations of an alleged affair with a young boy, William 'Kitty' Courtenay, later the 9th Earl of Devon. He knew how to spend money – on a luxurious lifestyle and on beautiful objects. While living in Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and France he amassed an amazing array of paintings, vases and objets d'art, as well as an extensive library. This collection is now scattered among the world's great museums and galleries and some stately homes.

William Beckford was also known as a writer and a novelist. He was a romanticist and a fantasist. He liked mystery and illusion. He was a dreamer who disliked convention. But he was well read and he enjoyed writing. His first work *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, a satirical work about six fictional artists, was completed when he was just 15 years old and published in 1780. Several travelogues followed over the years. He had a fascination for the Orient and its mysticism and, in 1782, he began his most famous work, the Gothic novel *Vathek*, originally in French, about an Abbasid caliph who renounces Islam and engages with his mother in a series of licentious and deplorable activities designed to gain him supernatural powers.

But Beckford is best remembered by many as the builder of the extraordinary neo-Gothic folly, Fonthill Abbey, where he lived for almost 20 years at the beginning of the 19th century, having demolished his father's attractive Palladian mansion, Fonthill Splendens, in 1807. It was a place where he could house his extraordinary art collection. Started in 1796, the Abbey took 17 years to build after the architect, James Wyatt, who had many other commissions, had been erratic in managing the project. Beckford took over the management of the building for a while and, during construction, the main tower fell down twice. Fonthill Abbey was largely completed in 1813, although scaffolding enveloped the tower even as late as 1817 and it was never regarded as being completely sound. Work carried on until 1819.

He never visited Jamaica, the source of his wealth and his sugar revenues began to decline, thus impairing his extravagant lifestyle. Beckford was obliged to sell the Abbey in 1822. Three years later, in December 1825, the huge central tower collapsed, destroying most of the building. But, prior to this, the grandeur and splendour of the Abbey, with its ornately decorated interior, had been captured in John Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill & Its Abbey*, which was published in 1823.

Beckford moved to Bath, where he acquired four houses in Lansdown Crescent, as well as several tracts of farmland to enable him to ride to another folly. The narrow route took him past grottos and open landscape views to a tower. Beckford's Tower, as it is now known, stands 154 feet high on a hill with panoramic views of Bath and the surrounding countryside. It contains some of his possessions and library books and is currently being restored.

In 1844, aged 83, Beckford died in Bath. He is buried in a cemetery next to the Tower in a grave surrounded by a moat, protected from the world yet overlooking the countryside and the city below. Beckford's fame rests on his eccentric extravagances as a builder and collector as well as his literary endeavours. In constructing his buildings and amassing his collections he managed to dissipate most of his fortune. His younger daughter, Susan Euphemia, married Lord Douglas who, in 1819, succeeded to the title of the Duke of Hamilton and some of her father's collection finished up in Hamilton Palace and at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran. Sadly, most of the contents of Hamilton Palace were auctioned in the 19th century and the enormous stately home was demolished in the 1920s. But some of William Beckford's collection can be seen at Brodick Castle.

Sir John Stuttard
Honorary President
Shaftesbury and District Historical Society

Western Gazette 7th, June, 1946.

Traditions of Shaftesbury.

A move to find proof.

‘Discovery that whetted appetites’.

The Earl of Shaftesbury was unanimously elected President at the inaugural meeting of the Shaftesbury & District Historical Society at the Town Hall on Wednesday 5th, June, 1946. Lady Shaftesbury was appointed Vice President. The object of the Society is to further the knowledge of history, relating more especially to the neighbourhood of Shaftesbury, and to carry out research by study of ancient archives, and, where necessary, by excavation.

Mr W. Farley Rutter (Chairman), presided over a largely attended meeting, supported by Mr Edwyn Jervoise (Hon. Secretary).

Explaining the objects of the Society, Mr Farley Rutter said there were a few old books dealing with the town and also accounts of a few excavations made upon the Abbey site, but nothing that really provided an accurate and interesting account of the town from an historical point of view. Was there, he asked, an early settlement in Shaftesbury in pre-Roman times and, if so, how far back did it go? Was there ever a pre-Roman settlement in the town, or even a Roman villa? There was tradition that, at the bottom of Castle Hill, there were Roman baths, but was there any truth behind the tradition? As so much of the old town had been pulled down and the buildings replaced by others, how many of them could answer the following questions:-

- What were the respective limits of the manor of the Abbess, and the manor of the King?
- Where exactly were all the old parish Churches which had disappeared?
- Where did all the old inns stand in the town, of which they had so many names?
- Where was the original Guildhall, which disappeared before the onslaught of the turnpike commissioners?

He suggested that the time had come, when they should make a concerted effort to answer these and similar questions, and to make the answers, with supporting evidence, known.

It meant research into old records and documents and careful excavation of sites likely to yield results, and they must keep a careful watch for finds where any excavation or trenching work was in progress in the old portion of the town.

Recent discovery.

Mr Rutter mentioned that the County Council had recently widened St. John's Hill and in order to do that, made a very considerable cutting into a neighbouring garden. Two shafts of some kind were noticed, and immediately the question arose as to how they came to be there, and when were they made. 'That particular happening was really what set in train the events which have led up to this meeting' he said. "Care was taken to sift all the evidence available about these two shafts, but nothing conclusive was found, although it certainly whetted the appetites of some of us".

A set of rules was approved by the meeting, one being amended to read that it should be an obligation on any members who heard of or made any discoveries of archaeological or historical interest, to report them to the Chairman or Secretary.

Referring to the appointment of the President and Vice President, Mr Farley Rutter said that he knew from past experience, that Lady Shaftesbury had been very keenly interested in the history of the town. One of her keen desires was that there should be a museum in the town, so that they could preserve such treasures as might be brought to light. He was convinced that there would be a great many to come into the limelight if they had a museum into which they could be placed, and a suitable curator in whom everybody had confidence.

The following were elected to the committee:-

The Mayor (Alderman J.A. Norton), Mr A.C. Gray, Mr Teulon Porter, The Rev. A.C.M. Langton, Miss Dunford & Mr S.I. Jones.

Western Gazette 7th, October, 1946.

A MUSEUM.

A request by Mr W. Farley Rutter, Chairman of the newly-formed Historical Society, that the Society should be allowed the use of a small room in the Town Hall as a museum, was approved. The application was supported by Mrs Norton and Mr Edwyn Jervoise (The Society's Honorary Secretary), who said that some interesting pottery had been found as a result of excavations on Castle Hill. It was agreed that Society should be allowed to use the room free of charge.

John and Anne Rutter (drawn 1829)



John Rutter, drawn by Samuel Pearce, Bath, 1829, reproduced by kind permission of Rutter & Rutter, Wincanton



Anne Rutter, drawn by Samuel Pearce, Bath, 1829, reproduced by kind permission of Rutter & Rutter, Wincanton

SHAFTESBURY'S WAR HEROES.

BEAUTIFUL EYAM CROSS UNVEILED BY EARL OF SHAFTESBURY. STIRRING CEREMONY IN "THE PARK."

The following account is taken from a report published in the Western Gazette 5 days later, on the 28th, October.

Almost three years after the end of the 1st world war, Shaftesbury's War Heroes were honoured when a beautiful Eyam Cross was unveiled by the Earl of Shaftesbury in a stirring ceremony.

On Sunday afternoon, on Park Walk, there took place one of the most impressive and soul-stirring ceremonies in the history of the borough. It was described as Shaftesbury's day with the dead. Here, on this wind-swept day, hundreds of townspeople honoured the memory of 60 men who gave up their lives for King & Country.

Almost directly in front of the hospital, there now stands this visible expression of the gratitude of a thankful people. It is a distinctive tribute, beautiful in its substantial symmetrical proportions, and in perfect harmony with the traditions of the town, itself one of the oldest in England.

Shaftesbury's Eyam Cross, is named after the village in Derbyshire, where the oldest of Saxon crosses in this country is located, in the local Churchyard. There are few modern imitations and, in erecting it therefore, Shaftesbury has a memorial of distinction.





With the exception of the four panels, which are of Hopton Wood stone, from Derbyshire, the memorial is constructed of the noted Chilmark stone, drawn from the district.

The locality of the memorial gives it an added boldness and dignity, overlooking, as it does, miles and miles of countryside to the south. In this unique spot stands this unique tribute to the heroism and devotion to sixty gallant Shaftesburians, whose example will be as a beacon fire upon the hilltop, pointing the way to true greatness and noble service in the cause of humanity.

The inscription reads: **'Lest we forget. In proud and grateful memory of the men of Shaftesbury who gave their lives in the Great War, 1914-1918'**. The names of the 60 fallen are inscribed on the side panels. Their names are reproduced on the next pages.

Walter Harry Alner	Reginald Butt	Decimus Hardiman
Sidney William Alner	William Thomas Cole	Henry Meatyard Hatcher
Frederick Thomas Atkinson	Charles Crew	John Highman
William Bastable	Chartes Davis	Walter William Hodder
Harry Bastable	Harry Davis	Percy Hussey
Charles Belbin	Montague Durston	Bertram Keast
William Belbin	George Henry Dyke	Charles King
Charles Blake	Ernest Foot	Edwin Large
Frederick Brickell	Reginald Foot	Rex Lawson
James Burbidge	Harry Gray	Gilbert Maidment
HARRY Butt	Sidney Gray	Arthur Mayo
Frederick Butt	Edwin Greenaway	Frederick Miller
	Lesley Gutsell	Frederick Morgan
Edwin George Mullins	Walter Thorne	
George Newton	Arthur Toogood	
	Harold Lawrence Tuffin	
Sidney Parsons	Hubert Frank Weldon	
Charles Parsons	Reginald S White	
Alfred Parsons	Leslie Reginald Wightman	
Joseph Powell	Thomas Wright	
Harry Robins	Herbert Wright	
Bertram Robins	Philip Sidney Young	
Alfred Stainer		
John Stainer		
Frederick Taylor		

The Unveiling.

On the day, shortly after 2.15pm, a long procession left the Town Hall square, for a service at Holy Trinity Church. At the head walked Inspector Swain and members of the local constabulary, followed by the Comrade's band, under bandmaster T. Wareham. The Territorials and several hundred ex-servicemen from Shaftesbury & Gillingham, under the command of Lord Stalbridge and ex Corporal-Major, T. Imber, preceded the civic body, which was led by the Mayor, wearing his robes and chain of office.

At Holy Trinity, the service was conducted by the Vicar and commenced with the hymn 'O, God, our help' and was followed by a pause for silent remembrance.

After the service, the procession was reformed and, to the triumphant music of 'Onward Christian soldiers', proceeded to the memorial, which was surrounded by a huge crowd, with every point of vantage being occupied. In reserved positions, close to the memorial, were the relatives of the fallen, most of whom carried floral tributes.

After the hymn 'Rock of ages', the Earl of Shaftesbury addressed the crowd and then pulled the cord, releasing the flags, and revealing the beauty of the memorial. The Mayor then solemnly read the names of the fallen, and concluded, 'May God grant that they rest in peace'. The Rector dedicated the memorial, and Lord Stalbridge laid on it the Comrade's wreath, in national colours, bearing the inscription, 'As a token of respect to our fallen comrades, from the ex-servicemen of Shaftesbury'. Many other wreaths were laid until the base was completely covered.

Lord Shaftesbury, who, although suffering from a sprained ankle, stood throughout the ceremony. Addressing the Mayor, members of the Corporation and the good people of Shaftesbury, offered his hearty thanks for the share he was privileged to have in the impressive and stirring proceedings. Now they had unveiled the memorial to public gaze, what a host of feelings it evoked. Feelings of wonder and amazement for that supreme act of sacrifice. Then there was the thought of all the pain that that sacrifice entailed. Finally, the sense of thanksgiving and praise for the stupendous victory won. Surely they in Shaftesbury had done well in selecting this form of memorial to those of Shaftesbury who gave their lives for King and country.

'Greater love hath no man than this,

That a man lay down his life for his friend.'

Then, after Lord Shaftesbury's address, another hymn, prayers and a blessing, the National Anthem was sung, and a memorable and deeply stirring service ended with the sounding of the Last Post, by three members of the Cadet Corps.



100 years later, the memorial continues to be a focus for commemoration of all those men and women of Shaftesbury, who died in subsequent wars and conflicts and who are also remembered each year at the 11th hour of the 11th month.

Western Gazette 28 October 1921

Researched by Dave Hardiman,
Trustee, Gold Hill Museum



Shaftesbury High Street



St James



Bell Street



Angel Lane

A Tale of Two Teulon Porter Memorial Lectures

On the evening of Tuesday 05 October, 2021, and with not a little trepidation, The S&DHS returned to holding in-person lectures. There were concerns about whether, with numbers of Covid cases continuing to rise, and a subject outside the comfort zone of local or even British history, an adequate audience would materialise at the Town Hall. In the event, the attendance was of Goldilockian proportions: just over 50, with 17 non-members, some of whom were sufficiently impressed to join. In the 75th year of its existence, the Society was treated to a lecture, on the 2020 Presidential Election by Professor Tony Badger, worthy of its founder; in the words of one distinguished observer, “fascinating, authoritative, and compelling.”



There is probably no better qualified British commentator on modern American history and politics than Tony Badger. Until his retirement in 2014 he was Paul Mellon Professor of American History and Master of Clare College at the University of Cambridge. From 2014 to August 2021 he was Professor of American History at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne. He is the immediate Past President of the national Historical Association, in which honorary role he toured the length and breadth of the country lecturing to branch meetings of H.A. members.

Tony addressed the issues of how an outsider, unversed in the practice of American politics, could hi-jack the Presidential electoral process. He pointed to precedents of businessmen as candidates – Henry Ford, Hearst, and Lindbergh; to populists equally abusive of opponents – Huey Long, Joe McCarthy, Roy Cohn; and to evangelists like Pat Buchanan who incited culture wars. None of these candidates won. Donald Trump’s campaign exploited a pot-pourri of factors including the collapse of “Democratic fire-walls”, the discontent of the “Left Behinds – rural and rustbelt”, hatred of the Clintons, and support for right-wing appointments to the Supreme Court and Israel’s plan to move its capital to Jerusalem.

The Trump administration was consistently chaotic. Cabinet members were fired wholesale and the President was more interested in his own image than in the details of policy or government. He displayed minimal awareness of history, conducting an erratic foreign policy by tweet and bluster. Even so, 74 million Americans voted for him in November 2020 and Trump, without a grounding in politics or previous experience of defeat, could not accept that 80 million had voted for Joe Biden.

Tony concluded by recalling his swansong lecture for Cambridge at the British Library: “How Dismal is the Future of American Politics?” There had been other times of gloom, in 1933 and 1960, followed by some of “the most productive and constructive periods of governance in America.” The events of January 2021, however, “certainly stress tested American democracy. It survived but only just.” He could not be as optimistic about the future as he had been in 2014.

This concern was shared by questioners from the attentive audience, who worried whether Trump would run again in 2024. Tony thought that he might not, if he (Trump) thought that there was a danger of losing.

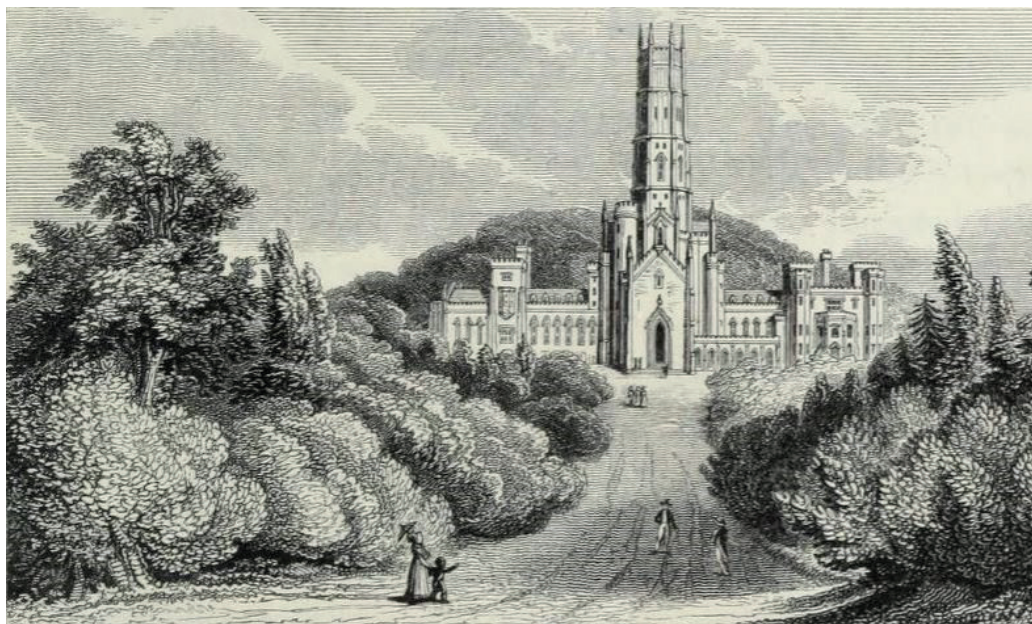
A memorable lecture which was followed by these kind words from Professor Badger, who visited Gold Hill Museum before returning home to Essex. “I am relieved that some people liked the lecture. I could not have asked for more generous hosts, a more engaged audience, or more delightful companions. I shall treasure memories of Shaftesbury for the longest time. You should all be very proud of what you have achieved at the Museum and what you have done to sustain such a vibrant history society.”

Ian Kellett, Secretary

Gold Hill Museum

News of the 2022 Teulon Porter Memorial Lecture

The S&DHS is delighted to announce that Dr Amy Frost, Senior Curator at the Bath Preservation Trust, has accepted our invitation to be the next TPM Lecturer. Her talk will focus on William Beckford's life in Bath after he left Fonthill, and what selling Fonthill enabled him to do in terms of building and collecting in Bath. This lecture in October will coincide with the final weeks of the *Fonthill Fever* Exhibition at Gold Hill Museum, marking the bicentenary of the first Fonthill Abbey Sales, and introduced by Sidney Blackmore's lecture on Tuesday 05 April at 2.30p.m. As ever, details of the lecture programme and exhibitions will be most easily found on our website at <https://www.goldhillmuseum.org.uk>



William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, prior to collapse of the tower

Ian Kellett (November 2021)

The Art of a Salesman



Gold Hill Museum volunteer Jeanette Hardiman in the process of accessioning a copy of *The Art of a Salesman*, kindly donated by its author, Paul Whittaker in October 2021. Jeanette has been through the entire stock of the Museum's Reference Library – over 1300 volumes – entering basic information such as Title, Author, Date of Publication, Publisher, and ISBN into a searchable database. She is now identifying up to 30 Keywords for each book so that future enquirers may find books, via our website, which they may not even have realised were relevant to their research interests. She anticipates completing this massive task by April 2022.

The Art of a Salesman is a 2019 biography of the hotelier and philanthropist Sir Merton Russell-Cotes who helped to drive the development of Bournemouth as a fashionable tourist resort in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He and his wife gifted the cliff-top Russell-Cotes Museum, together with a substantial art collection, to the town in 1907. Prior to Paul Whittaker's self-published work, there was no accurate account of Merton's life. Merton had compiled *Home and Abroad*, a kind of autobiography. "It is," Paul says, "the strangest book I've ever read – more of a bloated CV than a life story."

Running to two volumes and more than a thousand pages, it's an achievement just to get to the end. There are chapters devoted to the museum, the hotel, famous friends, world travels, and art collecting. Press reports of banquets and celebrations abound, all transcribed in long-winded detail." Paul suspected, however, that Merton was being economical with the truth. Anything which conflicted with the image of a resolutely middle-class, well-educated, and successful businessman was excised from the story. The *Art of a Salesman* cuts through the myth-making and begins to set the record straight.



In 1876 Merton bought the lease of Bournemouth's Bath Hotel. (Photographed in 2019 by Ethan Doyle White). He was the third son (born 1835) of a Wolverhampton wholesale ironmonger, Samuel Coates. Merton's middle name was probably a tribute to Lord John Russell, something of a local Midlands hero for his championing of the 1832 Reform Act, and was never hyphenated during most of his lifetime. He seems to have been a commercial traveller in cotton goods, though one also interested in buying and selling contemporary British art. He acquired experience of the hotel trade in Glasgow, in partnership with his sister Clara, and renamed the Royal Hanover Hotel, off George Square, on the strength of a visit by a great-grandson of Charles X of France. In fact Merton's great talents lay in marketing, networking, and self-promotion. The Bath became the Royal Bath Hotel because the Prince of Wales, aged 14, stayed for one night in 1856, and was virtually rebuilt in Loire Valley chateau style in 1877. Merton knew the power of celebrity and ensured that the Royal Bath could provide the luxury expected by an upmarket clientele. In the early 1890's this included Prince Albert of Belgium, conductor Sir Charles Halle, Oscar Wilde before his fall from grace, and actor Sir Henry Irving, whom Merton claimed as a special friend.



In 1896 Merton secured a lease on the elevated site for a new house, East Cliff Hall. In appearance this was an eccentric fusion, in his own words, of “Renaissance, Italian and old Scottish baronial styles.” Only the top storey was visible from the road and entrance level, while three storeys nestled into the cliff and commanded superb sea views. Visitors descended into the double-height Main Hall, which was overlooked on all four sides by a balcony. Statuary and a mosaic fountain caught the eye in the Hall, while the balcony walls were covered with paintings. Rooms off the balcony were dedicated to Japanese artworks – 100 packing cases of artefacts had been brought back from Japan in 1885 – and to memorabilia associated with characters played by Irving. In 1907, at a civic lunch held to celebrate the opening of the undercliff promenade for which Merton had campaigned for 30 years, the sensational announcement was made that East Cliff Hall and its art collection would be gifted to the town of Bournemouth. Henceforth it would be known as The Russell Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, though Merton and his wife Annie would continue to reside there during their lifetimes. By the time Annie died in April 1920, she and her husband had funded three additional galleries and the salary of a curator.

In 1894 Merton served as one of the early Mayors of the newly incorporated Borough of Bournemouth. He was not an elected Councillor and may have regretted accepting the honour after the Council reversed his attempt to block a right of way passing between the Royal Bath and three adjoining houses to which he held the leases. (These houses have subsequently disappeared under the tarmac of a car park.) By 1908 this furore was long-forgotten when the Russell Cotes received the Freedom of the Borough, and few begrudged a knighthood for Merton in 1909. It may have been references in the press to "Sir Russell Cotes" which led to the adoption of the hyphen.



Merton Russell Cotes (prior to hyphen) wearing the mayoral insignia which he and his wife gifted to the town of Bournemouth

Merton Russell-Cotes will be the subject of a lecture by David Beardsley at Gold Hill Museum at 2.30p.m. on Tuesday 04 January 2022.

Much of this article first appeared as a News Blog on the Gold Hill Museum website (<https://www.goldhillmuseum.org.uk>) written to mark the centenary of Merton Russell-Cotes's death on 27 January 1921. The writer was heavily indebted to Paul Whittaker's biography; in turn Paul was pleased to see that someone had taken notice of his revisionist account of Merton's life. As Paul says "I'm not done with Merton yet. I amassed a huge amount of material during my research, so I'm now writing a blog to get as much of it as possible online. And there's a lot more still to be discovered about this enigmatic man." Paul's blog is at <https://prw-on-mrc.blogspot.com>

Ian Kellett, November 2021

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