The Landmark Trust

BECKFORD'S TOWER

History Album

'…so I am growing rich, and mean to build towers'

William Beckford, 1781

Written by Caroline Stanford

2000 and updated 2024

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BASIC DETAILS

Listed Status **Grade I**

Owners **Bath Preservation Trust**

Tenure **Leasehold**

Landmark Phase of Repairs & Renovation to Accommodation Block

Architect - Will Hawkes of Hawkes, Edwards & Cave
Quantity Surveyor – Adrian Stenning of Bare, Leaning & Bare
Main contractor – Emerys of Bath
Emerys Carpenters – Alan Waites (foreman) and Pete Netherwood
Joiners - John Brown and Len Hardy, Landmark Trust
Electricians - R Campbell
Mechanical Services & plumbing - Shires Building Services Ltd
Paintwork and finishes specialist - Trisha Murray of Tom Foolery
Joiner for console – Mark Smitten
Moire for wall hangings – supplied by Context Weavers
Wall hangings – fitted by Beldecor Design
Carpet for Scarlet Drawing Room – Ulster Carpet Mills (special commission)

Let for first holiday: November 2000

Beckford Tower Trust Repair to Tower and Re-roofing of the Living Accommodation in 1999

Architects – Peter Bird, John Bucknall & Helen Phillips of Caroe and Partners.
Consulting engineer – John Mann of Mann Williams
Main contractor – Emerys of Bath.

Bath Preservation Trust capital works to the Tower in 2023-4

Architects – Thomas Ford & Partners
Structural engineers – Ed Morton Partnership
Main contractor – Emerys Brothers of Bath

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Beckford's Tower, June 2024

Summary

Beckford's Tower was built between 1825 and 1827 by William Beckford (1760-1844) to designs drawn up by H.E. Goodridge. It was built by Beckford as a daily destination of retreat from his main house, No. 20 Lansdown Crescent. He would retire to the sumptuously furnished Tower to read, appreciate the many fine objects and paintings he had amassed, and contemplate the view from his belvedere.

Beckford himself was a fascinating yet problematic figure who still attracts much interest and scholarship. He was a brilliant and precocious only child, born to immense if nouveau wealth, which derived from sugar plantations in Jamaica worked by enslaved people. This great wealth bought him privilege and power which he sometimes abused. Perhaps overprotected by his mother after his father's early death, he was educated mostly at home and was sent abroad to finish his education in Geneva. This was the first of many European tours that were to encourage his eclectic cultural tastes and make him disinclined to take up the role in English politics for which his mother hoped.

Beckford was a lively and colourful character, fond of music, the arts and, somewhat vicariously, religion and its trappings. He was very attractive to both sexes and it was clear early on that his preferences lay with his own. At eighteen, he fell madly in love with eleven-year old William Courtenay, an abusive relationship that developed over the next six years. In 1783, he married Lady Margaret Gordon, but this did not prevent the so-called Powderham Castle Scandal the following year, over his relationship with Courtenay. Beckford and his wife left England; it was a happy marriage which bore two daughters, but Margaret died in 1786. The scandal over Courtenay resulted in Beckford's ostracism by English society for the next decade or so, from which he never recovered. It reinforced an increasing tendency towards reclusion as Beckford realised that his own mores and refined tastes were not those of his social peers, or 'the Worldlings' as he called them. A prolific writer, he published a novel, Vathek, and travel and other works. He took his vast wealth for granted. Unlike many of his fellow profiteers, he gave back nothing in philanthropy.

He is mostly famous as the builder of Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire, an extravagant Gothic fantasy based on mediaeval monastic buildings. Its central tower was close to 300 feet high. It was designed by James Wyatt and was a hugely important building in its day. However, Beckford found he did not enjoy living in it and was heavily in debt. He sold it in 1822 to an aged gunpowder millionaire and moved to Bath. The central tower at the Abbey collapsed in 1825; only a fragment remains today. The Tower that Beckford built in Bath is an important example of Picturesque architecture, characterised by its eclectic combination of styles. The Tower and its accommodation block represent a combination of what became known as the Italian Villa Style and of Greek Revival architecture, and they represent early and important

examples of both. The blocking of the accommodation block is thought to reflect that of Tuscan vernacular architecture, from which a watchtower often sprang. Beckford and Goodridge's innovation was to include classical Greek references to their tower, which offers the viewer a 360 degree panorama from its summit.

William Beckford, during the building of Fonthill Abbey, by John Hoppner.

After repairs carried out by the Beckford Tower Trust from 1997, the lantern is crowned with an accurate replica of Beckford's cast iron acroteria, of which only a single length had survived. The Tower's total height is 154 feet, from a spot already 800 feet above sea level. The lantern is thought to have been inspired by the Tower of Winds (an appropriate reference in this exposed spot) and the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, both in Athens. Their use as sources for Greek Revival work was not new, but it was their use together that was new and daring. Only three earlier examples are known, and these were all in London churches.

The accommodation block at the base provided the villa reference, with its impression of low massing, flats roofs, small paired semi-circular windows and pierced parapets. The entrance porch presents a loggia in miniature, with three semi-circular headed arches with heavy imposts. The freestanding arch on the roof of the block turned the chimneys into an integrated folly. Originally, the windows were all plate glass (then considered a prodigy) and covered by gilded cast iron grilles, which lent a touch of the Byzantine.

After Beckford's death in 1844, his daughter gave Beckford's Tower and grounds to Walcot Parish for a funerary chapel and cemetery. The Tower itself grew increasingly dilapidated and in 1931 was seriously damaged by fire. Repaired and altered at this stage, the Tower remained a chapel until 1970, when the Church deconsecrated it and declared the cemetery redundant. The Tower was converted into residential accommodation in 1972. In 1977 the Beckford Tower Trust was formed and a major repair programme followed in 1997. In 2000, the Landmark Trust took a long lease on the ground floor of the accommodation block.

Beckford used the tower as a private museum for his fine collection of *objets de vertu*, riding up most days from his house on Lansdowne Crescent. The display rooms were richly decorated, their appearance in Beckford's time captured in lithographs by H.E. Goodridge. Because such detailed and reliable evidence survived, Landmark took the decision to reinstate the rich finishes in the vestibule (today's kitchen) and the Scarlet Drawing Room to an appearance that Beckford himself would recognise. The painted coffered ceiling was recreated and silk moiré hung on the walls. A plywood replica was made of the fine marble console, and this and the chimney piece were skilfully marbled using traditional paint techniques.

In 2024, the Bath Preservation Trust completed a two-year second major restoration programme on the tower, repairing the lantern and revising and renewing their museum rooms and interpretation. With an enabling grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, they conducted much community outreach, scrutinising William Beckford's complicated legacy afresh with affected groups. Confronting these issues can be painful, but the brilliance of Beckford's tower-building remains undimmed.

Figure 1: Alderman Beckford (1709-70) in the process of rebuilding Fonthill after the fire in 1755. By Tilly Kettle.

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Figure 2: Mrs Maria Beckford ('the Begum') in a posthumous portrait by Benjamin West (1799).

A Brief Life of William Beckford

William Beckford was born on 29th September 1760, the son of Alderman William Beckford and his wife Maria. Alderman Beckford was an ebullient character, twice Lord Mayor of London and MP for the City (Figure 1). His family had emigrated to Jamaica in the seventeenth century, and quickly become immensely wealthy sugar planters through the exploitation of African labour. The Alderman was born in Jamaica as third generation issue in 1710 and spoke with a heavy accent for the rest of his life, despite being educated at Westminster School and Balliol, Oxford. He returned to Jamaica only once in adult life, and his son never set eyes on the island that provided their fabulous wealth. The Alderman, a well-known figure in circles of high finance and national politics, managed his sugar operations from the City. He was a member of the Whig party, vociferous in his opposition to the Court and loyal in his support of William Pitt the Elder who became his son's godfather. The Alderman achieved notoriety for daring to rebuke George III to his face in public in a speech. He was a strange mixture, a cultivated man with a taste for the arts, yet with uncouth manners and violent temper. He was father to a host of illegitimate children (Walpole said there were thirty, although we only know of seven) many of whom he left provision for. William was the only child of his late marriage to Maria Hamilton, daughter of the Hon. George Hamilton, M.P. for Wells, and granddaughter of the 6th Earl of Abercorn (Figure 2). She brought William a stepsister from her previous marriage and a patrician lineage of which he was to be inordinately proud throughout his life. She was deeply religious with a marked Calvinist streak. As a mother, she was at once tyrannical and spoiling and a dominant influence on Beckford until her death in 1798.

Figure 3: Fonthill Splendens from the north: a huge Palladian villa on the west bank of an artificial lake and William Beckford's childhood home. He demolished it in 1807 to provide stone for Fonthill Abbey. Engraving after Turner from W. Angus's *Seats* (1787).

In 1736, the Alderman bought an estate in Wiltshire called Fonthill, from an old and decayed family. This Fonthill House burnt down in 1755, and the Fonthill in which Beckford grew up was the huge Palladian mansion that was built to replace it. It was so opulent that it became known as Fonthill Splendens, placed at the bottom of a wooded valley on an artificial lake complete with bridge, grottoes and ornate boathouse (Figure 3). The interior decoration was sumptuous and at times theatrical and exotic, and echoes through the interiors Beckford was to create in his own life.

The heir to this lavish setting was given the best of everything (Figure 4). He was highly intelligent, sensitive and precocious. An eight-year-old Mozart gave him piano lessons when he was five, during which Beckford later claimed that he, not Mozart, had composed the air *Non piu andrai*, from *The Marriage of Figaro.* The simplicity of the tune gives this claim some plausibility, although we rely on only Beckford's word for this anecdote. Sir William Chambers, architect to the King, taught him drawing and the principles of architecture. The fashionable drawing-master Alexander Cozens taught him drawing and fired his boyish Oriental fantasies by introducing him to *The Arabian Nights.* He encouraged the boy's belief that he came from a long line of kings and, importantly, encouraged him to write. He was a lasting influence on Beckford, one of the few who understood Beckford's reluctance to exchange his life of super-sensibility and poetic melancholy for the public activities into which he was later pressed by his family. Beckford's letters to Couzens are one of the main sources for his early life, although his most recent biographer questions whether they were in fact all written as dated or indeed actually despatched to Couzens, perhaps being rather kept as a kind of adjunct to his journal.[1]

The Alderman died suddenly when Beckford was only ten, and the son never quite escaped the shadow of his virile, domineering father who was to be the model for the fictitious Vathek, anti-hero and Caliph in Beckford's novel of the same name. The terms of the will cast a further shadow, since the Alderman decreed that, in the event of William's death, the estate should pass not to Maria his widow, but to Richard, his eldest illegitimate son, a man more after his own

[1] See Timothy Mowl, *William Beckford*, *Composing for Mozart* (1998). This lively and revisionist interpretation of Beckford's life casts doubt on the authenticity as dated of many of Beckford's letters, suggesting instead that they were revised and re-written long after the events they describe. It also (perhaps controversially) pulls no punches over Beckford's sexual tastes. A shorter, comprehensively illustrated and judiciously balanced account is given in James Lees-Milne's *William Beckford* (1976). From Beckford's years at Fonthill Abbey, Boyd Alexander's edition of letters he wrote to his former lover, agent, procurer and friend, Gregorio Franchi (for years suppressed by Beckford's family and which were not revised by Beckford) provide perhaps our most accurate rendition of Beckford's unconsidered voice. They are often adolescent, amusing, emotional, febrile, self-absorbed and demanding in tone, though couched in an idiom with regard to emotion and relationships that is different from today's and not straightforward to decode. All these volumes may be found on the Landmark bookshelves, to which we hope to add other biographies as they become available. It seems a requirement for anyone interested in Beckford's character to form one's own judgement!

mould who managed the slave plantations in Jamaica. Alderman Beckford's prejudice against William made Mrs. Beckford immensely protective of her only son's welfare. Great things were expected of him from an early age: his godfather Lord Chatham, thought him more talented than his own son, William Pitt the Younger, who was to become one of our greatest Prime Ministers at the age of only twenty three. Beckford was never sent to school, but educated alone at home even in his teens, by two worthy but prosaic tutors, so that he never experienced either the social or intellectual jostle and competitiveness of school life. This encouraged his natural waywardness and arrogance, traits he exhibited throughout his life.

Beckford was not sent to university in England, where his mother seems to have feared he would have fallen under bad influences, but rather packed off in 1777 to finish his education in Geneva. He went not with Couzens but with the Reverend Lettice, his personal tutor. From this time until 1803, Beckford was as much abroad as in England. Although the course of his life was altered most crucially by events in England, he found his sympathies and tastes wholly engaged by cosmopolitan life on the Continent. He was voluble, excitable, and lively, and devoted to Italian opera (especially *castrati* singing – he had a fine counter tenor voice himself, although it is not sure whether in his case this was a true or falsetto timbre). In other words, during his travels he was able to develop those aspects to his character most antipathetic to the expectations of the role in English society and politics that awaited him at home.

Geneva in the late eighteenth century was one of the intellectual centres of Europe and not an unreasonable choice by Mrs. Beckford (or 'the Begum' as Beckford always referred to her in his letters). Beckford felt immediately at home, and learnt Italian, Spanish, German and Portuguese with prodigious ease. He met Voltaire (who praised the Alderman's great liberalism and impressed Beckford with his penetrating eyes) and submitted himself to the tuition of some of the leading European intellects. Beckford revelled in it, writing regularly to

Couzens and his stepsister, Elizabeth during his year away, and beginning the travel writing that forms a significant part of his literary output. He adopted the fashionable idiom of the Sublime in writing of the effect that nature in the raw had on him, and captivated the Carthusian monks with whom he stayed during a visit to Grande Chartreuse. This was also his first exposure to the advantages of life among the cloisters, which he strove to emulate at Fonthill Abbey. He wrote disparagingly of the average beer swilling, sport-addicted English student that he found in Geneva - 'Such an animal I am determined not to be'. Unfortunately, his mother would much have preferred that he did become such a creature, rather than place his immortal soul in danger by consorting with untrustworthy philosophers. Alarmed by the reports she received from the Reverend Lettice of the company kept by her son, she ordered him home to take on the role she envisaged for him as a leading light in English politics and society.

It was already too late for this mantle to sit comfortably on Beckford's shoulders. He returned to England at odds with the prevailing ethos of the ruling classes. A fine horseman, he detested cruelty to animals in any form, whether hunting, shooting, fishing or butterfly collecting. He was happier in the company of his dogs than of most other people. He inherited and developed his father's liberal attitudes to life. He foretold that the prolongation of life would come to take precedence over the cure of souls, that 'Every lady will be proud to marry her apothecary and every lord his cook maid.' He predicted that 'every kind of exclusive system, reserved seats and pews…will be done away with. Universal toleration will produce in process of time not only universal suffrage but universal simplicity of manners.' Long before the French Revolution, he deplored the exploitation of the working classes. Yet he took his great wealth and its evil source thoughtlessly for granted and did not choose to compensate for it by philanthropic acts.

Figure 4: William Beckford as a boy, at about the age when he 'composed for Mozart', and already fond of dogs. Attr. To William Hoare.

Figure 5: The Hon. William Courtenay (1768-1835), 'Kitty' and later 3rd Viscount Devon. Beckford's infatuation with him caused the Powderham Scandal in 1784. Painted for Beckford by George Romney, 1781.

Figure 6: Louisa Beckford, Wife of William's first Cousin, Peter. She is shown as Hebe, a dubious figure who preceded Ganymede as cupbearer to Zeus, not inappropriately given her role as go-between for Beckford and 'Kitty'. Beckford commissioned the painting from Joshua Reynolds in 1782.

In the summer of 1779, however, the optimistic Mrs. Beckford sent Beckford on a tour of English country houses, accompanied by his tutor Revd. Lettice, in an attempt to introduce him to conventional circles and rural pursuits. What happened on the first stop of this tour was to affect the rest of Beckford's life. He went to stay with Lord and Lady Courtenay at Powderham Castle on the River Exe, and fell instantly and passionately in love with their eleven-year old son, William, spoiled darling of thirteen sisters (Figure5). Beckford (then aged eighteen) swung from elation to despair in the throes of his emotion; he confided in Cozens 'I grew sensible there was a pleasure in loving something besides myself'. He also wrote passionate letters to the boy, who he nicknamed 'Kitty' and 'the little Dove'. Kitty seems to have returned his affection, although there appears no physical relationship at this stage. Surprisingly and unwisely, Beckford flaunted his love in the Courtenay and Beckford households and later from Paris confided in Charlotte Courtenay, Kitty's aunt, who had her own feelings of affection for Beckford himself. He begged her to support his attempts to contact her nephew. Charlotte was soon to marry Lord Loughborough, Chief Justice of Common Pleas and in his hands this letter in itself - it runs to many pages - would ensure Beckford's eventual exile from Britain and inability to mount a libel case against attacks in the newspapers.

The immediate result was that Beckford departed with Lettice for the Lake District. He loved the English countryside and his writings here anticipate the praises of the later nature poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. He was still pining for Kitty, however, and Mrs. Beckford intervened again, with equally disastrous results. She invited to Fonthill her husband's nephew, Peter Beckford, with his attractive wife Louisa, to distract him from his infatuation (Figure 6). Unfortunately, Louisa in turn fell madly in love with Beckford. In a bizarre twist, she became a willing accomplice in his pursuit of the boy, as a means of tying Beckford's affections to herself. Their correspondence, which continues over a number of years, reveal her as a neurotic, demanding, jealous woman with a passionate nature that seems not to have found an outlet in her marriage.

Figure 7: Sir William and Lady Catherine Hamilton, with whom Beckford stayed near Naples. Beckford found a soul-mate in Catherine, shown here perhaps composing her harpsichord accompaniment to Homer's *Iliad.* She died in 1782, and Sir William then married the infamous Emma, later Lord Nelson's mistress.

Louisa and Beckford spent very little time together in fact, although her feelings for him continued unabated until her death. It is hard to avoid the impression that Beckford exploited her feelings for him to have an outlet for his own for Kitty and she clearly misjudged the extent and nature of those feelings for her.

At this point the Begum had had enough. In 1780, she despatched her son on a final Grand Tour of the Continent in a final attempt to steer him onto the straight and narrow path. He was again accompanied by the long-suffering (and in reality fairly tractable) Revd. Lettice. Via Holland, the Rhine, Vienna, Augsberg and Munich, the retinue reached its intended destination, Italy, in August. In Venice, he was introduced to two sisters and a brother in the Cornaro family. A sister fell in love with Beckford; Beckford fell for the brother, a young man of his own age with 'amazing eyes'. In the febrile Venetian atmosphere amid frequent visits to the opera, it seems there was a physical element to this brief relationship. Certainly we find Beckford prostrating himself before the shrine of his favourite saint, St. Anthony, in penance for a mortal sin and he was tormented by yearnings and guilt over an act that was a capital offence in England. 'Think where I was [last] year', he wrote in his diary, 'happy and sequestered with my love Wm.' Some fifty years later, he would raffishly claim that both sisters (one of whom was married) also threw themselves at him.

Further south, he stayed with his relation, Sir William Hamilton and his Welsh first wife Catherine, in whom Beckford was to find another soul mate and confidante (this time Platonic – see Figure 7). Lady Catherine was composing a harpsichord accompaniment to Homer's *Iliad*, and she and Beckford spent many happy hours strumming away. She was gentle and sympathetic. Beckford confided in her about the Cornaro boy (although not about young Courtenay). She was deliciously horrified, and their correspondence consists mostly of Beckford confessing without inhibition the temptations he perceived, and Lady Catherine urging penitence and regeneration to her eagerly listening but unrepentant friend.

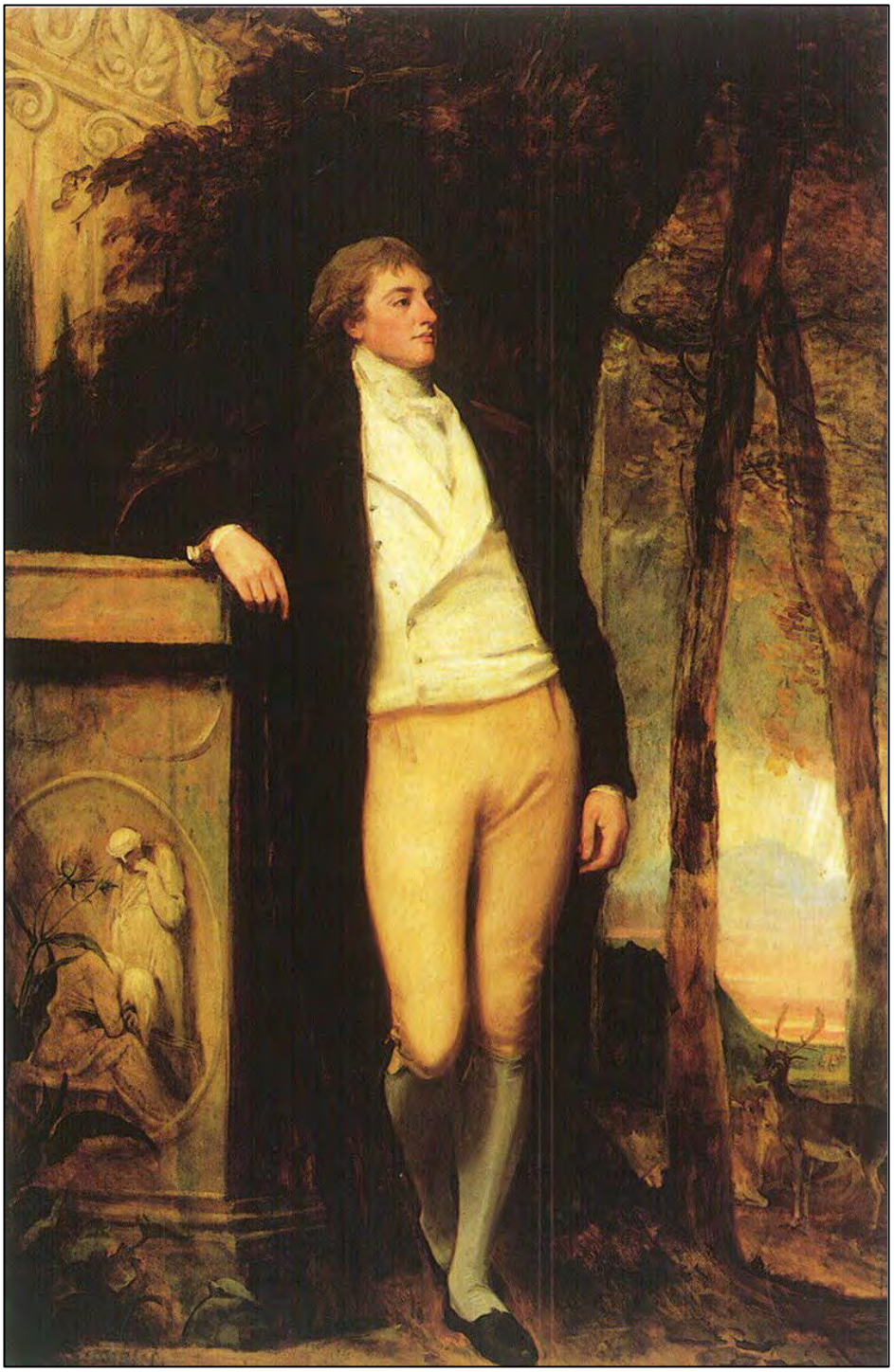


Figure 8: Beckford at his coming of age in 1781, by George Romney. This carefully composed painting contains much of Beckford's character: set in romantic scenery, shadowy architectural detail and sculpture suggest the refined tastes of the sitter. The deer roam unmolested. The canopy of trees frames a distant craggy horizon which hints at the Sublime; unknown sunlit vistas wait beyond for the young man choosing instead to linger in the shadows.
(Now at Upton House in Warwks. National Trust Photographic Library/John Hammond)

Beckford indulged his love of music throughout his stay in Italy. Music was another of his defining passions and he responded to it with a sensual intensity. His favourite composers were Corelli, Haydn, Jommeli and Mozart. He would attend operas clutching the score and hissing wildly when he deemed that a fault had been made. He became firm friends with Pacchierotti, a famous *castrato*, and from Naples made a special trip to visit the perhaps the greatest *castrato* of them all, Farinelli, who had nightly sung Philip V of Spain to sleep and was now in his 70s. Beckford was a great performer himself (the word is chosen advisedly, since his musicianship is sometimes questioned). He delighted in giving impromptu, virtuoso performances to impress those present, playing the piano, singing in his high tenor voice or dancing around the room with abandon.

We see Beckford at this age in Romney's portrait of him, undoubtedly an attractive young man and, with his wealth, supremely eligible (Figure 8). By the end of 1780, he was back in England and he spent the next months between London and Fonthill in a leisured existence of diaries and letters and preparation for his coming of age in September. He was once again philandering with Louisa Beckford who acted go-between with young Courtenay while he was at Powderham Castle during the school holidays from Westminster School. 'How my heart bounds with transport', gushed this strange lady to Beckford, 'when I fancy that after Kitty I am the being you prefer to all others!' During term time, Beckford somehow contrived that Courtenay, now thirteen, should spend the weekends with him at Mrs. Beckford's house in Wimpole Street. The boy was seemingly a willing party to this undoubtedly abusive relationship, by now, it seems, a more physical one.

On 29th September, Beckford's coming of age party was held at Splendens. It is one of the set pieces which have entered the legend of Beckford's life. A celebrated theatrical impresario, Loutherbourg, had been hired to project scenes

of sunsets, volcanic eruptions and moonlit glades through the halls and corridors using strategically placed lanterns. There were braziers of scented coals and incense; the castrati sang eerily from unseen sources. 'It was, in short', wrote Beckford years later, 'the realisation of romance in its most extravagant intensity.' A host of relations attended, including the Peter Beckfords and one Lady Margaret Gordon. For three days, Beckford carried out his duties to family, neighbours and tenants in a round of bonfires, fireworks, dancing and feasting.

At Christmas there followed a smaller gathering, again now legendary, although in part it is the manner in which Beckford himself later reminisced about these two events that give them their aura of decadent indulgence (his own two accounts of this occasion vary considerably). The Italian musicians were again present, so too were the Couzens, Louisa Beckford (without her husband), her brother George Pitt and her friend Mrs. Sophia Musters (in the throes of a passionate affair with each other), Beckford's cousins Alexander and Archibald Hamilton – and Kitty Courtenay. The Rev. Samuel Henley, tutor to the Hamilton boys, lent an air of spurious propriety although he too was an enthusiastic orientalist and encouraged the *Arabian Nights* atmosphere. Even Lees-Milne, most balanced of Beckford's biographers, describes this party as 'an orgy of acting, music and lovemaking', and it caused a scandal in the country at the time. It was also the beginning of the literary association between Beckford and Henley.

During the house party, Beckford had shown Henley some of his Italian letters. Henley's spontaneous admiration led to their inclusion in Beckford's *Dreams, Incidents and Waking Thoughts.* Beckford was also supposed to have been inspired to compose his novel, *Vathek*, by this Christmas gathering. Again, creation of this work suffers from the accumulation of myth, much of it created by Beckford himself. He claimed he wrote the novel immediately on his return to London, in the space of a few days. In fact, it seems rather that the novel had been gestating for some five years, and was largely written during another trip

to Italy in 1782. It was written in French, upon which Beckford prided himself – falsely, since his written French was full of badly translated English idioms. The book begins as a light-hearted pastiche of Arabian life but moves to a vision of Hell in which the author maintains a position of strict neutrality to the extremes of good and evil. Mass murder is passed over as an amusing incident; the personification of evil is handsome and has good taste. The plot draws upon Arabian myth to lend an air of spurious plausibility. Lettice had begun a corrected translation on their way home from Italy, a task that Henley took over at Christmas. Henley also proceeded to add voluminous footnotes based on his own Oriental erudition, which almost doubled the length. He also added a lightness of touch and elegance to the French. By the end of the year, Henley, impecunious and with a large family to support, was keen to publish. Beckford held back, insisting that the work needed the addition of four extra 'Episodes' to explain why four princes and a princess were found awaiting their doom in an antechamber in the original novel. Henley tolerated this prevarication for several years, but then developed his own plan: with faith in his own scholarship, in 1786 he published the work in English as if it were a genuine literary discovery of an eastern text. It was entitled *An Arabian Tale from an Unpublished Manuscript with Notes Critical and Explanatory* and made no mention of Beckford's part in its creation. Reviews were more favourable to the footnotes than to the content of the narrative. Beckford was horrified; the betrayal came at a low point in his own fortunes. Perhaps typically, he chose to avoid confrontation, bought a copy of Henley's version and had it translated back into French and published in Lausanne in November 1787 with his claim to authorship. To confuse matters further, another French version was printed in Paris, again without reference to Beckford. By this time, Beckford's life had moved on and he drew little satisfaction from its publication. His prequel, *Episodes of Vathek,* remained unpublished until 1912. Yet *Vathek* ran to nine editions in Beckford's lifetime, prompted numerous imitations and was further popularised by Byron, who claimed it as the inspiration for some of his work (to Beckford's chagrin, since he disliked Byron intensely).

Figure 9: Lady Margaret (nee Gordon), Beckford's pretty and sympathetic wife who stood by him until her death after the birth of their second daughter in 1791. From a miniature by Maria Cosway.

Perhaps part of Beckford's reluctance to publish in the mid-1780s stemmed from his increasingly complicated private life. Louisa Beckford had become increasingly reckless of hiding her passion for him. Rumours also reached her of his probable engagement to Lady Margaret Gordon (Figure 9). Beckford left with his entourage for Italy, reaching Naples in July 1782 only to find Lady Hamilton dying and Sir William desolate. Then his musician, John Burton, caught a fever of which he also died. Beckford returned to England by November, to be greeted by the news that Louisa was dying of consumption. She begged him to come to see her; as far as we know, he never did, just as he was to ignore a similar plea from Franchi in the 1820s. Despite his own often fulsome expressions of affection, Beckford seems to have prevented all reciprocal claims from touching him.

Meanwhile, the Coutenays were becoming increasingly suspicious of Beckford's relationship with their son. In May 1783, Mrs. Beckford engineered her son's marriage to Lady Margaret Gordon, a pretty twenty-year old who was the daughter of the 4th Earl of Aboyne. Their relationship was a very happy one. The couple left immediately for a honeymoon in Switzerland. Beckford's affection for Kitty did not falter, but his new wife seems to have accepted his proclivities. She treated him with gentle solicitude and kindness. They became devoted to each other, with William Courtenay remaining the third element in an unusual emotional triangle. On their return, the Beckfords installed themselves at Splendens and were presented at Court. Beckford got himself elected M.P. for Wells, long in the patronage of his relations the Hamiltons and began jockeying for a peerage. The Begum's cup ranneth over, and at this point, Beckford's life might have finally run in the grooves that had seemed predestined for it.

The calm was illusory. In June, Lady Margaret gave birth to a stillborn son. In October, Beckford's name was actually gazetted as Lord Beckford of Fonthill while the couple was staying at Powderham.

Figure 10: Alexander Wedderburn, Lord Loughborough, Chief Justice of Common Pleas and Beckford's chief accuser over the Powderham Castle scandal. He and Alderman Beckford had been arch political enemies; it is possible that he was taking his revenge on the son. Portrait by W. Owen.

Also staying at Powderham were Lord Loughborough, bitter former political enemy of the Alderman, and his wife Charlotte, to whom Beckford had so rashly written about Kitty (Figure 10). Early one morning, the boy's tutor discovered Beckford in William's bedroom, seemingly *in flagrante.* Loughborough confronted Beckford; Beckford refused to admit guilt, claiming he had merely been thrashing the boy (this, it seems, would have been perfectly acceptable). Kitty, however, was forced to confess and surrendered various letters. Society was agog and awash with righteous indignation and wisdom after the event. The Begum suggested creatively that her son should pick up a few whores in Covent Garden and parade them in Mayfair; his wife advised flight to the Continent, the usual response of eighteenth-century aristocracy in disgrace. Beckford set off on 29th October, but at Dover turned back. Fortified by his own sense of self-worth and finding new courage, he returned to Fonthill and his pregnant wife. His judgement is vindicated by the fact that no prosecution was ever brought. Despite the rampant innuendo of the newspapers and the well-known unscrupulousness of Lord Loughborough, it seems that no watertight evidence could be produced for a court of law. Yet the damage to Beckford's reputation had been done. He must also have felt betrayed by his Kitty, whose name he barely mentioned again. (Courtenay remained ultimately unreformed: in 1811, he too fled the country to avoid a charge of sodomy – then a capital offence – and was never to return).

Beckford's first daughter, Maria, was born in 1785. Shortly afterwards, the family retired to live in Switzerland to escape the gossip. The following year another daughter, Susan, was born but a few days later, Margaret Beckford died of puerperal fever. She had supported Beckford with unwavering loyalty throughout the scandal and apparently accepted his bisexuality with equanimity. He was devastated by her death. Their daughters were sent back to England to be brought up by the Begum (Figure 11), where rumours circulated that Beckford himself had been responsible for his wife's death. It was at this point too that Henley brought out his version of *Vathek.*

Figure 11: Margaret and Susan Beckford in a typical eighteenth-century study of childhood innocence. After the death of their mother, Beckford's mother took them as babies back to England to be raised apart from their father. By George Romney.

Beckford returned briefly to England early in 1787 before embarking on a supposed visit to his plantations in Jamaica. In the event, the combination of winter gales and cockroaches drove him instead to put in at Madeira and then on to Lisbon, where he was to remain for the next eighteen months, during which time he quite recovered his natural high spirits. He was able to cut something of a figure in Portuguese society; as ever, his wealth made him sought after. He dabbled in Court politics, though with less commitment than his hosts hoped for; he enlivened the social scene while ever keeping an eye open for an appealing choirboy; he was virtually adopted by the Marquis of Marialva while lusting after his son; he indulged in attendance at Mass and delighted in presenting a mien of great piety and devotion, while in fact merely deriving his usual emotional fix from the music and drama of the Catholic liturgy. His patron saint, St. Anthony, had come from Lisbon and Beckford was most disappointed in the modest setting afforded him. He met a young musician, Gregorio Franchi, who was to be first his lover, then his friend and agent until Franchi's death. Beckford kept a detailed journal of these days, still extant in manuscript as *The Journal in Portugal and Spain,* which is generally accepted as some of his best writing. In diluted form, it became part of his *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal,* which he revised in his Lansdown tower.

The time was only soured by the English Minister, Robert Walpole's refusal to allow him to be presented at the Portuguese court. By the end of 1787, Beckford had had enough of Lisbon and moved onto Madrid, where he again became entangled in webs of amorous intrigue amid a social whirl. He was simultaneously enamoured, it seems, of the French ambassador's eighteen-year old daughter, her fourteen-year old husband and her nineteen-year old brother. The ambassador forbade his daughter to see her admirer (of his reaction to the boys there is no record) and the English attaché similarly refused to present Beckford at the Spanish Court, so in June 1788 he moved on to Paris.

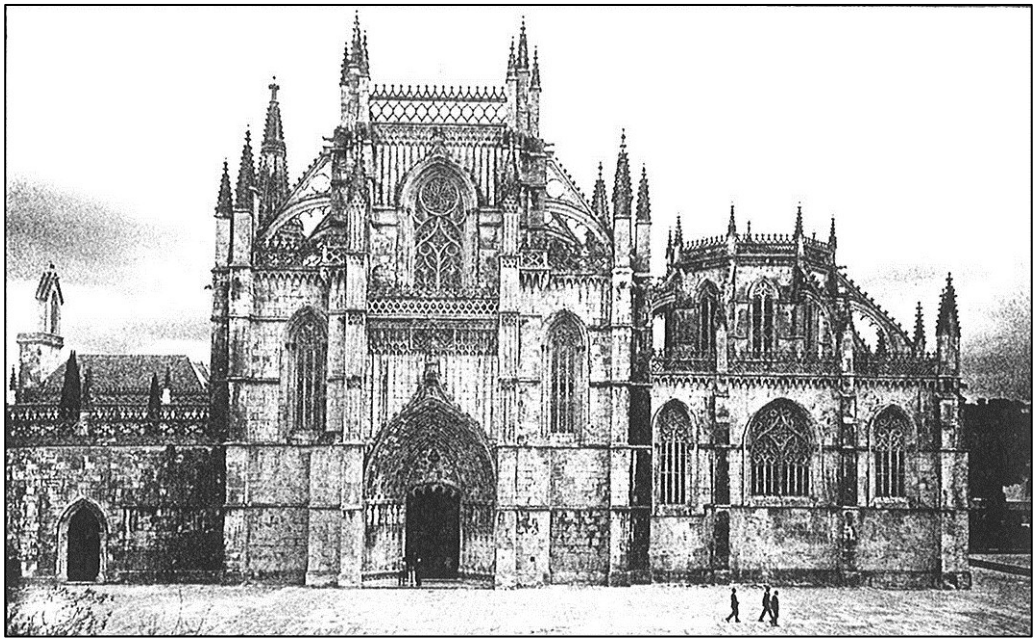


Figure 12: The abbey church and monastery of Batalha in Portugal, seen from the west. Beckford visited Batalha in 1794, and sought to replicate the impression it gave of an entire mediaeval town at his Fonthill estate.

Figure 13: Lee Priory in Kent, built by James Wyatt in the 1780s and a precursor to Fonthill Abbey.

Beckford travelled almost obsessively through the next few years until 1793, éwitnessing France during the Revolution and playing the role of a minor Scarlet Pimpernel in Switzerland. Remarkably, he also managed to leave Paris in 1793 '*accompagné des regrets des sans-culottes et de l'estime des autorités constitués de Paris'.*[2] He returned twice to Portugal, during which he achieved the long-awaited presentation at the Portuguese Court and visited and was inspired by the monastery of Batalha, which was to have such an influence on Fonthill Abbey (Figure 12).

Meanwhile, Lord Courtenay had died in 1788, and Kitty's succession to the title made it safer for Beckford to return to Fonthill intermittently. He directed its redecoration and refurbishment and the landscaping of the estate during his travels. His income had never been higher and his collections benefited greatly from the bargains to be had during the disintegration of the French aristocracy. His thoughts began to turn to building on the estate, first some hazy idea of a chapel on Stop Beacon, its highest point. Though the scheme never came to fruition, it provided his first contact with the architect, James Wyatt (Figure 13). Then in 1793, Beckford encountered a pack of hounds hunting on his land. Enraged, he ordered a wall twelve feet high and seven miles long to surround the estate, topped by a line of iron spikes. It was the beginning of a withdrawal from the world at once physical and symbolic.

In 1796, Beckford returned from his second visit to Portugal, more or less for good. A last foray into the political arena on behalf of the Regent of Portugal had been rebuffed by Pitt's ministry, his boyhood friend joining the ranks of those shunning his tarnished reputation. Beckford was driven ever further into a stance of defiance and bravado. After the addition of 1,700 acres to the Fonthill estate, and the planting of a million trees, he decided to create a building of a scale and grandeur hitherto unseen in England, safe behind his tall walls.

[2] 'Accompanied by the regrets of the Sans Culottes [revolutionary extremists] and with the esteem of the duly constituted authorities of Paris.'

Figure 14: Fonthill Abbey in 1799, the year before Nelson's visit, with one version of its ill-fated tower.

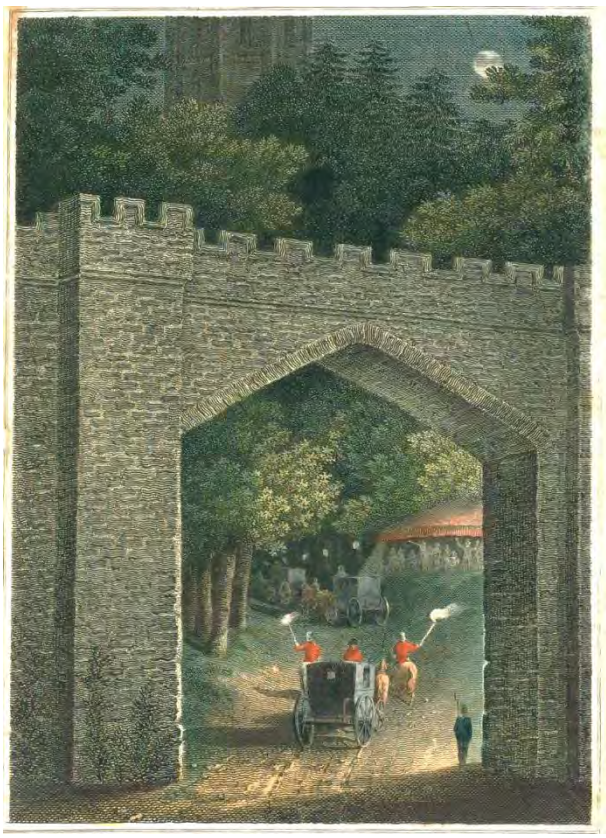


Figure 15: Nelson's visit to Fonthill: the departure from Splendens for a carefully stage-managed banquet at the Abbey.

Only his choicest friends would be allowed admittance to this private world, which he wanted to resemble a mediaeval town in miniature. He employed James Wyatt as architect – brilliant and celebrated, but also unreliable and dilatory. The commission was for a monastic-style building topped by an enormous tower, making good his aspiration when he came of age, 'so I am growing rich, and mean to build towers.' Yet he also said 'Some people drink to forget their unhappiness', said Beckford. 'I do not drink, I build' (Figure 14).

By October, a mock abbey was being erected at the other end of the ridge from Stop Beacon. Hundreds of workmen were employed; Beckford enjoyed being surrounded by the team of builders and the sense of purposeful activity around him. Once a decision was made, Beckford liked to get on with things. Wyatt, on the other hand, tended to lose interest once the plans were drawn up and the building proceeded in fits and starts over the next seven years. Inactivity alternated with furious activity, which led to hasty and skimped work. The building itself evolved in something of an ad hoc way; in 1797 a spring gale brought the wooden tower crashing down. Undeterred, a new structure was built, this time using a new compo-cement that was supposed to be everlasting. In 1800, it collapsed again, just before Lord Nelson was due to visit at Christmas. The visit was an enormous coup for Beckford, who forced Wyatt to cancel all other commitments to rebuild the tower. Nelson was in fact coming more to spend time with his beloved Emma, second wife of Sir William Hamilton, who were both part of Beckford's small coterie. Lord Nelson was promised a quiet visit away from the 'drawing room parasites', since none of these would have accepted an invitation to Fonthill anyway.

The Abbey was by no means finished and barely fit for habitation. Beckford orchestrated the visit carefully so that only the parts of the building fit to be seen appeared, and then to their best advantage (the party slept at Splendens). Rows of loyal locals turned out to welcome the procession of carriages as it approached the Abbey across the park at dusk, a brass band played *Rule*

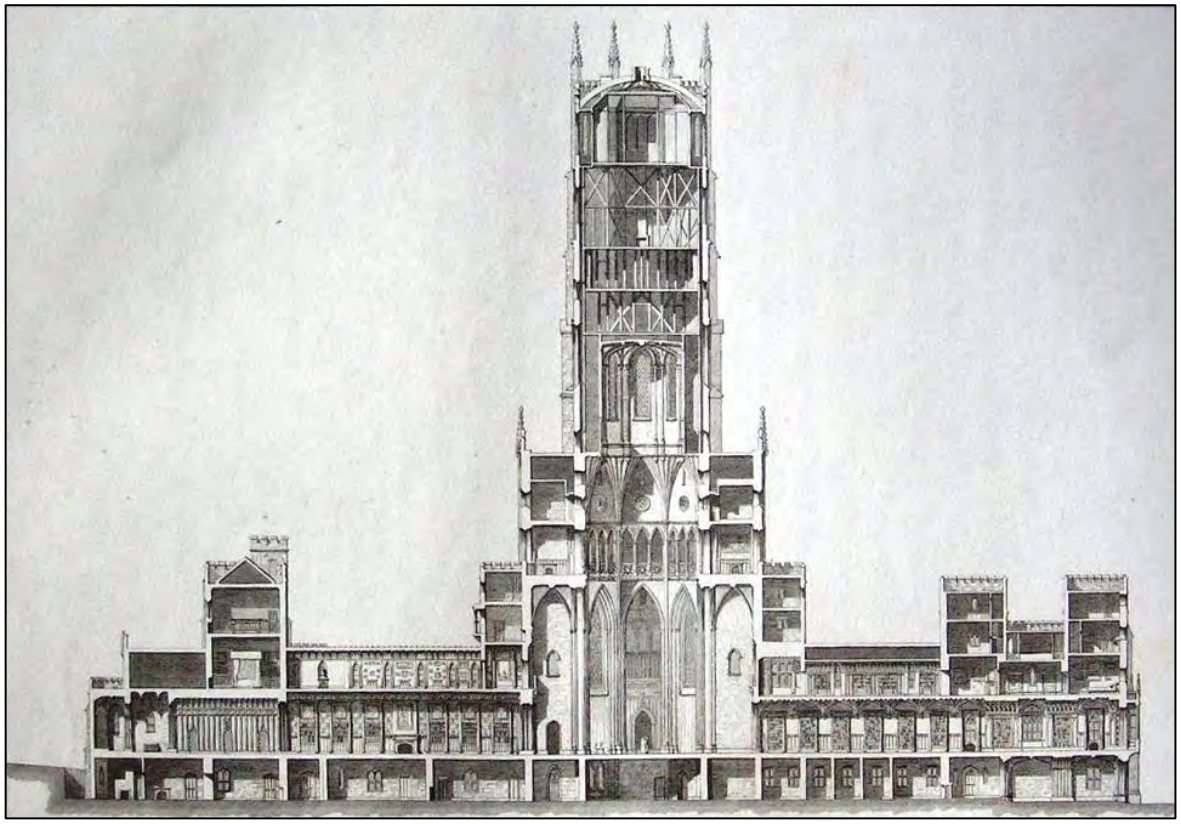


Figure 16: Longitudinal section of Fonthill Abbey, taken from John Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill* (1823).

Figure 17: Fonthill Abbey, lithograph view from the north-west by John Buckler.

Britannia and the trees were hung with lamps (Figure 15). Inside the Abbey, mysterious hooded figures lit the way with torches. After a sumptuous banquet, Lady Hamilton performed Agrippina bearing the ashes of Germanicus in a golden urn, reducing her audience to tears (of what is not recorded). During the same visit, Beckford famously outfaced the national hero by taking him for a ride at breakneck speed through the grounds in a phaeton, until Nelson (one-armed by this stage) begged to be set down. The pair did not particularly hit it off; as so often, it seems the outside world, in which Beckford at one level wanted so much to prove himself, had proved ultimately less satisfying than his own, tightly controllable sphere.

By 1807, Beckford was able to move into the Abbey, although building was to continue until 1818 in fits and starts. He ended up demolishing Splendens to provide stone for the project. Fonthill Abbey was an immensely important and influential building at the time, to which justice cannot be done here (Figures 16-20). It was famous for its sheer bulk, its vast tower some 280 feet high[3] with the huge Octagon at its base, and the wealth of its interiors. Its imitators were many, and probably include the Houses of Parliament. Yet despite times of exhilaration and elation, it was not a comfortable place to live and Beckford himself criticized its aesthetics through his mouthpiece, John Rutter. By the early 1820s he had additional worries: his financial affairs had been progressively worsening and had reached a point of desperation.

It is striking that, for all his intelligence, Beckford seems to have paid no attention whatsoever to his business affairs, content to spend the money they provided and to leave everything else to lawyers and agents who were by no means always scrupulous. The Wildman brothers, his solicitor, agent and banker respectively, had been steadily defrauding him for years by various means, and were now gaining possession of some of his slave plantations through Chancery suits. The price of sugar itself was in long-term decline, and Beckford found

[3] Accounts vary as to the tower's exact height, but such estimates would make it roughly twice as high as the Lansdown Tower.

himself £145,000 in debt. Fonthill was no longer a great adventure but an increasingly heavy millstone. The great Tower moved and groaned in the wind; the place made him melancholy and full of foreboding. 'Oh what a fatal abode!' he wrote to Franchi. 'Here it smokes, there the wind blows in (and so would the rain if it were raining); every tower is a conveyor of rheumatism.' There was no reason to stay; there was every reason to get rid of it.

Figure 19: St. Michael's Gallery, Fonthill Abbey. It was here that Nelson was entertained to an after-dinner dessert and concert of religious music – with the northernmost bays still unfinished. Display cabinets line the walls; the fan vaulting anticipates the full-blown Gothic revival mid-century.

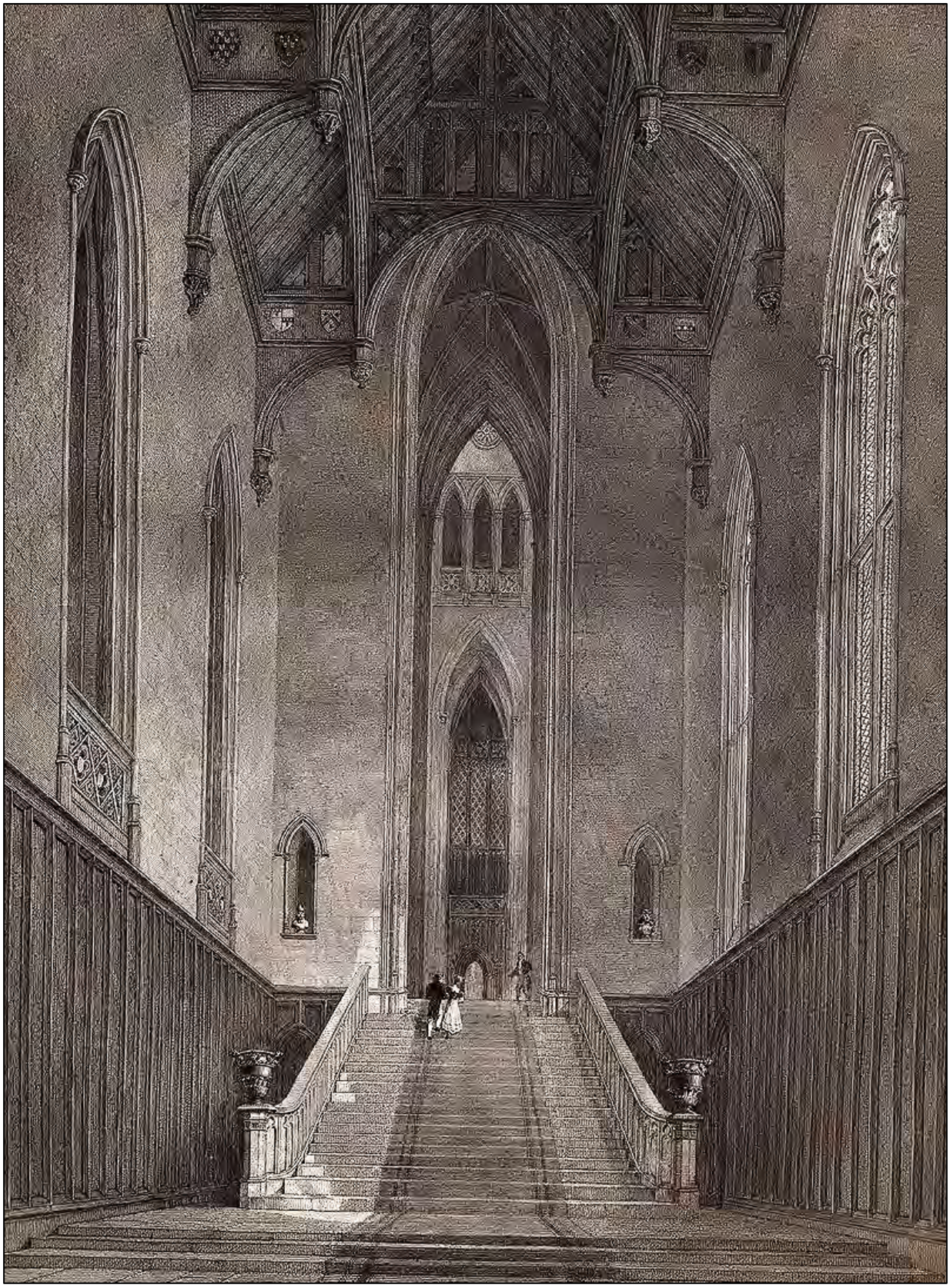
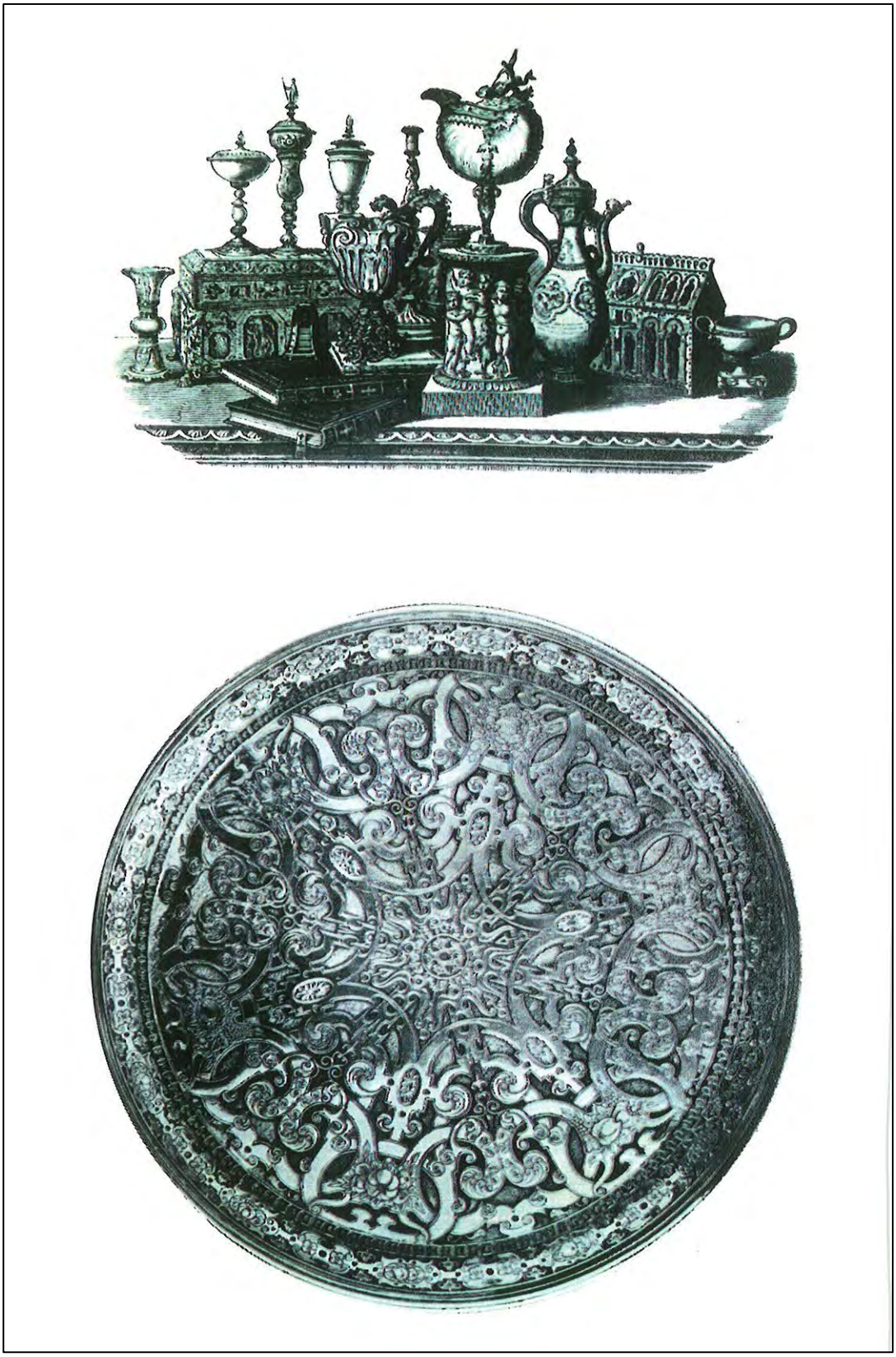


Figure 20: The Great Western Hall at Fonthill, leading through to the Octagon. The steps were an afterthought when Beckford realised that the space was unsuitable for a dining room.

A selection of the treasures to be found at Fonthill Abbey

An agate and chalcedony cup, of which the cover and stem were mounted by Joseph Angell, 1815-16, in Saracenic pattern. Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Above: Vignette in Rutter's Delineations of Fonthill (1823). The agate cup (shown on opposite page) can be seen on the left of the group. Below: One of six silver-gilt plates matching the cup).

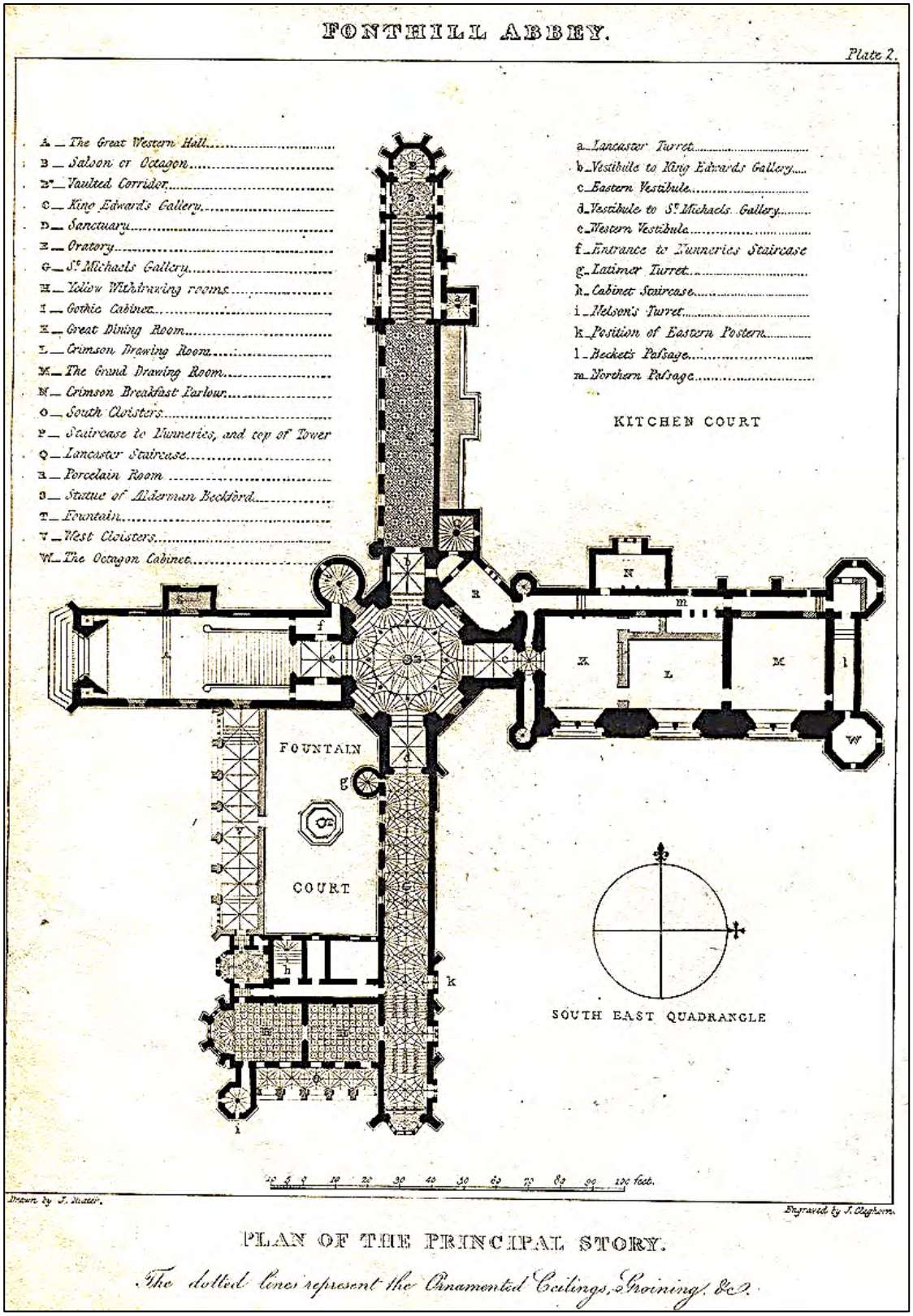


Figure 18: Plan of Fonthill Abbey from John Rutter,'s *Delineations of Fonthill Abbey.* The narrow cross wings were only seventeen feet wide, a lack of proportion not apparent in views from ground level.

In 1822 the entire Fonthill estate was put up for sale apart from a few of Beckford's favourite pieces. The public interest and excitement were enormous. 72,000 catalogues printed by Christie's at a guinea each all sold. That summer it became *the* place for a day out, entrance by ticket only: dealers, connoisseurs, society ladies and gentlemen flocked in their hoards for a glimpse of this notorious treasure house, of which so much had been heard. Then, two days before the sale with excitement at its height, a brief notice was posted at the gates. The estate, house and contents had been disposed of by private treaty. Ever a canny negotiator, this was perhaps Beckford's moment of triumph, a payback for all the years of ostracism he had endured. He had thrown open his gates and tempted everyone with the treasures within – and then he had snatched them away again. The Abbey had been sold to a John Farquhar, who had made his fortune selling gunpowder, for £330,000.

On the day of his departure, Beckford rode around the grounds with Vincent, his gardener, as so often before, and pointed out the alterations and improvements he wanted made. Both knew it was a sham; Beckford rode back to his front door, dismounted, climbed into his carriage without another word and departed to Bath.

Fonthill deserves its postscript. The story goes that in 1825, Beckford was summoned to the deathbed of Wyatt's building contractor, who confessed that the foundation of the great tower at Fonthill had not after all been laid according to the specifications for which Beckford had paid. It could fall at any time. To his credit, Beckford passed this warning on to Farquhar, who behaved equally well in dismissing it – the tower would, he was sure, outlast him. He was wrong; on 21st December in that same year it collapsed down on itself (Figure 21). Miraculously, no one was hurt; old Farquhar, wheeled out earlier in his bath chair when an ominous creaking began, had been wheeled in again, and heard not a sound of the collapse. With great amiability, he declared he was glad half the building had fallen, for now the house would not be too big to live in.

Beckford's response to the news was that the tower had never obeyed him and that he wished he had been there to see how it fell. All that are left today are the Lancaster Tower, the Sanctuary and Oratory, reminders of 'the boldest exposition of the Romantic movement in stone, brick and mortar, and possibly the most dramatic country house to have arisen in the English countryside.'[4]

Figure 21: The ruins of Fonthill Abbey.

[4] Lees-Milne, p.76.

Beckford in Bath and the Building of the Tower

So it was that in 1823, with his household, Beckford arrived in Bath at the age of sixty-three. While still very active, he was beginning to feel that age: his teeth were paining him and he had bladder problems. By the 1820s, Bath was far from fashionable in these more Picturesque times – the heroine of Jane Austin's *Northanger Abbey* rejected 'the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape'. Beckford's own, earlier dismissal of the city after a visit in 1817 in a letter to Franchi is almost Gothic in its vitriol:

> 'Bath does not please me. After the great spectacle of the Abbey [at Fonthill] it seems to me incredibly dingy and wretched; and the infamous old men and youths carried in chairs and mechanical carriages round the smoking baths horrify me – a horror not softened by the tender glances of certain old women clad in flounces supremely *a la mode,* who come and go eternally in this paradise of idlers and corpses'.

Clearly, it was no longer thronged by the *beau monde.* Most residents were elderly gentry and retired professional couples, many in reduced circumstances. The fact that Bath was no longer part of the social mainstream may have been the very reason Beckford decided to take up residence there, with less fear of social rebuff or competition.

With the rise of such luminaries of Picturesque taste as Uvedale Price, Bath's architecture too had fallen out of fashion. The horizontal lines of the Classical terraces and crescents, now once again considered Bath's glory, were then generally thought to need leavening by more trees and vertical points of interest. In his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), Price had pointed out 'how little the buildings [of Bath] are made to yield to the ground, and how few trees are mixed with them'. He also noticed how the hills surrounding Bath resembled the Italian landscape, and called for an architectural treatment similar to that found in Florence. Beckford must have arrived in Bath with a certain sense of melancholy. Yet he was to live here for almost two decades, for him a period of renewed architectural and literary creativity. Despite occasional frustrations

with his neighbours, it was a time of relative contentment. Edward English, an auctioneer of Milsom Street who catalogued Beckford's collection in 1844, provides the answer of why Beckford not only came to Bath, but also stayed there. It was because:

> 'the vicinity of Bath has, unquestionably, more of the southern cast of character than any other English city…One evening the writer, accompanying Mr. Beckford through the grounds, after a visit to the Tower, was curious to learn what reconciled him so perfectly to the locality of Lansdown after the vastness of Fonthill, with its extensive gardens and groves of almost Oriental beauty….Extending his arms and elevating his voice, as if excited by "the poet's fire", he exclaimed, '*This!* – This! – the finest prospect in Europe!' pointing to the vast panoramic view around, to the countless hills near, the far Welsh mountains, the blue fading distance, and then to the most beautiful of our ancient cities, which at that moment slept beneath, enveloped in the rich purple mist of a summer sunset, - "This!" he repeated.'

Certainly, there was excited anticipation at the arrival of the conceiver of Fonthill Abbey. As early as 2nd July, *The Bath Chronicle* announced:

> 'Mr Beckford is arrived at his house in Lansdown Crescent and is engaged in making extensive alterations and arrangements for his unique pictures, books and other rare and costly specimens of art. It is reported that the Gentleman is in treaty for an extensive purchase of land in the rear of the Crescent, with a view to erecting a house in the same. We sincerely hope this is the reason… We may anticipate a model of architectural beauty…'

Initially, Beckford may have stayed at No. 66 Pulteney Street for a few months; he also considered purchasing Prior Park but it was too expensive. In the end, he bought No. 20 Lansdown Crescent, then at the very northern edge of the city with views up to the unspoilt Cotswolds behind. He then added the end house of the next terrace, then known as West Wing (now No. 1 Lansdown Place West) and separated from the Crescent by a narrow lane. From the *Bath Chronicle* account, it seems he already had plans for the down above him, but they were not for a house. His octogenarian great-uncle, Charles Hamilton, had also laid out a garden behind his house in Royal Crescent. Fifty years earlier, Beckford had visited this garden and it may well have inspired him to create his Walk (see next chapter).

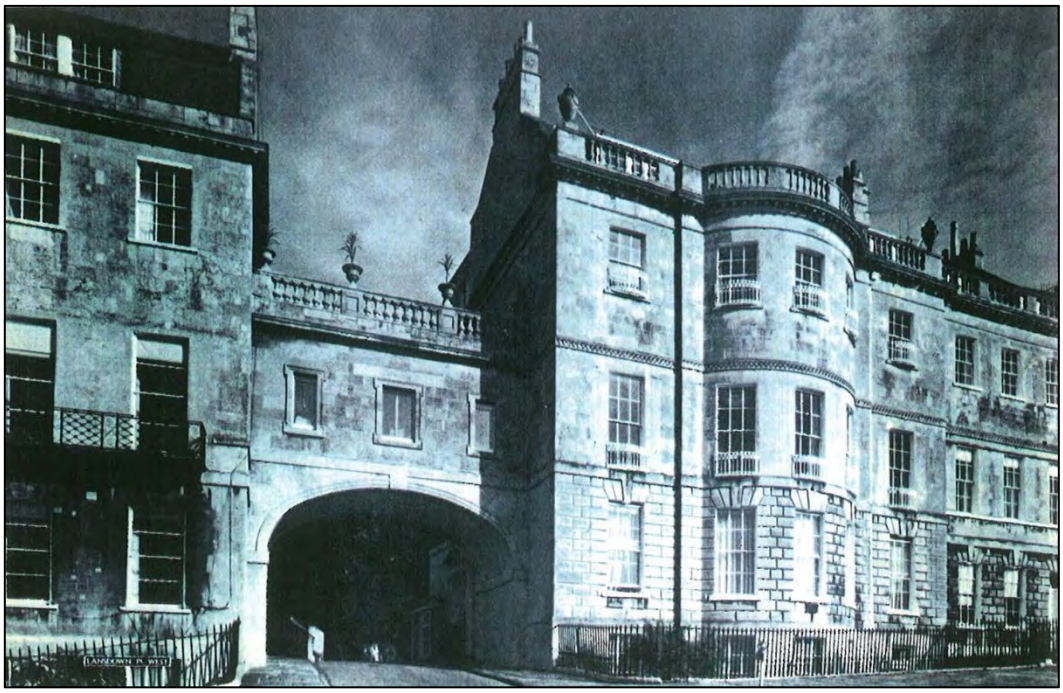


Figure 22: Number 20, Lansdown Crescent with the bridge linking it to Number 1 Lansdown Place West. Although he visited the Tower almost every day, this was Beckford's place of residence in Bath.

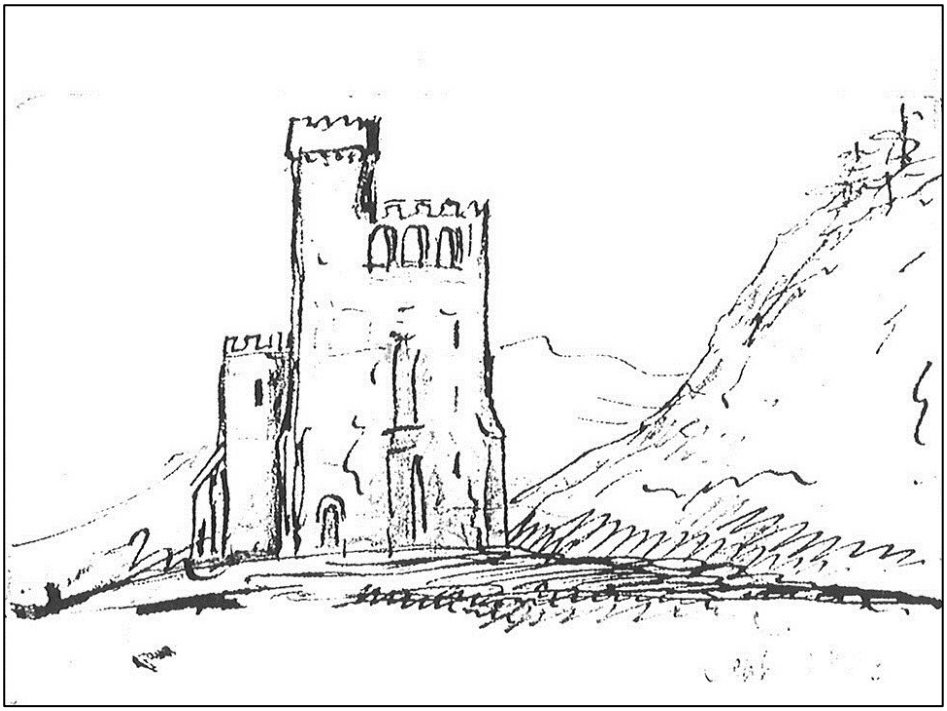
Figure 23: Beckford's Coat of Arms, attempting to summarise the illustrious ancestry from which he claimed descent. The *bec fort* of the heron appears at the top; note too the Latimer cross and cinquefoil. It was of lasting regret to Beckford that he never achieved the peerage he thought was his due, for which this shield overcompensates. It is, of course, pure whimsy.

It may be that Beckford originally intended to keep this second house empty, but the temptation to expand was too great and doorways were made in the party walls to contrive typically Beckfordian vistas closed by mirrors. A tunnel-like staircase was installed in Number 19, to keep out the draughts according to Beckford, although it has been speculated that he disliked being watched by his servants. The same servants could also serve to deter the idly curious: one visitor recorded being admitted by an unobtrusive footman to be confronted by Beckford's (nevertheless loyal and faithful) dwarf sprawling in a chair, leering horribly and picking his nose. The same front hall held a framed genealogical tree tracing Beckford's descent from Edward III. Most of this structure must also be apparent in his bewilderingly detailed coat of arms (see Figure 23). One senses the harmless eccentricities of increasingly reclusive tendencies, no doubt magnified by the Bath gossip.

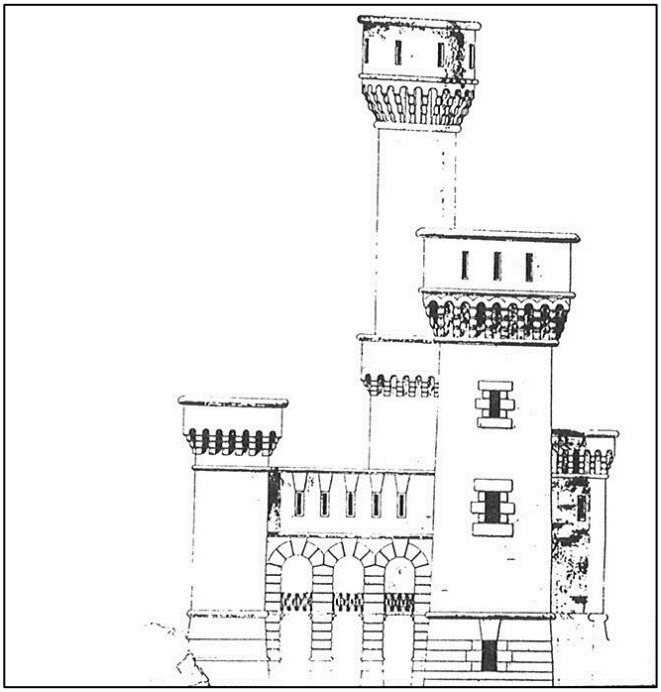
His Tower had in any case soon become a daily pilgrimage away from the pettiness of life in the city below. Various designs by Goodridge survive, dated September 1823, versions of the sketches for a mausoleum tower Beckford had intended at Fonthill (he had long harboured a wish to be buried above ground, as he had a morbid fear of mouldering underground). These early designs were mostly crenellated and fortress-like in aspect, much cruder in design than the sure touch of the eventual structure (see Figure 24). There were early rumours that Beckford was building 'a Saxon Tower': in October 1822 a London paper reported 'Beckford has just bought Lansdown Hill which is the scene of the most active labours, and the summit is being prepared for the erection of a Saxon tower'. Perhaps it was originally envisaged as mausoleum, with deliberate reference to the burials of Saxon chiefs from whom Beckford claimed his descent.

By November 1826 the Tower as we see it today had taken shape.

Figure 24: Early designs for Beckford's Tower:



***A* sketch made by Beckford himself, dated September 1823, of a 'Saxon' tower. The three windows at top right perhaps anticipate the eventual belvedere.**



An early design by Goodridge (1823) revealing that the massing and liveliness of the final version were in his mind from an early stage.

For Goodridge, it was to be 'the most significant [work] of his career: in terms of architectural history, it is the most important work he did'.[5] Its importance persists today as 'one of the most innovative and remarkable structures of its time.'[6]

At Fonthill Abbey, Beckford had demonstrated that the Picturesque could be created within the buttressed and battlemented vocabulary of the Gothic with relative ease (even, in the case of the unreliable and opinionated James Wyatt, with a certain laziness). However, Picturesque architecture, as Christopher Hussey observed, 'is not, except in rare instances, a style, but a method of using and combining styles'. It involved a certain informal relationship between man and his landscape and was by no means a new cult when Beckford built his Tower.

Beckford and Goodridge were aiming at a more eclectic and sophisticated interpretation of the Picturesque. Comparisons have been drawn with The Deepdene, a house in Dorking built by Thomas Hope, erstwhile suitor for Beckford's daughter Susan (see Figure 24a). The Deepdene experimented with the Italian Villa style, the vernacular architecture of northern Italy. Beckford knew Hope fairly well, and there was, as so often, a strong element of competition in Beckford's view of the acquaintance. The Deepdene was rebuilt between 1818 and 1823 and J. C. Loudon was to describe it as 'one of the finest examples in England of an Italian villa united with the grounds by architectural appendages'. It featured a watchtower such as are common on smaller Tuscan villas and farmhouses and it may well be that Beckford decided to adapt and refine this approach to his own needs.

[5] Neil Jackson, *Nineteenth Century Bath, Architects and Architecture* (1991), p53.
[6] Timothy Mowl, *William Beckford, Composing for Mozart* (1998), p.12.

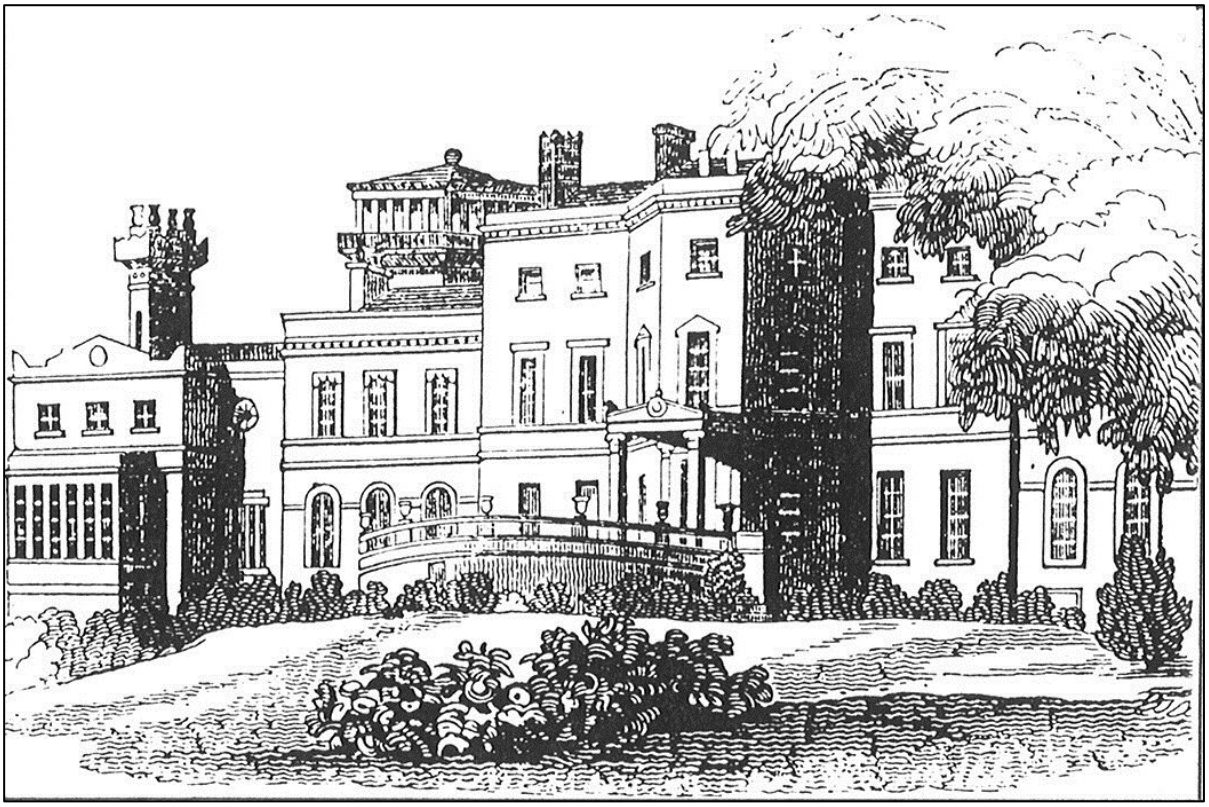


Figure 24a: The Deepdene, Dorking, Surrey built 1818-9 and added to in 1823. This was considered one of the finest examples in England of an Italian villa, in the sense that it evoked the themes of northern Italian vernacular architecture and their relationship with the *campagna.* This innovative expression of the Picturesque is thought to have influenced the design of Beckford's Tower.

Certainly there are similarities between the soaring shaft and almost top heavy belvedere of Beckford's Tower and Tuscan campanili (see Figure 25). The square shaft rises as some 130 feet of plain masonry, relieved only by small windows to the spiral staircase it encloses. The tower then bursts out into an exuberant expression of Greek references. The break between the plain shaft and the belvedere is achieved by a deep Doric entablature with a boldly projecting cornice supported on each side by four mutules. In the belvedere, three recessed windows, emphasised by square piers between, add to the impression of *chiaroscuro*. Above the next cornice are long panels of Greek key-fret decoration, while cubic blocks topped by roundels mark the angles, a touch reminiscent of Sir John Soane's designs. (Soane was by then an eccentric old professor of architecture, who met Beckford in Bath in about 1827). The next tier is a highly decorated polygonal plinth for the crowning octagonal lantern, and is made of wood with a fluted cast iron column at each angle. The observer is then provided with a continuous vista through the ring of round windows, which present themselves at eye-height internally. Thanks to the Beckford Tower Trust's 1999 works, the Lantern is again crowned with an accurate replica of Beckford's cast iron acroteria, of which only a single length had survived. The Tower's total height is 154 feet, from a spot already 800 feet above sea level.

The accommodation block at the base provided the villa reference, with its impression of low massing, flats roofs, small paired semi-circular windows and pierced parapets. The entrance porch presents a loggia in miniature, with three semi-circular headed arches with heavy imposts. The freestanding arch on the roof of the block turned the chimneys into an integrated folly. The windows were all plate glass (then considered a prodigy) and covered by gilded cast iron grilles, which lent a touch of the Byzantine. These were reinstated by the Bath Preservation Trust (who subsequently absorbed the Beckford Tower Trust) in 2024.

Figure 25a: Lansdown Tower from the west, by Willes Maddox from *Illustrated Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* (1844).

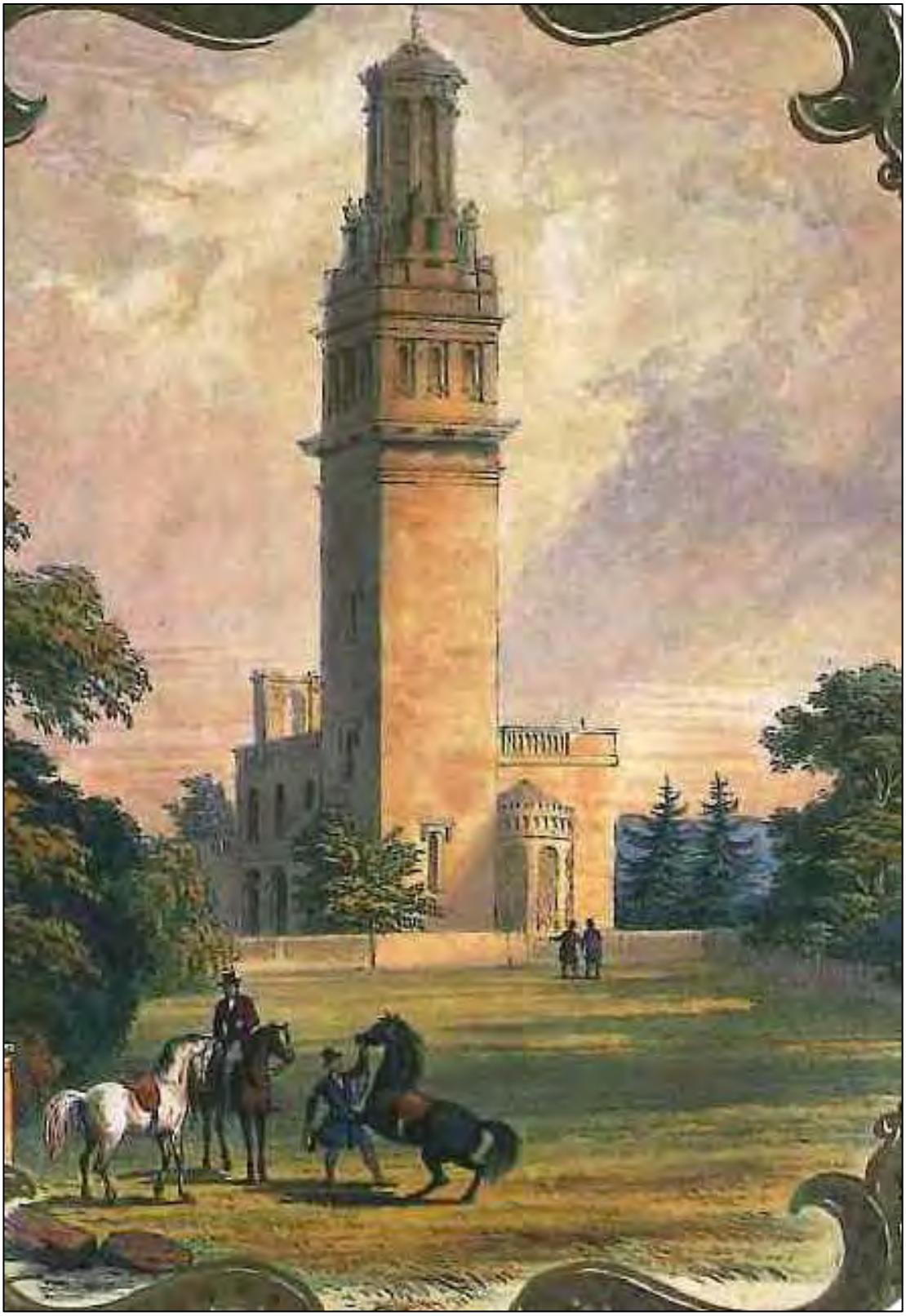


Figure 25b: Lansdown Tower from the east, by Willes Maddox from *Illustrated Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* (1844).

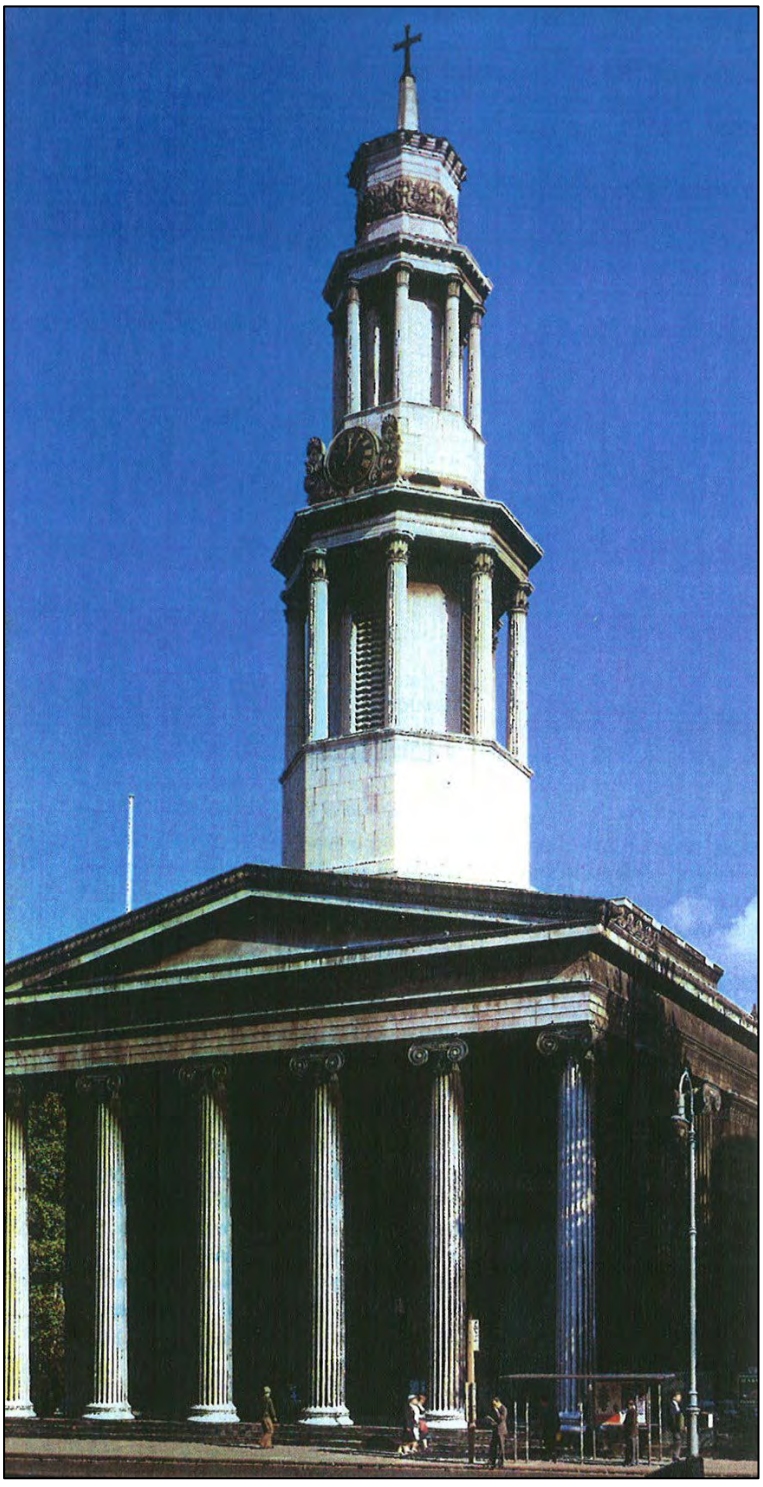


Figure 28: St. Pancras New Church in London, 1819-22by W. and H.W. Inwood. 'One of the great representatives of the Greek Revival' (Summerson) and resembled closely by the belvedere and lantern on Beckford's Tower.

Figure 26: The Tower of the Winds, Athens.

Figure 27: The Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, also in Athens. Both appeared in Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* and were popular as follies and monuments. In 1825, tower and monument had only been used together in a handful of churches in London.

The Lantern is thought to have been inspired by the Tower of Winds (an appropriate reference in this exposed spot) and the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, both in Athens (see Figures 26 & 27). Their use as sources for Greek Revival work was not new. James Stuart had built versions of both at Shugborough in 1764 & 1770; Wyatt's Radcliffe Observatory (1794) in Oxford featured a version of Tower of Winds. The Choragic Monument was widely copied for garden temples & funerary monuments. It was the combination of the two that was new and daring. Only three earlier examples are known, and these were all in London (the Inwoods' St Pancras New Church 1819-22 – Figure 28; C. F. Porden's St Matthew's in Brixton1822-2 and F. Bedford's St Luke in West Norden 1823-5). Goodridge seems to have had no connection with this group of architects and his combined use of the references in a secular context and outside London broke new ground.

Even with some small knowledge of Beckford's life and character, we can feel that the Tower succinctly encapsulates so many of his characteristics that it is a far more perfect (and more lasting) personification of his qualities than ever Fonthill Abbey could be. Its exposed isolation amid nature and the elements reflect his passion for the outdoors, for tall towers and for mysterious seclusion; the architectural references, at once cosmopolitan and cultured, reflect happy years abroad and a life of connoisseurship; the appropriation of religious language of form and sentiment to infuse an ultimately secular existence and setting also reflect his lifelong flirtation with the emotions stirred by religion. Unlike his gloomy and depressing Abbey, which for all its vast splendour weighed down his spirits, on Lansdown Beckford only had to step outside the front entrance or climb the tower to his 'Belvedere' to be invigorated by the elements and feel himself master of all he surveyed – and how must these emotions have intensified when he climbed the last winding, wooden steps to the lantern.

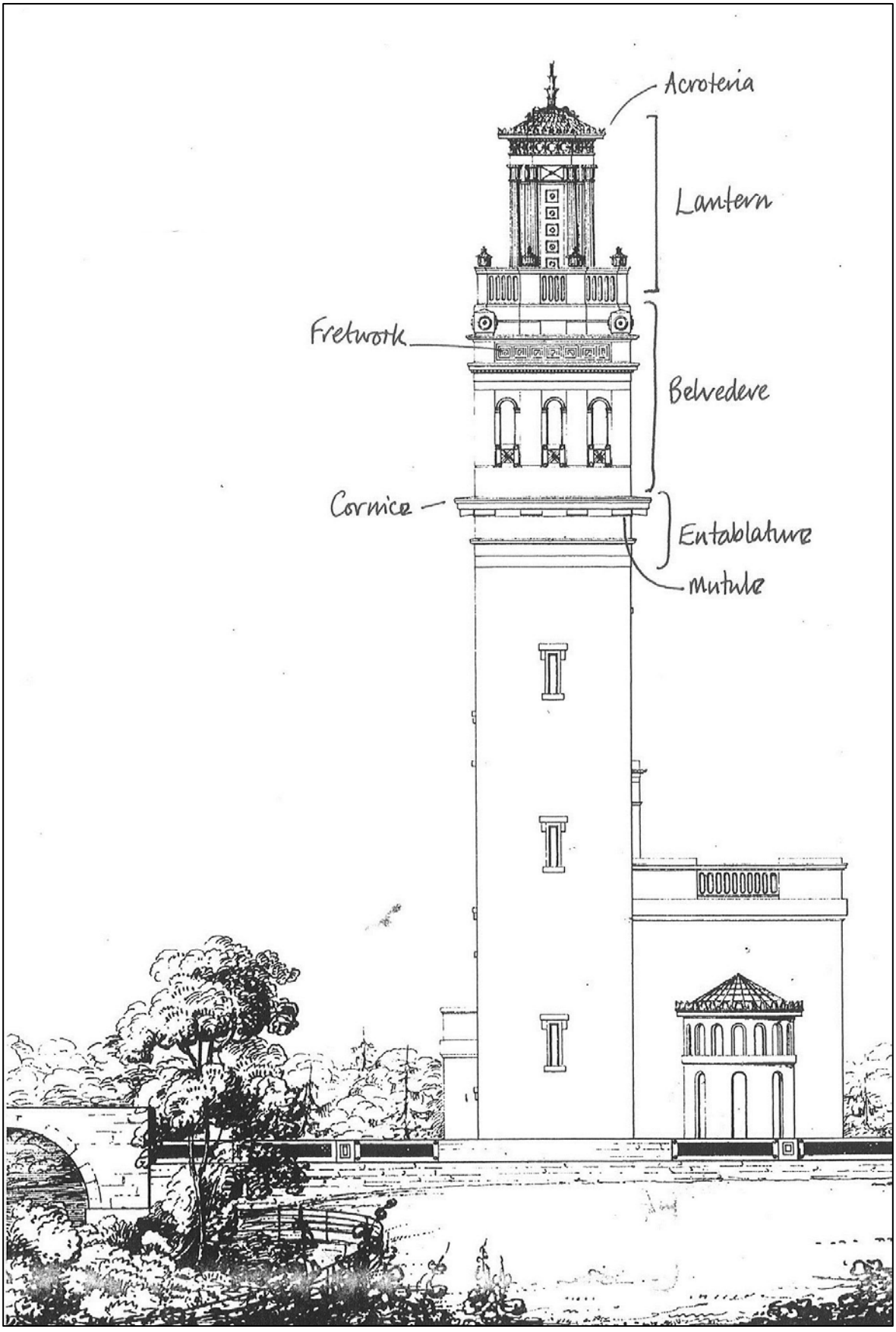


Figure 29: Beckford's Tower – A Naming of Parts.

Whatever its provenance, the Tower 'remains a milestone in the development of Neo-Classicism in Britain. It is a unique combination of variant themes – Greek and Italian, the broken Picturesque and the powerful Sublime. It fuses geometry with nature and Classicism with Romanticism. It was never done again'. [7]
This exterior was built to hold Beckford's retreat from the world in his old age, into which he crammed many of his most precious works of art. The Tower rose quickly. Goodridge's son recounted that the block cornice was reached in a mere four weeks, for which a roof had been intended. After much discussion, the belvedere was added, again with the intention that this should be the final height. 'Mr. Beckford, however, cried "Higher!" and the lantern was added to crown the summit.' The eventual well-proportioned result is all the more remarkable if its construction was indeed so haphazard. The Tower ensemble demonstrates a key virtue of the Picturesque approach to architecture, that additions can, if judiciously made, enhance rather than detract from the whole. However, the element of serendipity was no doubt enhanced by Beckford's long experience in matters of taste (Figure 29).

At a more practical level, the Tower had its own water supply from a well still to be seen down a narrow passage in the basement. (An OS map from 1817 shows an earlier building on the Tower site that may also have benefited from this source. Nothing more is known about this earlier building). Water was pumped up from the Old Pump Room (now the bathroom) and the remnants of the pump used in Beckford's day were found in the cellar. The heating system was part of the original building plan. A hot air system was supplied by J. & G. Haden of Trowbridge, who had also heated the Lansdown Crescent House. In the basement of the Tower, a furnace was installed with an outer chamber into

[7] Neil Jackson, *Nineteenth Century Bath, Architecture and Afchitects* (1991),p.59. This book is also a useful gazette for Goodridge's other work in Bath, for example Cleveland Bridge, Auction Mart and Bazaar in Quiet St (likely; 1824), Woodland Place on Bathwick Hill (c1834), Cleveland Place West (c1829), the (Berni) Royal Hotel and Argyll Hotels opposite, and Bath Spa Station for Great Western in the1840s (likely). Goodridge also developed the Tuscan villa style in several villas on Bathwick Hill – Montebello, Fiesole, La Casetta and Casa Bianca. Similarly Tuscan villas began to multiply across Bath as the century wore on, departing from the eclectic essence of Hussey's definition of the Picturesque in their devotion to the Italianate.

Figure 30: Scarlet Drawing Room, by Willes Maddox from Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* (1844).

which air was drawn. This was called a 'cockle' and it heated air which was then sent through underfloor ducts in the residential areas or into a stone drum, constructed above the cockle within the spiral staircase. Air rose through this drum into the Tower via a circular vent in a stone platform at first floor level. The vent was originally covered by an ornamental grille with flaps for controlling the airflow. By 1845, Beckford had acquired a monumental vase in rose-coloured marble, seven feet tall, which he placed on a stone platform over the circular grille (see Figure 35). The air then circulated through vents around the platform. Sadly, its whereabouts is now unknown.

Goodridge was also heavily involved with the creation of the interiors. With Beckford's guidance, he designed much of the furniture as well as orchestrating the internal finishes and surfaces. Goodridge was commissioned to design cupboards and sideboards with a unifying motif of round arches with heavily carved detailing. The heavy, ornate furniture anticipates mainstream Victorian taste later in the century. In some instances, the fittings seem to have played a semi-structural role, as in the bookcases on the first floor, which partitioned the Sanctuary from the Book Gallery. Unfortunately, virtually no evidence remains for the décor before 1844, when Willes Maddox produced the set of lithographs that have been so invaluable in recreating the interiors (see Figure 30). Beckford had refurbished in 1841; before that, we are reliant on the comments of his occasional visitors. The rooms always gave an impression of great opulence. An enhanced sense of space was created by doors with narrow plate glass panels and large circular headed mirrors which provided an impression of glimpsed depths and vistas. The internal gilding of the window grilles gave 'an appearance of perpetual sunshine'. Those permitted to enter all praised the impeccable taste with which Beckford displayed his collections of pictures, porcelain, books, bronzes, Etruscan urns, Japanese vases, enamelled and jewelled cups, gold-mounted nautilus shells - and so on. The ceilings were coffered and painted crimson and purple, while the cornices were gilded.

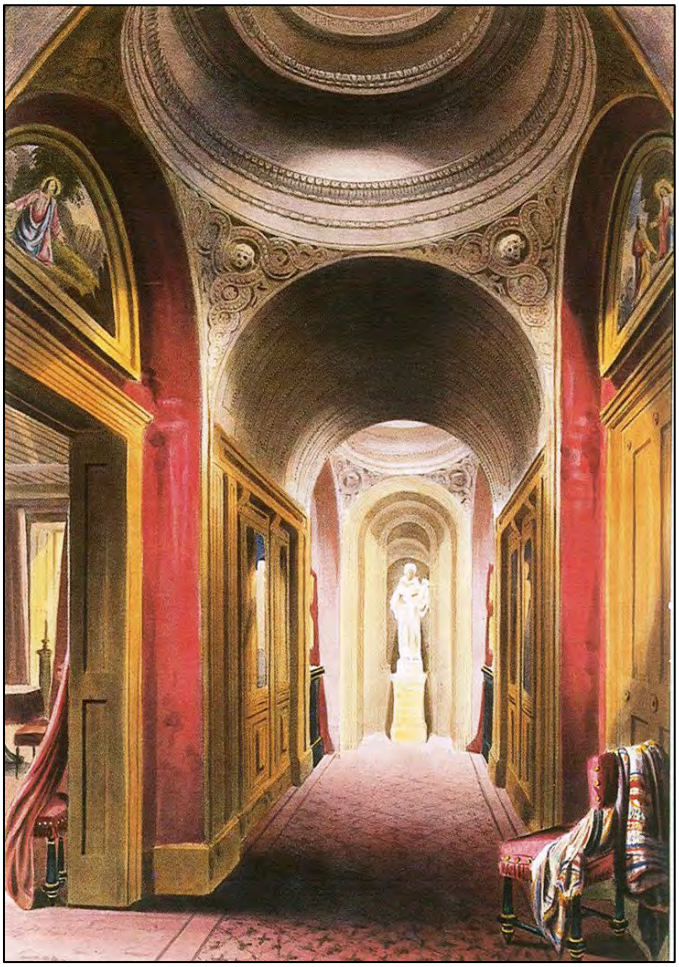


Figure 31: The Sanctuary, by Willes Maddox.The statue of St. Anthony appears at the far end; the Crimson Drawing Room leads off to the left. (1844).

The statue of St. Anthony, by Rossi, now in Wardour Castle.

Beckford had two favourite motifs, the *cinquefoil* and the *cross flory* (or Latimer Cross), which are references to his complicated genealogy on his mother's side. Maria Beckford could trace direct descent from the first Lord Latimer, whose coats of arms was a gold *cross flory* on a red field. They appear in many different guises on his possessions and finishes – on his book bindings, his cutlery, even on the railings designed for his tomb.

The Sanctuary on the first floor was Beckford's last homage to his favourite saint, St. Anthony of Padua, recoverer of lost trifles (including hearts). Those lucky enough to visit the Tower would climb the steps to the first floor to be confronted by a small room lit from above by two domed rooflights, so that the light fell on a statue of St. Antony by Rossi at the far end (Figure 31).[8] The mode of presentation and lighting is very reminiscent of the work of architect Sir John Soane, notably his house at 13 Lincoln's Inn Field in London (now the Soane Museum – see Figure 32). Soane was a collector of a different kind, but no less avid than Beckford, and he took the same theatrical delight in the manipulation of space and light for the display of his collection. The Crimson Drawing Room led off from the Sanctuary (Figure 33).

The collection of books in the Etruscan Library, also on the first floor, was considered so exquisite that guests had difficulty in tearing themselves away. Books were one of Beckford's most enduring passions and he was a knowledgeable collector. In typical fashion, he rendered his collection still more valuable by scribbling his (often lengthy) comments on flysheets and in margins. These were usually therapeutically splenetic venting of some grudge held against the author or the world in general. It is hard to avoid the impression that the comments were deliberately written and phrased to be read by the world at large and rather sad that this was his surrogate communication with it.[9]

[8] The statue now stands gently weathering in the gardens of Wardour Castle, now a school.
[9] Beckford did consider publishing a collection of notes he had written in the books of others. It was to be titled, with heavy irony *Flowers*; however, nothing came of the project.

Figure 32: *View of the Dome of Sir John Soane's Museum*, **by Joseph Gandy, 1811. Although on a smaller scale, Beckford's treatment of space and light for the Sanctuary was similar.**

The opportunity to visit Beckford's Tower during his life was not a privilege granted to many and still fewer were entertained by their host himself. Dr. Waagen, a distinguished German art critic was admitted to both the Tower and 20, Lansdown Crescent. Beckford's preferred method of admission was that the visitor should present himself in person, upon which he would be given a ticket, in Waagen's case for a two-hour visit. Waagen found this to be not nearly long enough, as he was bustled around the collections at both venues by ignorant housekeepers. Henry Venn Lansdown, who gives us a rare, apparently more or less verbatim account of a visit in 1838, was by contrast more impressed by the colour symphonies than the collections at the Tower. 'The walls are covered with scarlet cloth; the curtains on each side of the window being a deep purple produce a striking contrast; the colouring of the ceiling, crimson, purple and gold, is admirable.'[10] In his choice of palette as well as the overall impression of opulence, Beckford was anticipating the visuals of mid-Victorian interior decoration in a way that went beyond Soane's more muted tones. Lansdown also recorded that a huge slab of Egyptian granite stood in the vestibule, upon which there always stood a vase of flowers, replenished and arranged daily by Beckford. (This, presumably, was the marble console now replicated in today's kitchen.)

Otherwise, the Tower was a place for Beckford to appreciate his collections, read and enjoy the view, perched on an X-framed stool in his 'Belvidere' eyrie (Figure 34). It was during these years that he revised his earlier travel writings and letters, laying a paper trail for future Beckford scholars that will perhaps never be entirely untangled. He was inspired to renewed literary effort by the unsolicited receipt of the latest novel from a young author – Benjamin Disraeli. The book was *Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Autobiography*, and Beckford seems to have identified strongly with the book, and indeed taken it as a personal compliment.

[10] Venn Lansdown published his *Recollections of the Late William Beckford* in 1893.

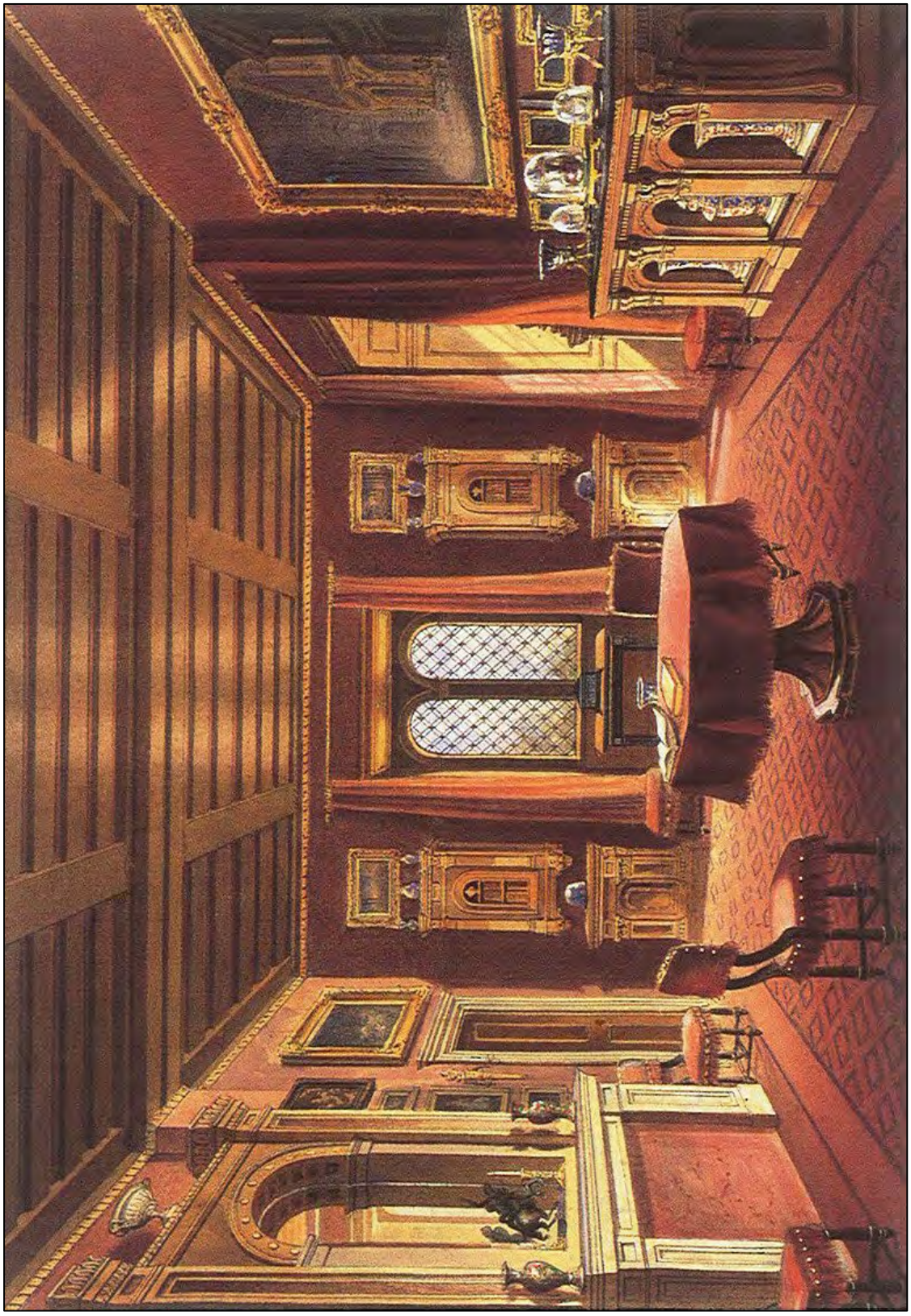


Figure 33: The Crimson Drawing Room, by Willes Maddox (1844).

He wrote back to Disraeli with fulsome praise – 'How wildly original! How full of intense thought! How awakening! How delightful!' Perhaps it reminded him of his own youth; certainly it had marked parallels and drew heavily from Disraeli's own travels in Europe. Finally, the hero aspires to write prose poetry in his old age, and this Beckford determined to do too. From his journals and letters, he proceeded to compile *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal* (1834) and *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha* (1835). The former was a critical success:

> 'We risk nothing in predicting that Mr. Beckford's travels will henceforth be classed among the most elegant productions of modern literature: they will be forthwith translated into every language on the Continent – and will keep his name alive, centuries after all the brass and marble he ever piled together.'[11]

Recollections was a more fictionalised account of a journey in the company of two elderly clergymen, drawing on Beckford's undoubted knowledge of the country. It is an account of happy days in a bygone time, and has been judged by many as some of his finest writing. Despite quarrels with his neighbours over water and rights of way, and occasional tantrums when he insisted he would pack up and leave Bath altogether, Beckford's years in Lansdown were happy ones. The Tower and Number 20 provided outlets for two of his passions, collecting and building, but he found an equally engrossing project to indulge a third obsession – the outdoors.

[11] *Quarterly Review*, June 1834.

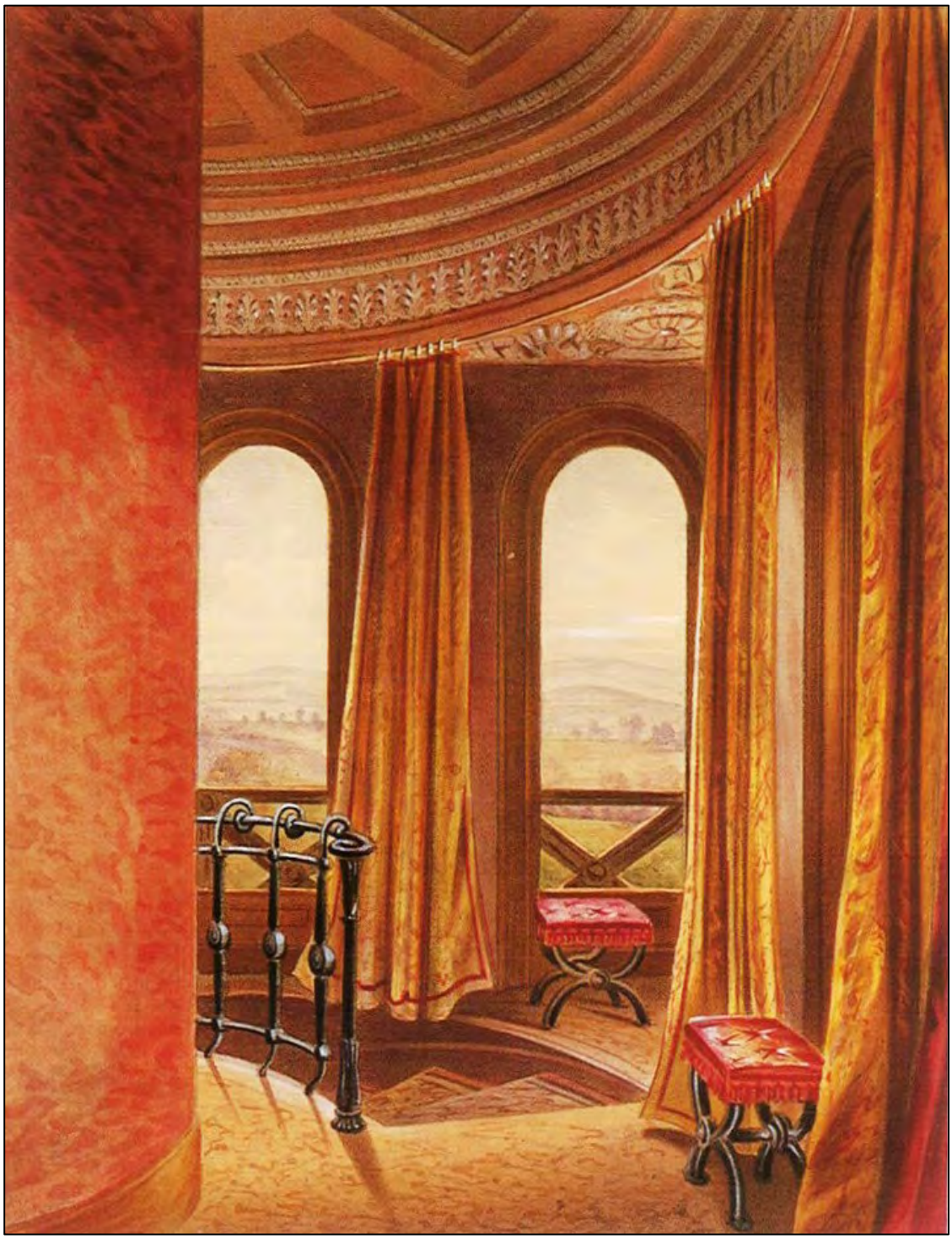


Figure 34: The Belvidere in 1844 by Willes Maddox.
Its luxurious décor suggests it was a room to linger in.

Figure 35: The Tower Staircase with the Granite Vase.

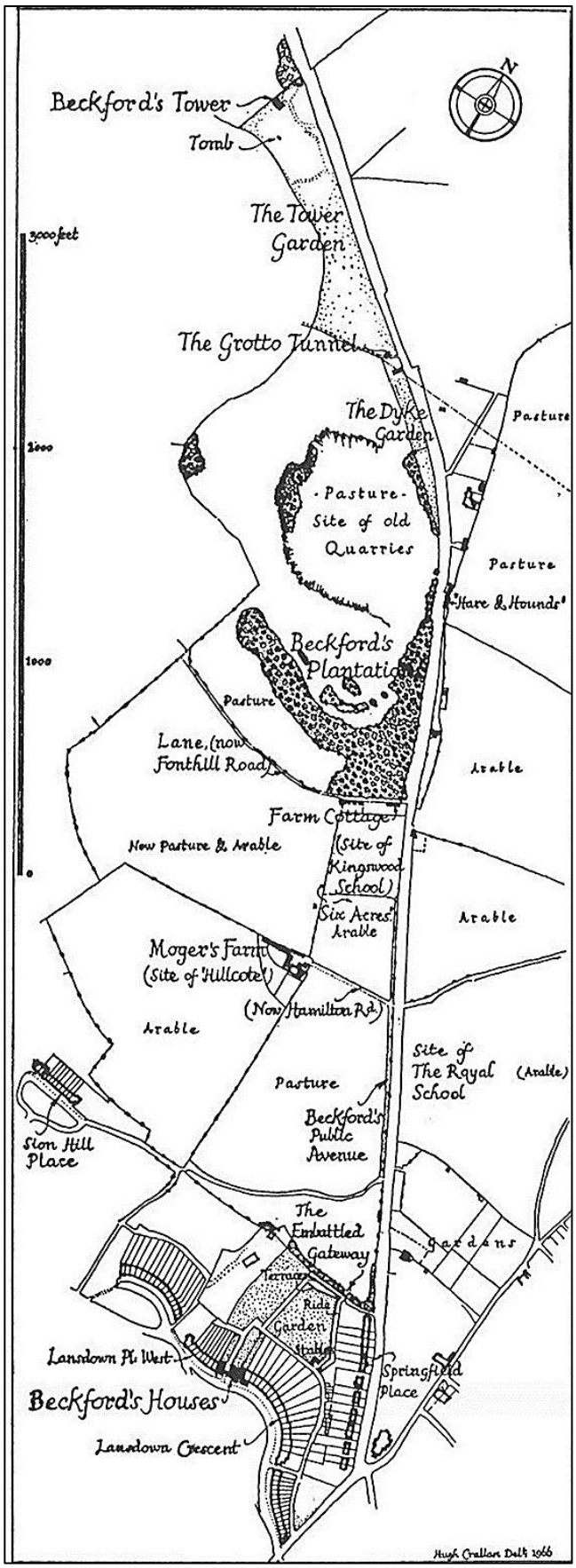


Figure 36: Map of Beckford's Walk from No. 20 Lansdown Crescent to the Tower.

Beckford's Walk

Beckford's acquisition of a tract of land behind his house in Lansdown Crescent has already been mentioned. In 1822, a hillside of arable land, rough pastures and disused quarries stretched behind the Crescent. By March 1823, Beckford had signed a lease with Thomas and Matthew Gunning for three fields from Charlcombe Field Farm and 39 acres of the Down and Common (see Figure 36). The lease included the right of 'Working, digging and getting stone in and from the Quarry' on the land, from which it would appear that much of the plain stone for the Tower and surrounding walls was taken. The quarry probably adjoined the plot of land that was to become the Ditch Garden, although there is also a depression in the graveyard later described as 'formerly used as a Stone Quarry' from which more stone may have been taken. To Beckford's regret, the lease specifically excluded the waterworks, from which Captain Gunning supplied local properties from a reservoir. Later correspondence suggests that he managed to gain some rights in the supply and pipes, but the water supply was to be a matter of ongoing contention. Beckford wrote of the lease negotiations:

> 'I hope to have a good and speedy termination, that I may without further loss of time set to work in converting the upstart house into a picturesque tower and forming my plantations and building my walls....'

By 1st July 1823 the *Bath and Cheltenham Chronicle* was reporting:

> 'we are informed that [Beckford] has concluded the purchase of land extending from the back of his residence to the top of Lansdown, which he intends to lay out with the same classic taste, that he has already imparted such enchanting to the Wiltshire hills.'

First, however, there was the small matter of public rights of way across his newly acquired land. Assent was given for their diversion at the Quarter Sessions in September, although there was considerable public disquiet about the possible closure of footpaths (see Figure 37).

The Bath and Cheltenham Chronicle was reassuring:

> 'We have great pleasure in informing, that so far from this being the case, the liberal Proprietor of the Lands has applied to the Magistrates for an order to turn and divert only a narrow angular footpath; in lieu of which, he proposes giving an ample gravelled walk at least twelve feet wide, on which it is intended to plant an avenue of trees, and to place seats thereon for the accommodation of the public; and this not only to the extent of the ancient footpath, which terminated opposite Charlcombe Lane, but to continue the same to the brow of Lansdown.'

By the end of 1825, Beckford had leased the field to the west of the Tower, although mindful of the '200,000' trees reported to be planted on Captain Gunning's land, the owner insisted on minimum planting only in one acre, any excess to be returned to tillage at the end of the lease. By August 1825, Beckford had succeeded in linking his Lansdown Crescent house with his property on the hill. The plot acquired had been the gardens for the National School and were already laid out as pleasure gardens. The comprehensive articles of agreement describe:

> 'the several Erections and Buildings Boundary and other Walls and fences and Fixtures and Fastenings of every sort and kind thereof and therein and the several Trees Shrubs Plants Bulbous Roots Seeds and others Matters and Things growing and being in upon or about the said Premises'.

There was little Beckford could add other than hothouses. This new plot gave directly onto the Down immediately to the north of the house, along a raised terrace, supported on arches at the side of the garden at the end of which Beckford built an 'embattled gateway', finished only on the side facing the rear of the Crescent (see Figures 38).

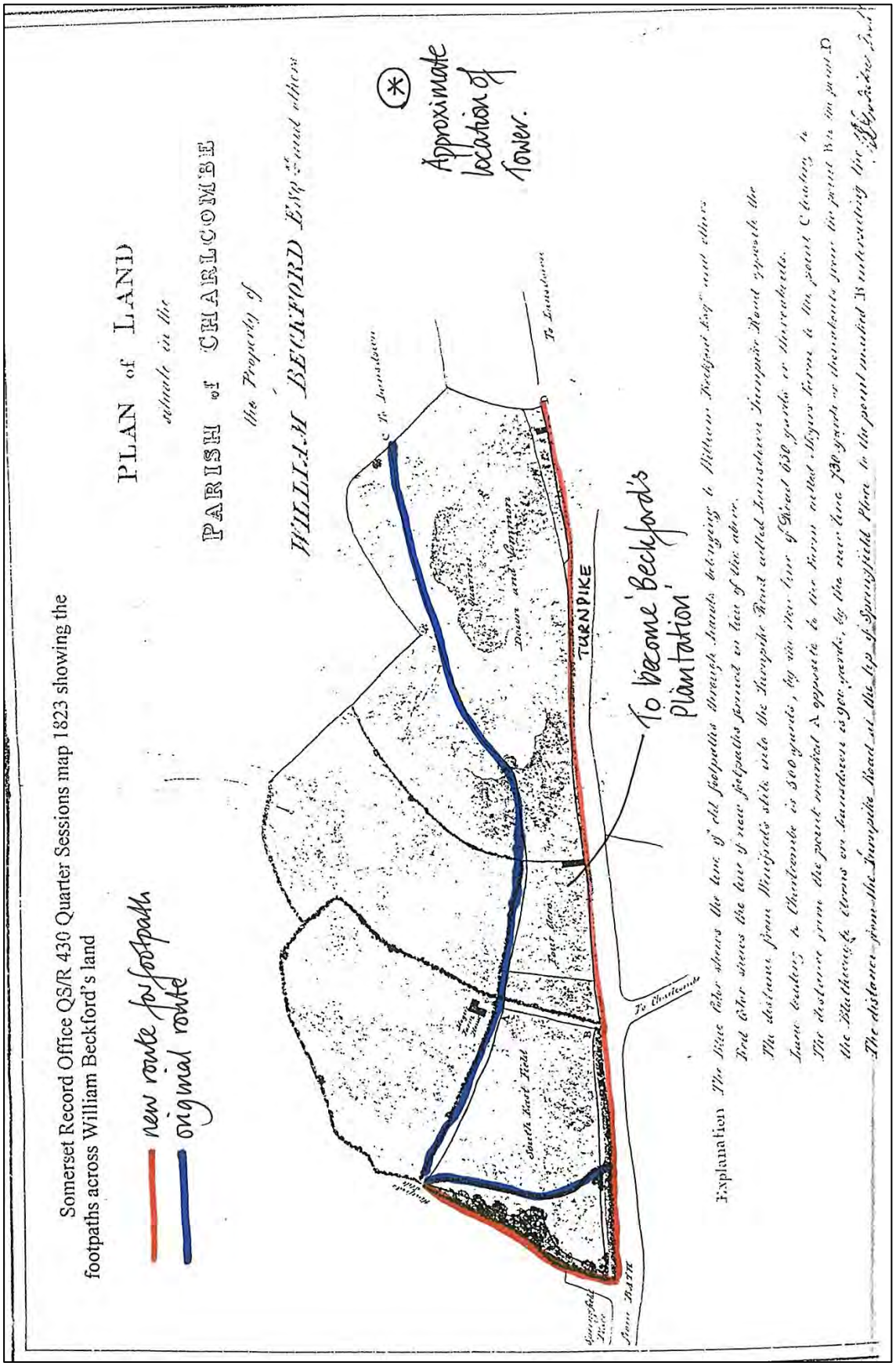


Figure 37: Beckford's footpath diversions on Lansdown Hill.

Figure 38: The Embattled Gateway (left) much as it must have looked to Beckford and the view along the terrace on the other side of the Gateway.

The only glimpse of the Gateway today.

Beckford had now acquired a strip of land extending all the way from his house to the Tower, and could set about one of his favourite pastimes - creating his own private landscape. The faithful gardener, Vincent, had moved with him to Bath. Vincent was in his service for fifty years and Beckford was devoted to him. Vincent was a mourner at his master's funeral. He lived with his wife in Beckford Cottage beside the Tower until pensioned off in 1845. Vincent was outspoken yet respectful, and one of the very few members of Beckford's family or entourage who dared address him with complete freedom. On one occasion, Beckford was heard to ask him 'Do you think me a fool, Vincent?' to which came the calm reply, 'Yes, your honour.' Vincent had wrought miracles at Fonthill, was knowledgeable and immensely capable. He seems to have specialised in transplanting the mature trees with which Beckford was able to transform his landscapes so instantly. 'If you find the money, sir, I will find the trees', Vincent said. So he planted around the Tower conifers from Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Siberia and Scotland; Irish yews, firs from Larissa and the Himalayas, maples from America, a rose tree from Peking. For Beckford, the outdoors was a theatrical arena in which to display his collections and taste, just as much as his interiors. His Walk, though limited in extent compared to the Fonthill estate, offered him the chance to try every landscape trick available. He produced a dramatic progression from the enclosed and formal to the open and wild and Sublime. Goodridge designed the architectural features for the walk, Vincent managed the horticulture.

Unless an easterly was blowing, every morning of the year until death, Beckford would take a cup of chicken broth and then ride early to the Tower along his 'Walk' (see Figure 39). It was quite a procession: first a grey-haired steward on horseback, then two grooms with long hunting whips. Beckford came next with five or six dogs, with two more grooms bringing up the rear. The ensuing commotion as they set off from the stables must have been part of the daily round for residents of the Crescent.

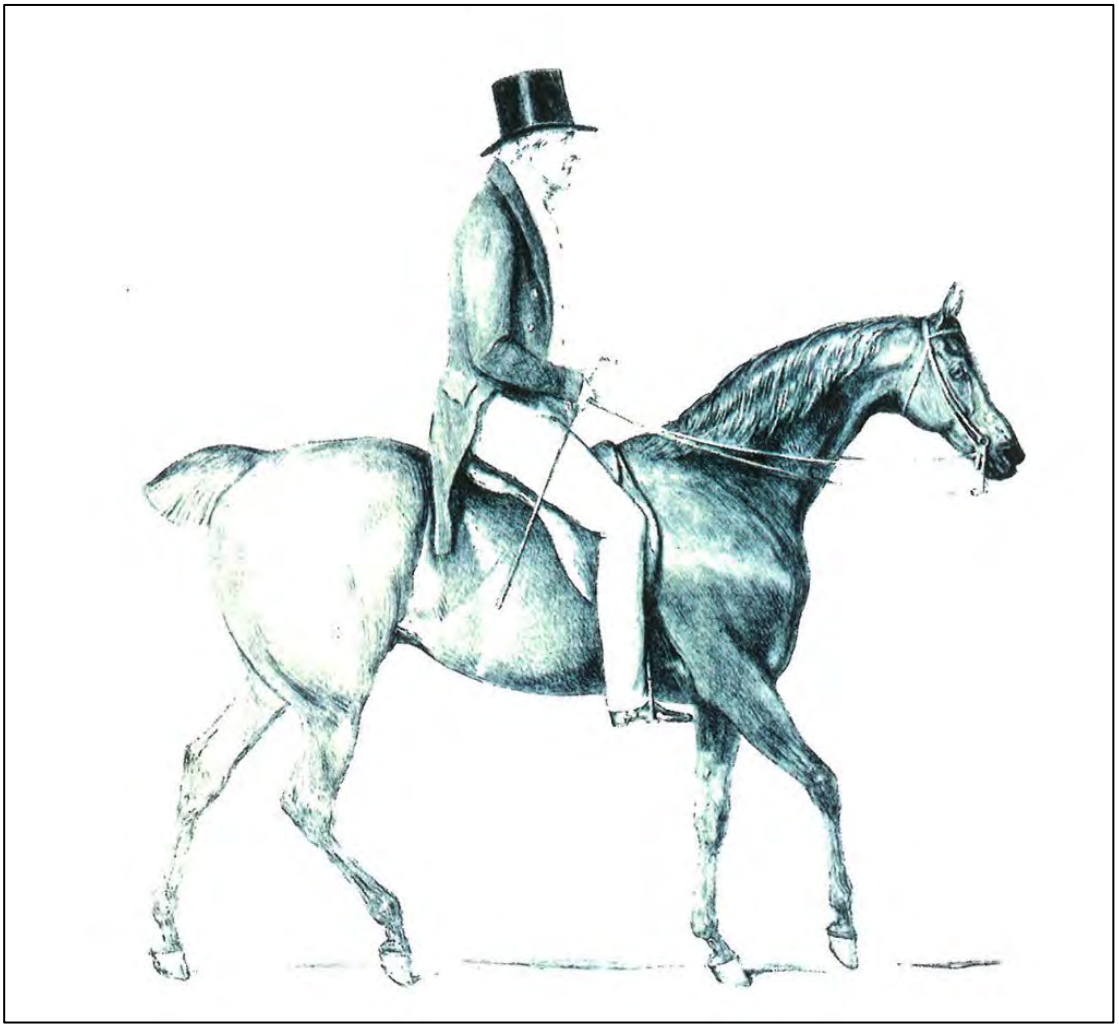


Figure 39: William Beckford on horseback as an old man, a familiar sight to residents of Lansdown Crescent. Lithograph by John Doyle.

For a description of the Walk, we have Henry Venn Lansdown's *Recollections of the Late William Beckford* which, while not published until 1893 seem to have been written at the time of the events described.[12] Goodridge had arranged a visit to the unpredictable old man, whom Lansdown described as being to a friend 'all gentlemanly frankness and affability', while to the world Beckford was 'retiring, reserved, distant, full of hauteur, cynical, impatient.' Lansdown seems to have found him in good form. The visit took place 21 August 1838 and at Number 20 Lansdown found a small, slender seventy-eight-year-old, very agile and quick moving, as ready to jump over a stool as to step around it. By now, Beckford had lost most of his teeth and his hooked nose was mirrored by his chin. His small grey eyes were aggressively alert and assessing, and he wore his hair short and powdered in the eighteenth-century fashion. His clothes were of buff and green, those of a modest country gentleman. He used his hands expressively as he talked, but when examining one of his paintings he had the habit of covering his mouth with his heavily freckled hands. His conversation was sprinkled with French phrases, pronounced in the accent of the old pre-Revolutionary Court. After admiring the contents of the house, Lansdown accompanied Beckford along his Walk to the Tower.

It began at the mews, where a small, mosque-like Islamic pavilion stands today in the garden of Number 20 (see Figure 40). Across the mews, in an area of about four acres behind the Crescent, Beckford had his kitchen garden – he always insisted on his own supply of fresh vegetables. Above his stables Goodridge designed the Embattled Gateway, which marked the point at which the Walk emerged into open country – just as you might ride through a city gate. It bears Beckford's adopted coat of arms, the herons' *becs forts.* Today, this gateway is the only visible sign of this magical progression, now hemmed in by modern housing. It led onto a terrace and on through fields (now Kingswood School) and into a plantation above Fonthill Road. Here the view was

[12] A full account of this visit can be found in Timothy Mowl's *William Beckford*, *Composing for Mozart* (1998), Chapter 1.

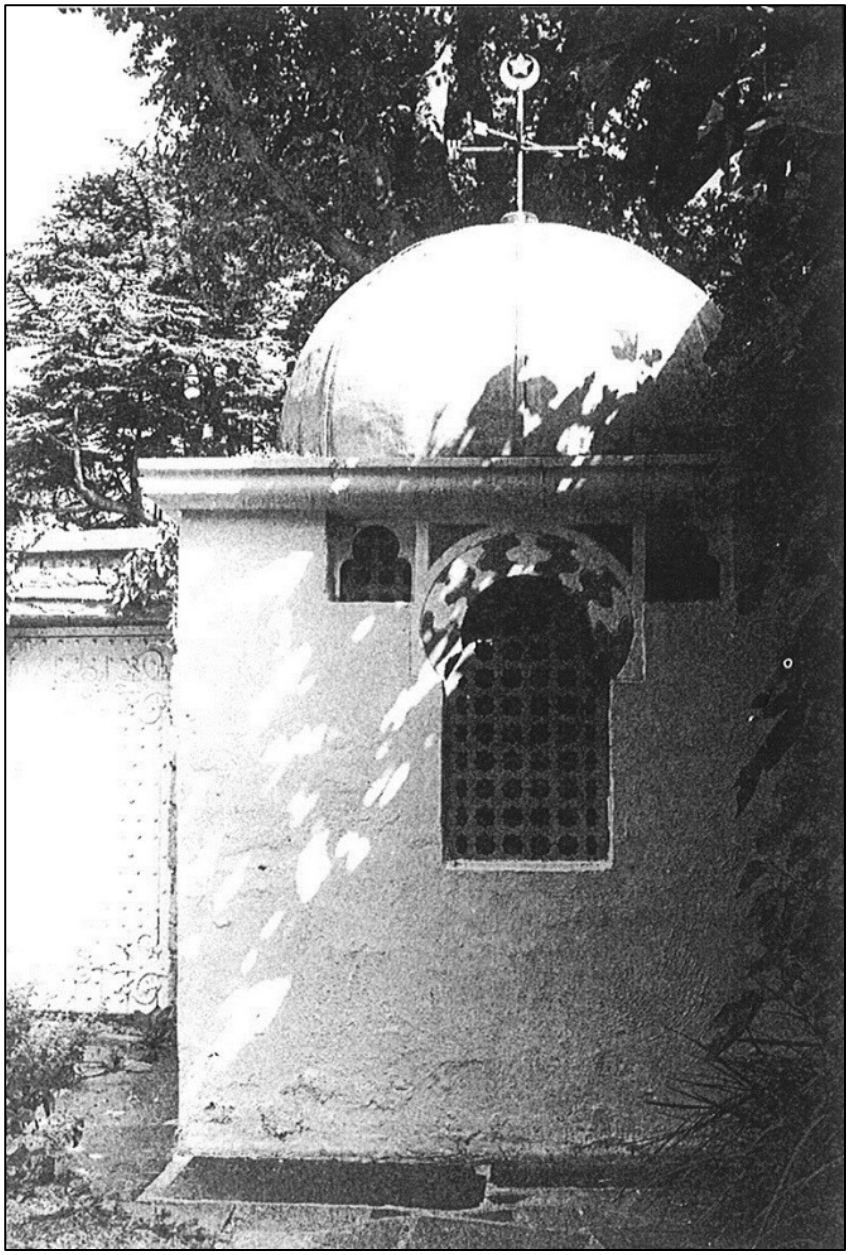


Figure 40: The Islamic Pavilion in the garden of No. 20, Lansdown Crescent, which marks the beginning of Beckford's Walk as he left the house for the stables across the mews. (The origins of the pavilion are not certain and it may have been erected after Beckford's day).

breathtaking, which is no doubt partly why Beckford had insisted on diverting the footpath. The Walk then opened out into a plateau of disused quarries, which, like everything else, delighted Lansdown:

> 'The remains of these quarries are most picturesque. At a little distance they seem to present the wrecks of stately building, the rows of broken arches, and vividly recall the idea of Roman ruins. I afterwards mentioned my ideas to Mr. Beckford who replied, "They do indeed put one in mind of the Campagna of Rome, and are vastly like the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla.'

After this open plateau, they plunged into second plantation: 'passing under a low doorway [we] entered a lovely shrubbery.' The path was made of 'small fossils' between tall and graceful trees. Lansdown was surprised by an abundance of

> 'odiferous flowers which we are astonished to find growing in such luxuriance at an elevation of nearly a thousand feet above the vale below. In many places the trees meet, and form a green arcade over your head, whilst patches of mignonette, giant plants of heliotrope and clusters of geranium perfume the air.'

The contrast with the open Down could not have been more marked, intensified still further by the use of a low entrance. The sweet-smelling flowers, growing under a tree canopy in apparently impossible conditions, were a favourite trick of Beckford's. The grottoes at his beloved Fonthill, even the windswept, pine-clad hills above Lisbon, had all featured the same *trompe l'oeil* ferns and flowers which so impressed Lansdown, flourishing for a brief season in impossible situations. They grew, of course, in sunken pots, allowed to flower for their season and then replaced by the long-suffering Vincent.

At the far end another door led to the Dyke Garden. This was a long, narrow kitchen garden, well sheltered by its position in old quarry. 'I said to the gardener', said Lansdown,' I understand Mr. Beckford had planted everything on the Down, but you surely found these apple trees here. They are fifty years old.' 'We found nothing here but an old quarry and a few nettles', Vincent replied laconically. 'Those apple trees were great trees when we moved them, and moving them stopped their bearing. They blossom in the spring and look pretty

and that is all Master cares about.' At the far end of garden, the walkway passed through an arch in a little Italianate building (now lost) and plunged under the lane that led to Chelscombe Farm, opposite where Granville Road joins Lansdown Road. The tunnel ran for some fifty feet before emerging onto the Down via some rustic steps. In it, Beckford had created the impression of a grotto, with 'a pond of gold and silver fish…you cannot help but admire the natural appearance of this work of art…There is nothing formed, nothing apparently artificial, and a young ash springs as if accidentally from between the stones.' Here indeed is the carefully framed 'unbridled' nature of the Picturesque.

As today, the turnpike ran hard by the walls surrounding the Tower site, so privacy on the grounds surrounding it was of great importance to Beckford. The gravelled path remains today, now a grassed avenue running along the side of Lansdown Road from Sion Road to beyond Hamilton Road. Many of the original lime trees are claimed to survive.

Below the paddocks leased by Beckford, disused quarries had been made into a quarry garden (now Lansdown Park, housing built in the 1970s). The quarry dyke was planted with scented shrubs and flowers. At the top of the dyke stood a small cottage, Goodridge enlarged a small cottage, renaming it the Italianate Cottage (replaced *c.*1860 by a villa called Hamilton House). However, just beyond this cottage, a public footpath cut across the land Beckford had leased, risking an encounter with the general public on his route to the Tower. To solve this, Goodridge created a curving Grotto Tunnel some seventy feet in length, marking a dramatic transition between the flowery dyke and the looser planting of the Tower's landscape.

Willes Maddox, in *Views of Lansdown Tower*, by E. English, 1844, p. 3.

Hamilton House, *c.* 1905. The horse marks the entrance to the footpath that ran above the Grotto Tunnel (early postcard).

A contemporary described this approach, 'now apparently closed by wall or rock, beyond which nothing can be perceived. Here a grotto opens beneath the gloomy arch of which lies the path that has hitherto been densely enclosed on either hand by flowers, shrubs and foliage.'[13] The grotto was mostly cut through the existing geology, the vault looking almost like dry stone walling so fine are its joints. Henry Venn Lansdown admired 'the natural appearance of this work of art', further commenting that 'hundreds have walked over it without ever dreaming of the subterranean passage beneath.'[14]

The Grotto Tunnel was blocked soon after Beckford's death. Its upper entrance remained hidden beneath the ground until the 2020s capital works on the Tower restoration works being scoped in 2021. These revealed the Tower-side entrance to the tunnel at least was well-preserved and in 2023 its upper stretch and steps were opened up fully. The lower portion of the tunnel was used to house the services for the 1970s housing that now occupies the site of Hamilton House, (demolished in the 1960s) making the rest of the tunnel irrecoverable for now at least, but enough is now accessible to give a sense of how it was. Finds from the 2023 excavation suggest that after Beckford's death, the tunnel was used as a midden by Hamilton House. Its rediscovery after so long is an exciting addition to the experience of the setting William Beckford created for himself.

The first glimpse of the Tower-side entrance to the Grotto Tunnel in 2021.

[13] Edmun English, *Views of Lansdown Tower*, 1844, pp. 2-3.
[14] Henry Venn Lansdown, *Recollections of William Beckford*, 1893, p. 25

The final stage of the Walk was through the Tower garden, also adorned with a picturesque archway and ruin, but kept deliberately untamed as a contrast with the soaring mass of the Tower. The garden around tower was described by the *London Illustrated News* in November1845 as a 'shrubbery, kept within the strict adherence to the wildness of nature: no trim walks, no nicely-edged borders are there, the paths being only such as are worn by the passenger's feet.' It was no typical shrubbery: Venn Lansdown impressed by the sheer variety of planting as well as its apparent maturity. 'Shrubs and trees, whose natural climates are as opposite as the antipodes, here flourish in the most amazing manner … my astonishment was great at witnessing the size of the trees, and I could scarcely believe my ears when told that the whole of the wood had been raised on the bare down within the last thirteen years.'

Beckford had thus created a unique progression in landscape architecture in his daily route to the Tower, one which referred to many of the principles described by Knight, Price and Repton but also at times anticipated the more contemporary Gardenesque, as elaborated by J. C. Loudon (architect and expert in the laying out of cemeteries and responsible for the Abbey Cemetery in Bath in 1843) and that found expression in town park planting later in the century. Loudon argued that a garden must be above nature if it was to claim to be a work of art, and so different from nature that it could not be mistaken for anything but a work of art. Beckford had in fact been following these principles for years, following his own instinct and love of exotic and scented blooms flowering in unexpected places.

Life (& Death) on Lansdown

Despite an idyllic setting, Beckford became increasingly exasperated with his neighbours as the years went by. He was forever trying to acquire more land, either to protect his privacy still further or, more often, pre-emptively to thwart schemes for development by his neighbours. In 1836 he was seeking to acquire an overvalued 64-acre farm to prevent the owner building on it, while the landowner across the road had reneged on his word and was letting his land 'for objectionable purposes' – in other words, for quarrying.

In 1837, the Slave Compensation Act was passed, which made provision for financial compensation for the plantation owners considered to have 'lost out' by the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833 and sought to draw a line under the shameful exploitation of enslaved labour once and for all. Beckford owned 660 slaves on four Jamaican plantations at Dank's Estate, Beckford's Rock River, Retreat Estate and Bodle's Pen. This made him eligible to receive some £13,000 (equivalent to £800,00 today) in compensation, no doubt pleasing his untrustworthy agents too.

In April 1837 Beckford seems to have bought a piece of land next to the Hare and Hounds to prevent it being turned into a skittle alley. There was a long running dispute with Captain Gunning over water supply to the farm, Gunning claiming that Beckford was wasteful, and that his trees were damaging the masonry of his reservoir. Such incidents drove Beckford into petulant tantrums, threatening that he would sell up and leave Lansdown for good (he seems to have believed that his presence was an asset to the Bath scene and that his departure would damage his opponents financially). His solicitor, Mr. White, tried to convince Beckford that the state of his finances made such a plan reckless, although in 1838 things got so bad that the property was valued and particulars drawn up. At the last minute, Beckford capitulated, but still instructed the long-suffering Mr. White 'to go down this evening [from London to Bath] to

impress on Captain Gunning & Agent & on Mr. Little & Mr. Sumption the prejudicial effects which must arise to Captain Gunning were [Beckford] to leave Bath.' The preparations for sale were too far advanced to cancel and Beckford's property had to be 'bought in' by his steward at considerable cost. Such irritations continued to the end of his life. As late as June 1843, Beckford wrote with melodramatic effect to an unknown correspondent:

> My Dear Sir
>
> I beg you will inform Mr. Taylor that if I continue to be annoyed with complaints about paths I shall have recourse to a sweeping remedy. I shall quit Bath & immediately upon my departure all my Fences upon Lansdown shall be removed the whole thrown open and a town of not less than 1500 hovels erected upon the freehold property behind my present habitation.

Beckford still saw moving as a realistic possibility; his advisers were mobilised to look for suitable estates. Once again, he began to doodle designs for mansions. In July 1843, his agent found a suitable location in Milford and Mr. Blathwayt of Dyrham Park expressed interest in buying the Tower. A sum of £30,000 was mentioned, but it is clear from the correspondence that Goodridge and White were doing all they could to dissuade the ageing Beckford.

Meanwhile, he had been busy refurbishing the Tower. Late in 1840, he had decided to sell many pieces of furniture and paintings in the Tower, less because he was bored with them than in reaction to an attempted burglary. In a draft letter of December 1840 he wrote:

> 'The more faithful the Servants the less do they deserve being exposed to the horrid chance of midnight murder for which sort of catastrophe the wide solitary expanse of Lansdown is but too well fitted.
>
> Having determined – in consequence I firmly believe of well-founded fears – to strip the Tower of the most valuable effects, nothing appears to me more rational than to dispose of such objects as could not possibly find other situation than in a lumber room.'

Even so, the inventory taken at his death valued the contents of the Tower alone at £47,339 (some £3 million today), and included a blunderbuss, a gun and two

pistols found in the servants' bedroom at the Tower. The sale had the added advantage of providing the excuse for a new project in new furniture and draperies. In May 1841 he wrote with his usual sense of urgency:

> 'The Coffers must be finished…whether in gilded wood or marble is to me indifferent… the long side table, with its black marble bordered slab of *extraordinary good quality* brocatelle, should be completed *as fast as possible*.'

The Brocatelle slab appears in the Crimson Drawing Room in the 1844 inventory, while 'Four Oak Coffers with dome tops on square Pedestals with Arch centres and doors very richly carved, gilt metal ornaments' appear in the Scarlet Drawing Room. Among many draperies the 1844 sale were a set of purple curtains, identifiable as from the Scarlet Drawing Room. All the evidence points to an extensive refurbishment of the Tower in 1841, with new curtains, carpets, wall hangings and furniture.

Beckford clearly did not consider himself in decline, although he had for some time become more than ever preoccupied with arrangements for his own interment. In 1834, he had still harboured ideas of using the Tower as his mausoleum, instructing Goodridge to design him a tomb in the upper corridor at the Tower. He wrote,

> 'Form a marble panel in the centre of the present floor – conceal this pavement under a rich carpet – and keep the Tomb in a packing case until wanted.'

The idea was not pursued, and in 1837 he considered building a mausoleum alongside the Tower. This too was dropped and he wrote to Goodridge that 'I have made up my mind, dear Sir, not to disturb the imposing solitude of the Tower by a rival edifice.'

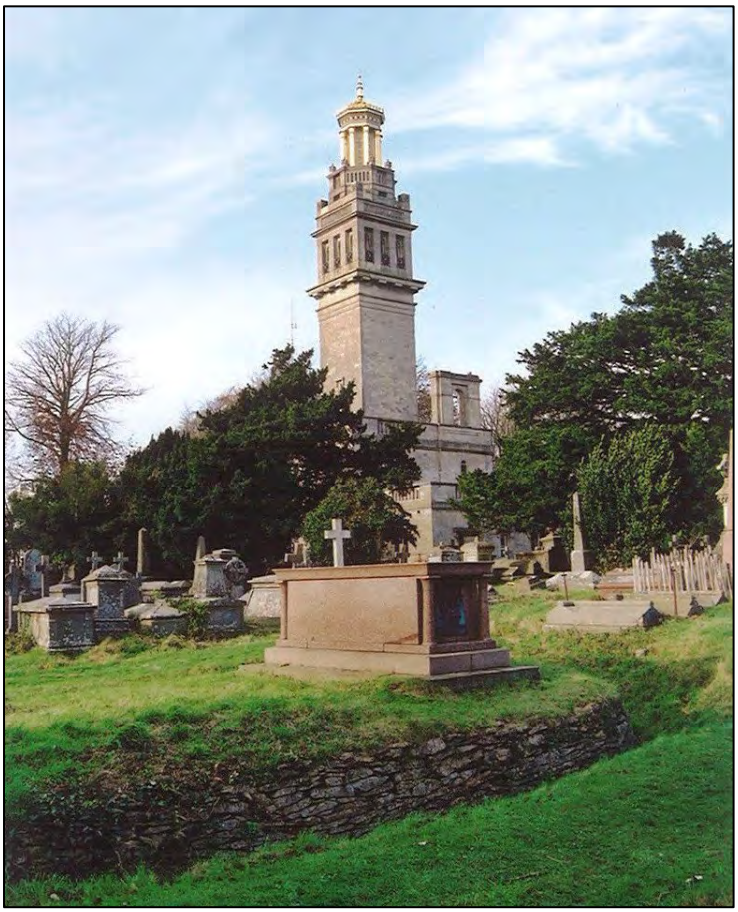


Figure 41: Beckford's Sarcophagus in 2000, still set, 'Saxon style', on its burial mound surrounded by a ditch. Its plaque reads 'Enjoying humbly the most precious gift of Heaven - Hope'.

However, the idea of burial in the garden at the Tower persisted. In 1842 he designed and had made a pink granite sarcophagus, which he had placed in the Tower garden, next to the tomb of a favourite dog (see Figure 41). In April 1843, Beckford applied to the Bishop of London for a faculty to be buried in the garden, asking that 'the Ground … be consecrated and appropriated to the Church forever.' The Bishop refused to consider the application and referred the matter to the Registrar of the Bishop of Bath and Wells and there the matter rested.

A year later, Beckford went for a walk in an east wind and got wet through. A fever developed and, frightened, he wrote to his daughter Susan, Duchess of Hamilton, begging her to come to his bedside. 'O abrigez la distance…O abregez la fatale distance', he wrote. She came, and tactfully offered to bring a Catholic priest to administer the last rites (Beckford had written her a long and enthusiastic account of a Roman Catholic funeral a few months early). He refused them, and equally the services of an Anglican minister. For his day, it is an interesting disavowal, finally dismissing as hollow all his flirtations with St. Anthony and the drama of High Mass during his travels. Beckford died peacefully on 2nd May 1844. Willes Maddox was summoned by the Duchess to provide an oil sketch of the deathbed, and so we have the last glimpse of him (Figure 44).

Yet the burial plot he had wished for was still un-consecrated and so he was buried ten days later in the new Abbey cemetery in Lyncombe (Figure 42), once the heavy sarcophagus had been transported down from Lansdown Hill. The coffin of Spanish mahogany, bearing gilded armorials specially designed by Beckford, was borne along Lansdown Crescent, down Lansdown Road and Milsom Street, across Pulteney Bridge and along Pulteney Street. The passage of the immensely long cortege was watched by crowds of Bathonians, curious to witness the obsequies in honour of a legendary recluse (Figure 43).

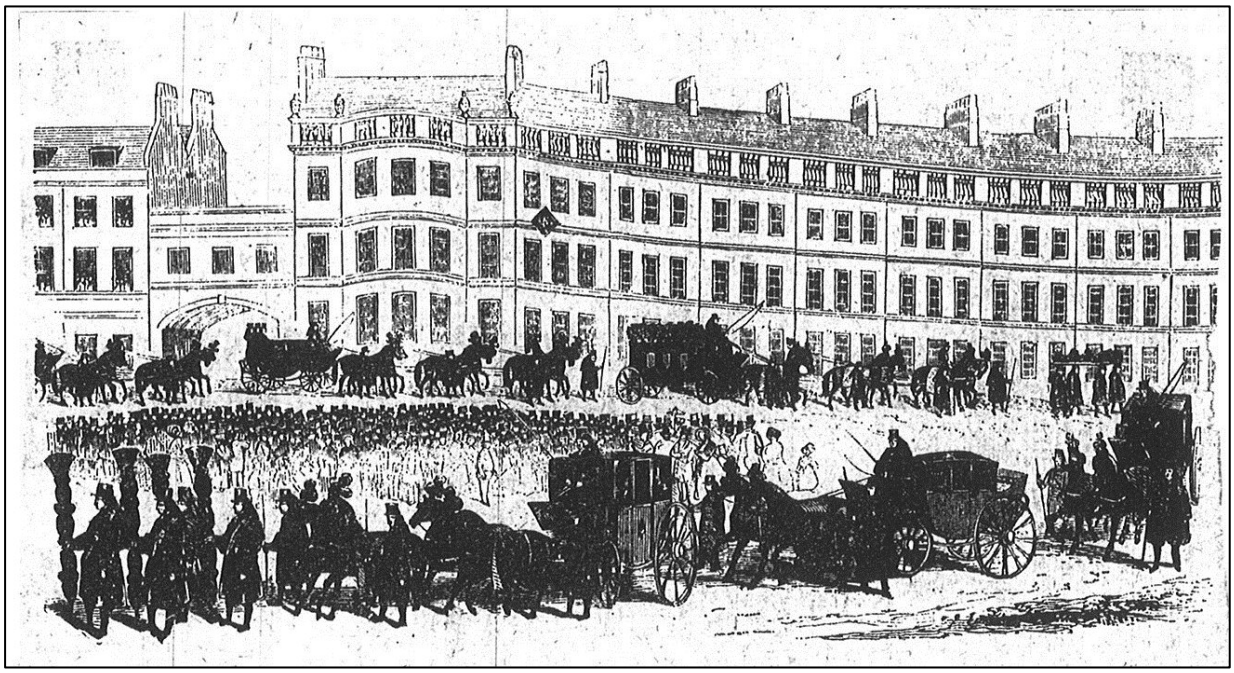


Figure 42: Beckford's funeral cortege leaving his house on Lansdown Crescent. Engraving from *The Pictorial Times* of 25th May 1844.

Figure 43: *The Abbey Cemetery Chapel,* watercolour by John Buckler, 1847. Laid out in 1823, the Cemetery is one of the best examples of |J.C. Loudon's scientific arrangement of graveyards. Beckford's tomb can just be made out at the far right, with railings and pillars around it. The following year, he would be re-interred in the Lansdown Cemetery.

His tomb bears the lines

> Eternal Power!
> Grant me through obvious clouds one transient gleam
> Of thy bright essence in my dying hour

And, at the other end,

> Enjoying humbly the most precious gift of Heaven – Hope.

What, finally, are we to make of William Beckford? Certainly he is a man who has continued to exert a fascination for many scholars. Apart from the Beckford Tower Museum in Bath, there is a Beckford Society in London. and the briefest browse on the internet raises tens of sites featuring him, from all across the world and in many languages. They cover aspects as diverse as his architecture, his sexuality, music transcribed for him in Portugal and Beckford as '*terroriste au pays de raison',* yet his insouciant oblivion to those over whose lives he had power can only be considered abusive. His persecution for his sexuality can only prompt compassion today; his pursuit of Kitty Courtenay abhorrently inappropriate to our own age. The evidence Beckford himself left behind – in many cases chose to leave behind – defies a definitive description of the man, and each biographer has chosen to draw his own veils and place his own emphases. Beckford pretended not to care about the hostility of his fellow men (or 'the Worldlings' as he referred to them), but in reality it was a constant burden. Yet he chose to accentuate his 'otherness' from society; Lees-Milne has suggested perceptively that in a sense he made the Powderham scandal an excuse for his temperamental shortcomings. Beckford was 'the quintessential romantic, the eternal child, forever playing a role', but 'the adult who tries to combat the harsh realities of life with the illusions of childhood only has himself to blame when these illusions turn to smoke.'[15] It was perhaps this hollowness that lay at the heart of Beckford's bravado and arrogance, yet it was from seeking to fill it that his creativity and connoisseurship sprang.

[15] Lees-Milne, p. 121

Figure 44: *William Beckford on his Deathbed*, **by Willes Maddox (1844), now at Brodick Castle. He lies on a narrow wooden bed against a crimson curtain, with some of his most treasured possessions dimly visible around him.**

Figure 45: Susan Euphemia Beckford, Duchess of Hamilton, by Willes Maddox. She was Beckford's younger and favourite daughter and heir to his possessions. His other daughter Margaret eloped to marry for love and died young, her father unreconciled to her and vehement in his dislike.

The Tower after Beckford's Death

Beckford left the Tower to his favourite younger daughter, Susan, wife of the tenth Duke of Hamilton (Figure 45). Ironically, far better records survive for this period than for during Beckford's residence, since meticulous running accounts were kept on behalf of his executors, the Duchess and Richard Samuel White. The executors first planned to sell the Tower to the highest bidder, and a detailed inventory was drawn up of all contents and fixtures. This in itself took three months. Items the family wished to keep were crated up and sent to Hamilton Palace in Scotland. Meanwhile, Goodridge drew up plans which showed the Tower was capable 'of being rendered a most complete Private Residence at very moderate expenditure' (see Figure 46 - it will be remembered that the Tower was a retreat for Beckford rather than a place of residence).

The sale of contents took place over eight days in November and December 1845. Most of the furniture, paintings, china, Etruscan vases and other *objets* reached good prices – then as now a Beckford provenance was a desirable association in matters of taste. However, the Tower itself failed to reach its reserve price of £5,000 and was withdrawn. The executors then approached Mr. Blathwayt (with whom Beckford, in a fit of petulance with his neighbouring landowners, had entered negotiations for the sale in 1843, when a price of £30,000 had been discussed). Mr. Blathwayt was no longer interested. For the next eighteenth months, the Tower was maintained, cleaned and heated, although also being gradually run down. Beckford's faithful gardener, Mr. Vincent, finally left the Tower Cottage with his wife in December 1845 with an annuity. Presumably a private buyer could not be found, for in May 1847 the Tower and its surrounding land was again put up for auction, this time in three lots. There must still have been considerable local interest in the fate of the Tower, since tables and forms were set out there, with 'Bottled Porter, Beer, Biscuits, Bread and Cheese etc.' also laid on.

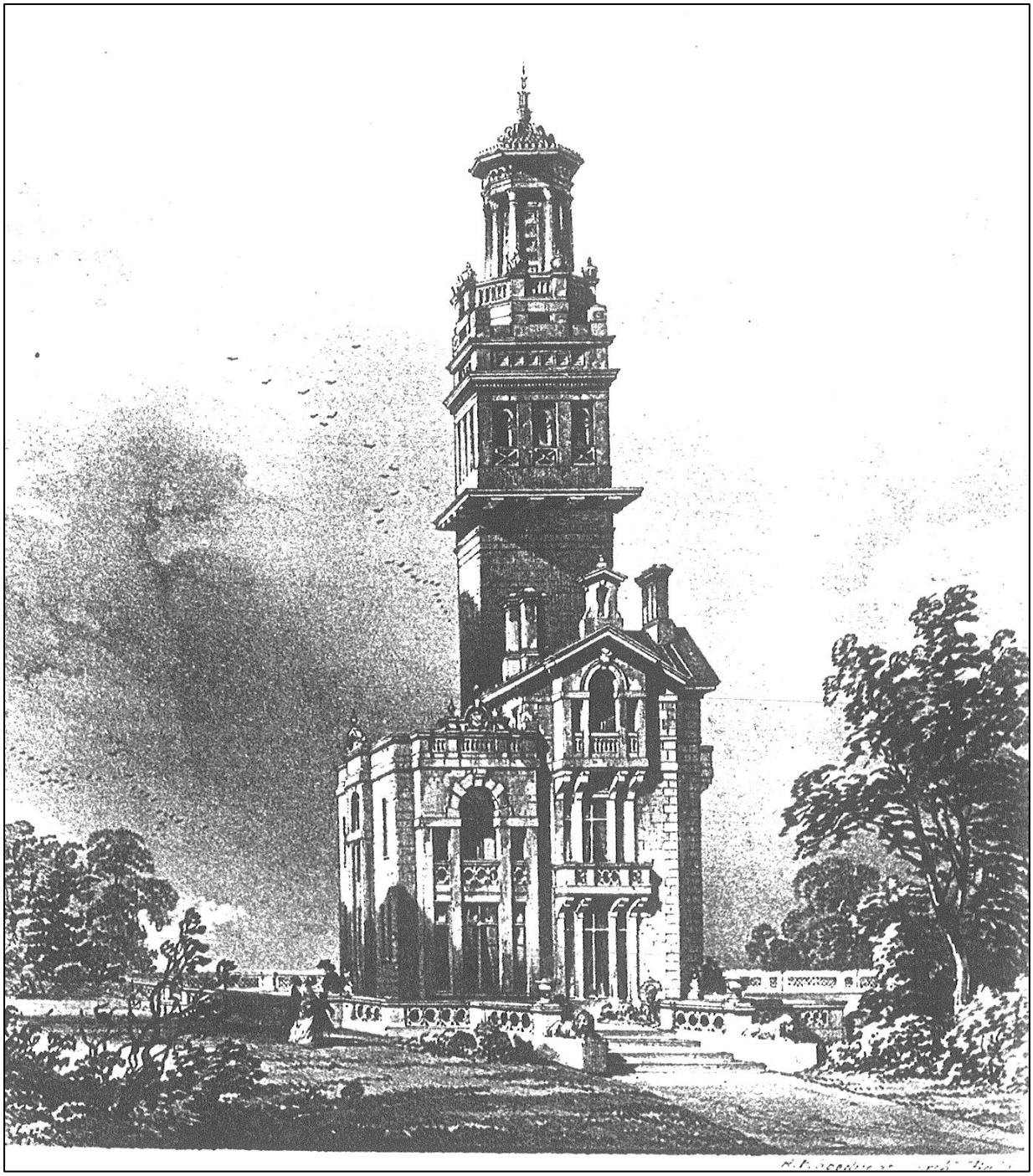
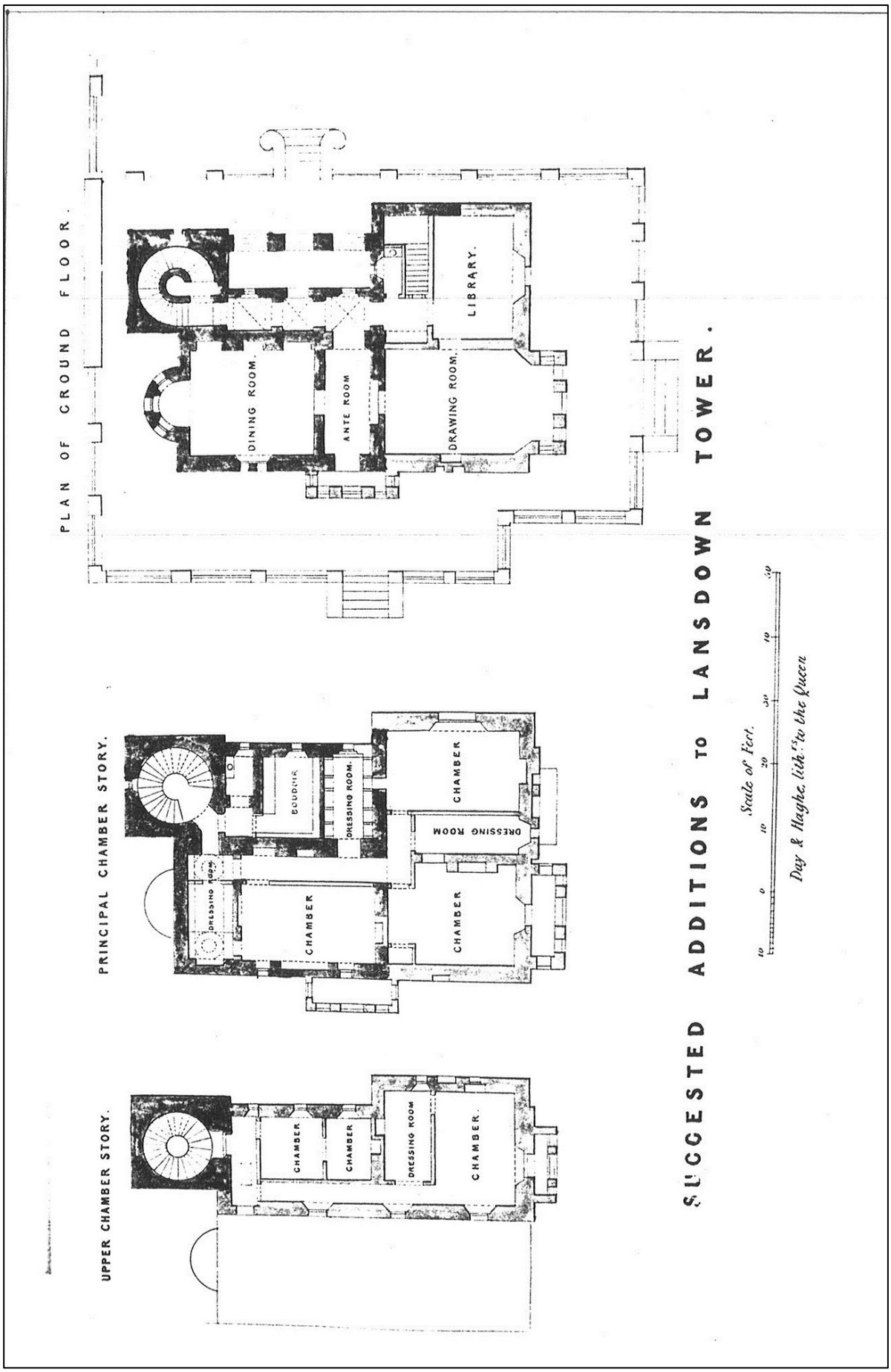


Figure 46: Goodridge's proposal for turning the Tower into 'a most complete Private Residence at a very moderate expenditure', when it was put up for sale after Beckford's death. He suggests adding another storey over the Corridor and single storey annexe. It is perhaps just as well no one took the plans up, since the ensemble loses much of its elegance.


PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR.
DINING ROOM.
ANTE ROOM
DRAWING ROOM.
LIBRARY.
PRINCIPAL CHAMBER STORY.
DRESSING ROOM
BOUDOIR
DRESSING ROOM
CHAMBER
DRESSING ROOM
CHAMBER
CHAMBER
UPPER CHAMBER STORY.
CHAMBER
CHAMBER
DRESSING ROOM
CHAMBER.
SUGGESTED ADDITIONS TO LANSDOWN TOWER.
Scale of Feet.
Day & Haghe, lith.rs to the Queen

Viewing had taken place for three weeks previously, for which security guards who slept at the Tower had been hired. The eventual purchaser got the Tower, 'with its Stock in the Garden, and various fixtures and fittings', at the bargain price of £1,000. Mr. Knott, 'landlord of the Freemasons' Tavern, Abbey Green', had little interest in the fittings (it was to transpire that his intention was to use the Tower as a public house) and Edmund English, who had drawn up the inventory, had to insist that considerable structural damage could result if the various fittings, bookcases and partitions were removed.

Two months later, the Duchess was shocked to discover Mr. Knott's true intentions for the site, to turn 'the land into tea gardens and the Tower into a Beerhouse'. Unable to countenance this prospect for the site upon which her father had lavished so much care and attention, she instructed Goodridge to buy the site back. Mr. Knott agreed to sell the Tower back for £1,120, although he also claimed over £600 for the fees he had incurred. 'It is impossible to describe the relief [sic] to my mind the release of the Tower from Mr. Knott's hand is', wrote the Duchess to Goodridge, 'and I am duly grateful to the part you have acted in this business'.

By September, the Duchess had come up with an alternative use for the Tower. She would give the Tower and its surrounding land to the Parish of St. Swithin's, Walcot for use as a cemetery for the parish, on condition that her father's sarcophagus was moved from the Abbey cemetery and re-erected in the Tower cemetery, and that the railings and stonework which had been put around the sarcophagus while in the Abbey burial ground should be re-erected at the entrance to the Lansdown cemetery - all at no expense to herself (her father's original desire to be buried near the Tower had been thwarted by the Church's refusal to allow consecration for a single tomb). Goodridge was commissioned to design the cemetery and supervise the transfer of the monument. The Rector of St. Swithin's, Mr. Widdrington, arranged for the consecration of the ground and fulfilled the requirement to organise the transfer

of the granite tomb at his own expense. However, the fixtures and fittings in the Drawing Rooms, Sanctuary and Libraries posed a problem since Mr. Widdrington, having first said he would buy them, then declared that he did not want them. Pressure was applied by the redoubtable Mr. English, and the Rector eventually agreed to buy them for £200, as well as the Tower Paddock, which was not included in the Duchess's gift. The actual title of the Tower was granted to Her Majesty's Commissioners for Building New Churches (later part of the Church Commissioners). It was also the Duchess's intention that the land on which the cemetery stood was to be held in trust for the parish and the benefit of the poor, but this was not how the Rector saw the matter. He had regarded the gift as glebe land which he could use for profitable purposes, hence his willingness to lay out the cemetery and move the tomb. This was to cause later incumbents some confusion over where specific responsibilities lay and led to the exclusion of the Tower from the deeds of consecration dated 28th April 1848 and meant that succeeding rectors did not consider it their legal duty to maintain the Tower.

At the time, Mr. Widdrington was also required to set up a funerary chapel in the Tower 'with all things necessary for the performance of the Burial Service according to the Rites and Uses of the Church of England'. The Scarlet Drawing Room was the obvious location for such a use and to allow for more easy access an opening was made through the North wall into the passage opposite the original entrance door. St. Swithin's, Walcot is known to have been Low Church in its persuasion. Designs for oak seating to be installed in the 1930s show that there was no altar as such in the chapel. The coffin seems to have been placed at the natural focus of the room, in front of the three arched windows – i.e. at the western end rather than the more traditional eastern orientation. Provision was also made for Dissenters, by reserving the north room in the single annexe for their use. The other single storey room was used as a vestry. The steps and wall at the front were also removed for coffin access and a sloping ramp installed.

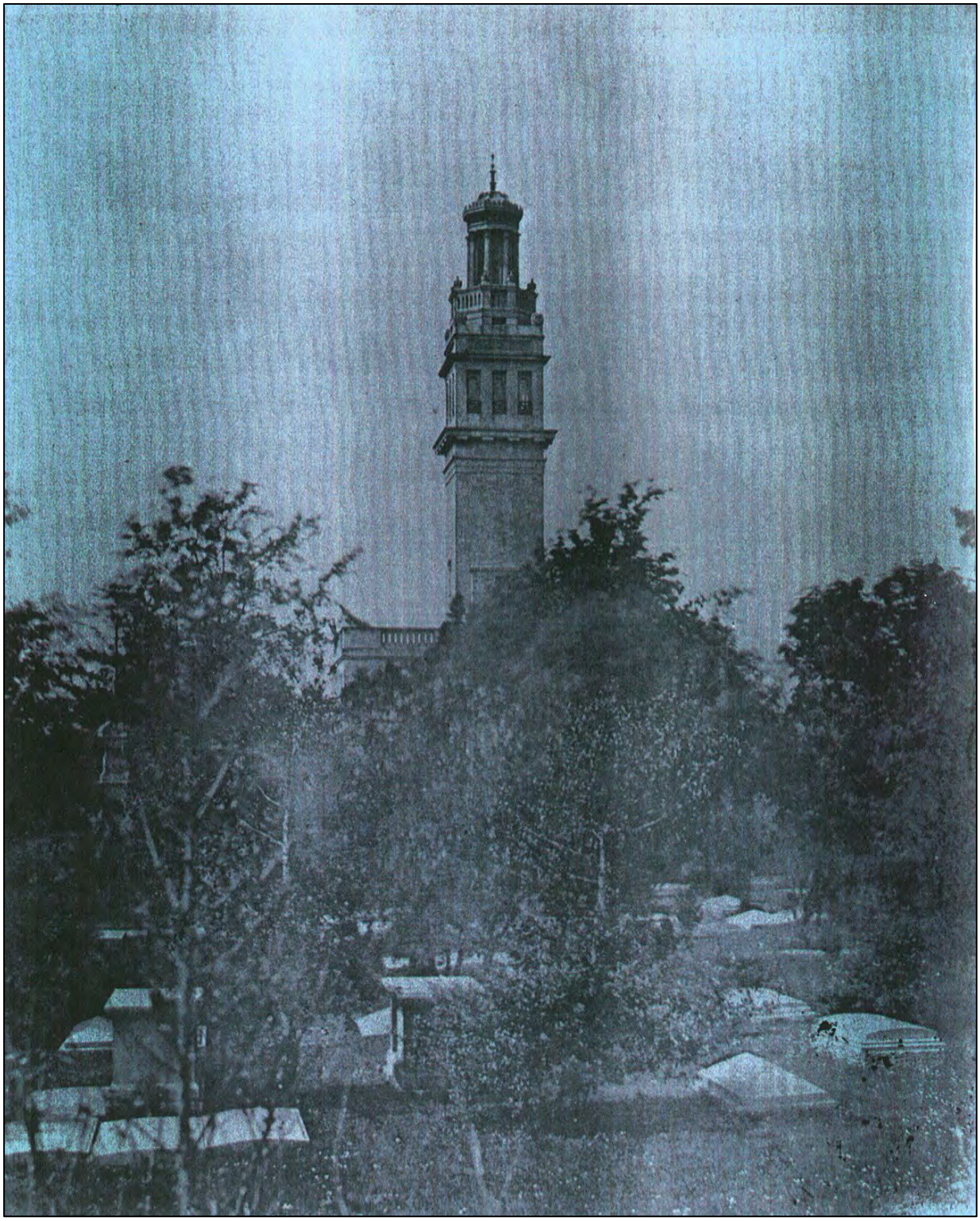


Figure 47: Earliest photographic evidence of Lansdown Crescent: a calotype taken c 1850. The tombs look new, the cemetery already much used and well-tended.

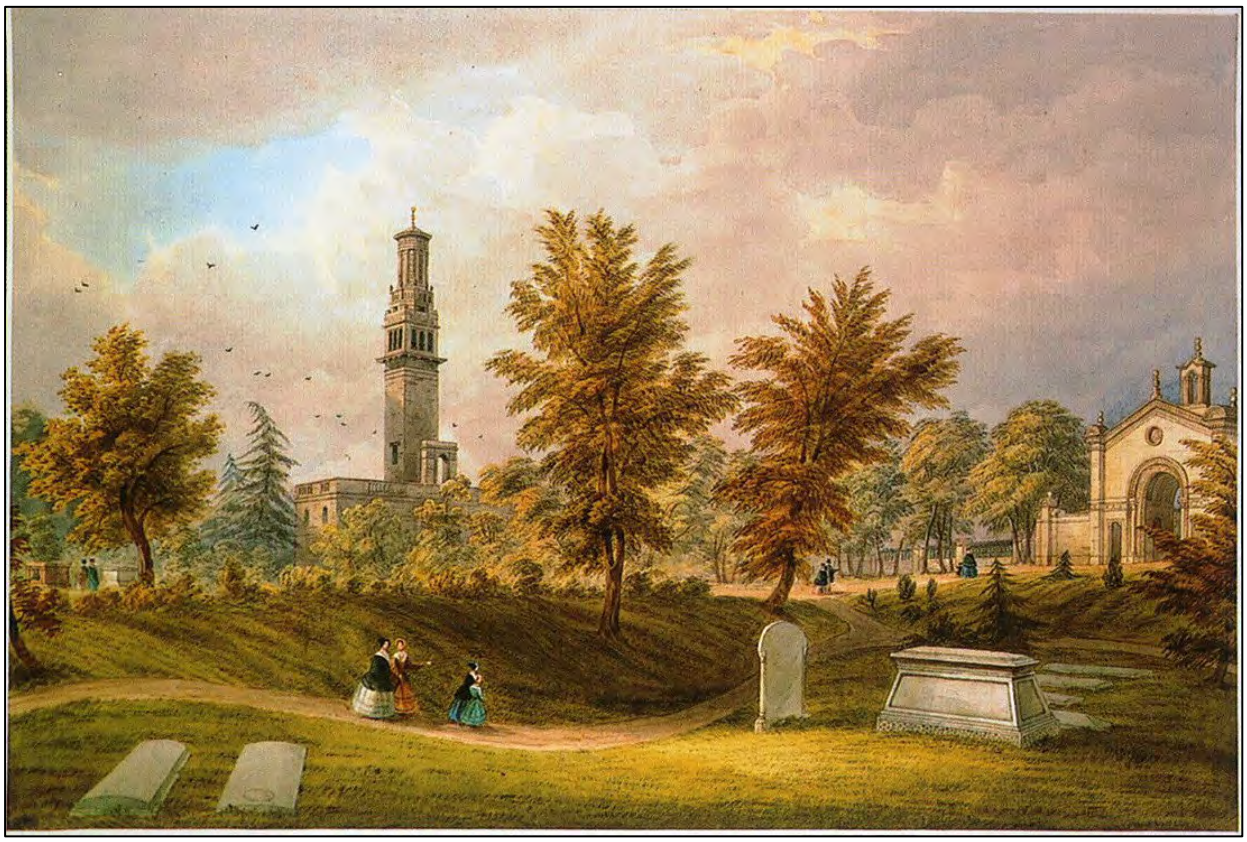


Figure 48: An early engraving of the Lansdown Cemetery. Goodridge's gateway and surrounding railings are already in place; Beckford's tomb is clearly recognisable at the far left. The landscaping of what was the Tower Garden is probably much as it was at the time of Beckford's death.

Figure 49: Gateway to Lansdown Cemetery, by Goodridge (c.1850), with a detail of the Romanesque decoration.

It seems likely that new, more convenient double doors were installed. Unfortunately no interior pictorial evidence of this early chapel phase remains. A funerary bell was hung from the free-standing arch on the roof of the accommodation block. The current stained glass windows date from the 1930s.

The cemetery was already laid out by October 1847 and was finally consecrated on April 28th 1848. The next day, William Beckford was moved to his final resting place. (There is, therefore, no truth in the rumour sometimes heard that he lay on un-consecrated ground.) Goodridge was commissioned to design the cemetery gateway and screen wall. The gateway mixes symbolic iconography popular at the time with rich Romanesque detailing (see Figure 49). In roundels along the wall are winged hour-glasses, triangles, crosses and serpents swallowing their tails. These refer respectively to 'Father' Time and the angel of death; the Trinity; Christianity and Eternity. Beckford's tomb was soon joined by others and a guidebook written in 1856 already comments on the number and beauty of the various headstones. A very early photograph or calotype record this stage of the site's history, as do engravings (see Figures 47 & 48). The Duchess of Hamilton was a regular visitor, checking the security of her father's tomb and the state of repair of the Chapel building and the Tower and ordering the planting of trees and shrubs. She was not going to allow her gift fall into a state of disrepair below that standard she thought fitting for her father's final resting place.

Meanwhile, there was a growing unease within the parish over relationship of the Lansdown Cemetery with their existing parish graveyard. The latter commanded an expensive ground rent of £74 per annum, which had previously been paid for from burial fees. However, the more affluent parishioners, with the more ornate headstones that commanded the higher fees, were now electing (or being encouraged) to be buried in the Lansdown Cemetery. Here, all or most of the fees went straight into Mr. Widdrington's pocket (not unreasonably since, as he saw it, he had paid for the setting out of the cemetery and the various

building work). This situation continued under his successor, a Mr. Collisson, so that the parish were left to meet the deficit on the ground rent for the original graveyard. A faction developed within the parish, which felt that the Tower was an unwanted liability and its cemetery an expensive luxury. There were also moves afoot to create a central burial ground, run by the Town Council and to which all parishes would contribute.

At a heated Vestry meeting, reported in the local press, H. E. Goodridge spoke for the Duchess, who had reiterated her intention that the poor of the parish should have a cheap burial place in the Tower cemetery. He maintained that her wishes had been systematically disregarded. The Churchwarden, a Mr. Roberts, then quoted the Rector as saying that his solicitors had been in contact with the Duchess. When this remark was reported by the newspapers, the Duchess was distressed and let it be known that the only communication she had received 'was a very courteous note from Mr. Collisson himself, with which she was very much pleased, and in which he gave her the fullest assurances that the conditions upon which the Tower and grounds were presented to Mr. Widdrington, should be carried out.'[16] A committee was constituted and a solicitor instructed to sort out the legal position of the Rector and the cemetery, and also to find a way round the requirement of maintaining the Tower. It was his report that revealed that the Duchess's title deed had been made over to Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and not to the incumbent. He also found that there could be no permanent settlement of responsibility for the Tower upon the incumbent. The parish emerged from this debacle grateful for the cemetery but anxious to shed responsibility for the Tower.

The Duchess had at first monitored the condition of the Tower, but after her death in 1859, there was no longer any pressure to keep the building in good repair and standards began to deteriorate. Goodridge too died, in 1864, and was

[16] *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, 1858, November 2nd.

Figure 50: H.E. Goodridge's tombstone in Lansdown Cemetery, a modest memorial designed by himself.

buried in the cemetery (Figure 50). His son, A. S. Goodridge, was associated in his turn with repairs to the tower for many years. The exposed position of the Tower made regular repairs inevitable and by 1898, the lantern was seen to be six to eight inches off the perpendicular. A full account of the various repairs over the next fifty years, which were often makeshift, may be found in the Pat Hughes and Jerry Sampson volumes held by the Bath Preservation Trust. No repairs were done during the First World War, and in 1918 a local commentator recorded that

> 'The Tower is piteous in its abandonment: here a heavy open-work shutter in gilt-bronze wrenched off its hinges, there a gilt-bronze medallion fallen to the ground; the stripped walls scrawled with *graffiti*, the ceilings dilapidated and the rain beating in.'[17]

In February 1931, there was a serious fire which gravely affected the chapel. Its cause is not known, although it has been suggested that use of more modern fuel in a (by then) ancient heating apparatus designed for coke may have overheated the system, and that timbers in the various flues and heating ducts ignited. The Tower itself seems to have acted like chimney; it was not badly damaged, but smoke was drawn up it, blackening the walls and the plasterwork as far up as the ceiling of the belvedere. Damage to the chapel was such that the church authorities decided at the time of re-building to incorporate the upper floor so that the chapel now rose to the full height of the accommodation block. Indeed, it may be that the fire started in the floor timbers supporting the upper floor, leaving the structure too badly damaged to be worth repairing. An arched and faceted softwood ceiling was introduced to the chapel and various windows and door openings were filled in to allow for this double height alteration.

[17] Falkner, J. M., *Bath: its History and Social Tradition* (1918), p. 84.

army they got on the cheap

THIRTY years ago today the Home Guard was disbanded. It was the end of Britain's newest and cheapest army, all of them volunteers.

When Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War made his wireless appeal for local defence volunteers on May 14, 1940, more than a million men had enrolled within a week. By July 1940, when they were to be known as Home Guard (NOT Dad's Army) and to wear badges of county regiments, the number eventually rose to over 1,300,000 men.

Retired generals, admirals and high ranking RAF chiefs served as privates; a host of ex-service men from the 1914 war — men from all walks of life joined up, and from all of them issued an unquenchable spirit of loyalty and patriotism.

Although in the early stages, handicapped by the shortage of arms, never had such a beautiful array of booby traps and decoys been thought out by our "reception committee". Chief among them was the sea of fire around our coastal waters.

The Home Guard guarded gas, waterworks, roads, bridges, railways; and manned searchlights and anti-aircraft guns. How lost many good men on exercises.

After initial teething trouble the Home Guard proved a highly efficient fighting force.

I was probably the first Home Guard volunteer in Britain, having enrolled ten minutes after Mr Eden started his wireless appeal.

Many stories both serious and amusing could be told of the Home Guard exploits.

Our platoon's headquarters were at Beckford Tower, in Lansdown Cemetery on the heights of Bath, where William Beckford, the well-known eccentric millionaire, and father of the Duchess of Hamilton, is buried in an elaborate tomb.

While on guard duty nearby I had an alarming experience.

The July night was still as I watched the entrance

The author's Home Guard platoon outside its headquarters in Beckford Tower in Lansdown Cemetery.

siderable time.

Nothing moved, but night guard duty can play tricks with the imagination.

All of a sudden, something happened.

Beckford's tomb!

It appeared to be slowly rising and falling. When I looked to the right the reason became slowly apparent. Unknown to me, a gentle breeze had arisen and it was swaying the branches of a nearby tree — slowly nodding up and down.

But it didn't half give me a shock.

The first night we were issued with live ammunition we were told: "Challenge three times, and if no reply — fire."

A young recruit was in cover on guard in the long cemetery grass with me. A figure passed on the sky line, ten yards away. We

"Halt" three times, four times, five times, and still the obscure figure did not stop. Just as my young enthusiastic colleague said "I am going to let fly," I suddenly noticed, silhouetted against a streak of dawn sky, a feather sticking up out of the man's trilby hat. I quickly remembered and stopped the eager young man. It was Captain Blaine, a big game hunter and an officer in our platoon. We learned afterwards that he went into the cemetery to "test the guard."

And he was stone deaf!

Our platoon commander, Colonel Jones, was a bank manager. During a social evening Private Frank Russell after a few drinks interrupted the commander's speech

"Don't heckle, Russell. I will have none of it. Shut my" he ordered Frank swayed to his feet. "Look see, Jonesie, I won't stand thy cheek and if I get any more of it I will take my overdraft from thy bank."

A pompous young man in our platoon was given a commission; his first "pip."

A short while afterwards he told us, "I suppose I get more salutes than Winston Churchill."

"How do you make that out?" we asked him.

"I salute them first," was the bombastic reply.

We should remember the Home Guard and their arduous duties, and thank God they were an army that did not have to be evacuated.

by Steven Baker

Figure 51: Reminiscences from a member of the Home Guard, stationed at the Tower during World War II. (BTT archive).

The building contractors began clearing the debris in March. The architect for the reconstruction work following the fire, Mowbray Green, took it upon himself also to repair the upper stage of the Tower while the contractors, Chancellors of Bath, were busy reinstating the Chapel accommodation at its foot. The then incumbent, Preb. Murphy, must have challenged this action since Mowbray Green wrote in a letter dated 29th May 1931 'I am sorry to say that it is impossible to delay the repairs to the Lansdown Tower.'

New chapel furnishings, in fashionable limed oak, were donated by relatives of those buried in the cemetery. These were consecrated by the Bishop of Taunton in July 1934. The lantern (which had again settled) and upper part of the Tower were also repaired at this time, although no attempt was made to clean the smoke-damaged staircase.

During World War II, the Tower was used as headquarters by a platoon of the Home Guard. The newspaper cutting opposite provides some reminiscences worthy of 'Dad's Army'! (Figure 51).

The next major phase of repairs came in the mid-1950s. A preliminary survey in 1952 revealed that the balustrading on the stairs, made of bronze-plated iron, had decayed to the point of being unsafe and the lantern was again cause for concern. The architects, Messrs. Rolfe & Crozier Cole, made the problem clear in a leaflet for the resulting appeal in 1954:

> The eight columns [of the lantern], however, stand on a lead apron upon an oak ring beam, and this lead apron has been pierced by the iron holding-down bolts. Water has thus penetrated and this has caused decay in the oak and a settlement to the southward. The introduction of new oak and the tarring of the column bases will make good the weakness, but regular attention will always be necessary.'

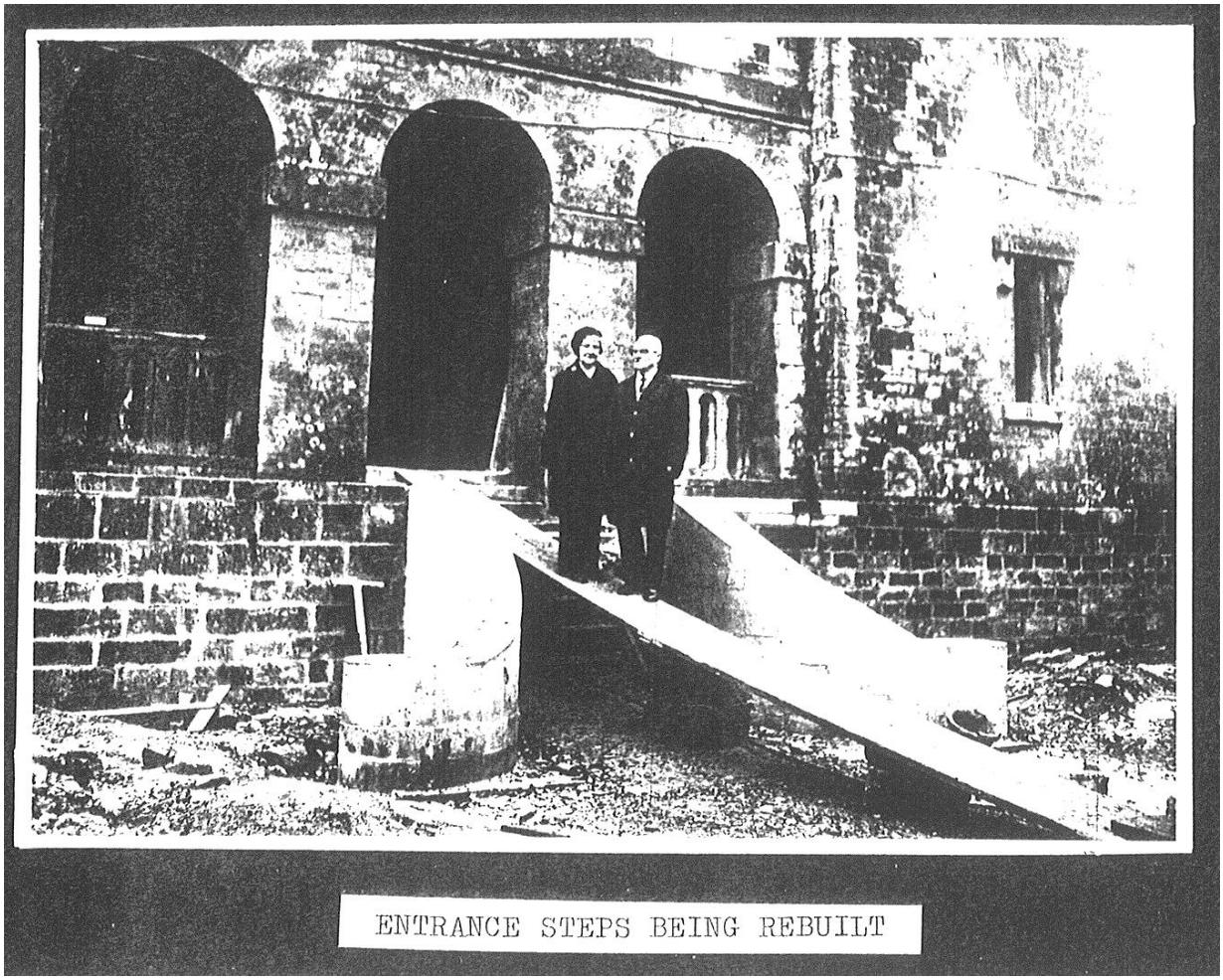


Figure 52: The Drs. Hilliard during their renovation of the Tower in the mid 1970s. Here, the reinstatement of the steps and balustrading at the front is in progress. These had been removed when the funerary chapel phase began for easier access for coffins. The Hilliards also returned the ground to its original level. (BPT Trust archive)

It seems some of this work was funded by selling the lead from the roof on the lower block. External repairs to the lantern were also enabled by a donation from the Drs Elizabeth and Leslie Hilliard, in memory of her father who was buried in the cemetery. This was the beginning of a long association of the Hilliards with the Tower. No money was available for the stairs.

Minor repairs continued through the 1960s, but perhaps not surprisingly given how stretched church resources have become, by 1969 Walcot Parish was, said their solicitor, 'most keen to dispose of the building which they find most burdensome.' The Rector was even more outspoken and was quoted in the local paper as finding the Tower

> 'a pain in the neck…It is morally wrong to use church money on that monstrosity. I cannot bring myself to spend money that should be spend on feeding the hungry – both physical and spiritual – on the building…It has neither ancient value nor contemporary interest: it's not even good as a folly.'

The same article also made reference to 'the scandalous orgies' supposed to have taken place in the Tower, a curious late-twentieth century echo of the reputation Beckford attracted by his wild parties. There is no evidence of any such goings-on at the Tower.

Nothing is known of the fate of the first floor during the chapel phases, other than the raising of the chapel ceiling to double-storey height through the floors of the Sanctuary and Crimson Drawing Room after the 1931 fire. It may well be that, though deteriorating; they remained as Beckford left them in interior finishes but without their bookcases and other fittings. Under the Hilliards' conversion, the former Sanctuary and part of the Crimson Drawing Room became a bed-sitting room, with the rest of the Crimson Drawing Room being turned into a small bedroom and bathroom at the west end and a third bedroom where Beckford's Etruscan Library and Book Gallery had been. This room was soon to become the first museum space in 1977, housing the Hilliards' own collection of Beckford memorabilia.

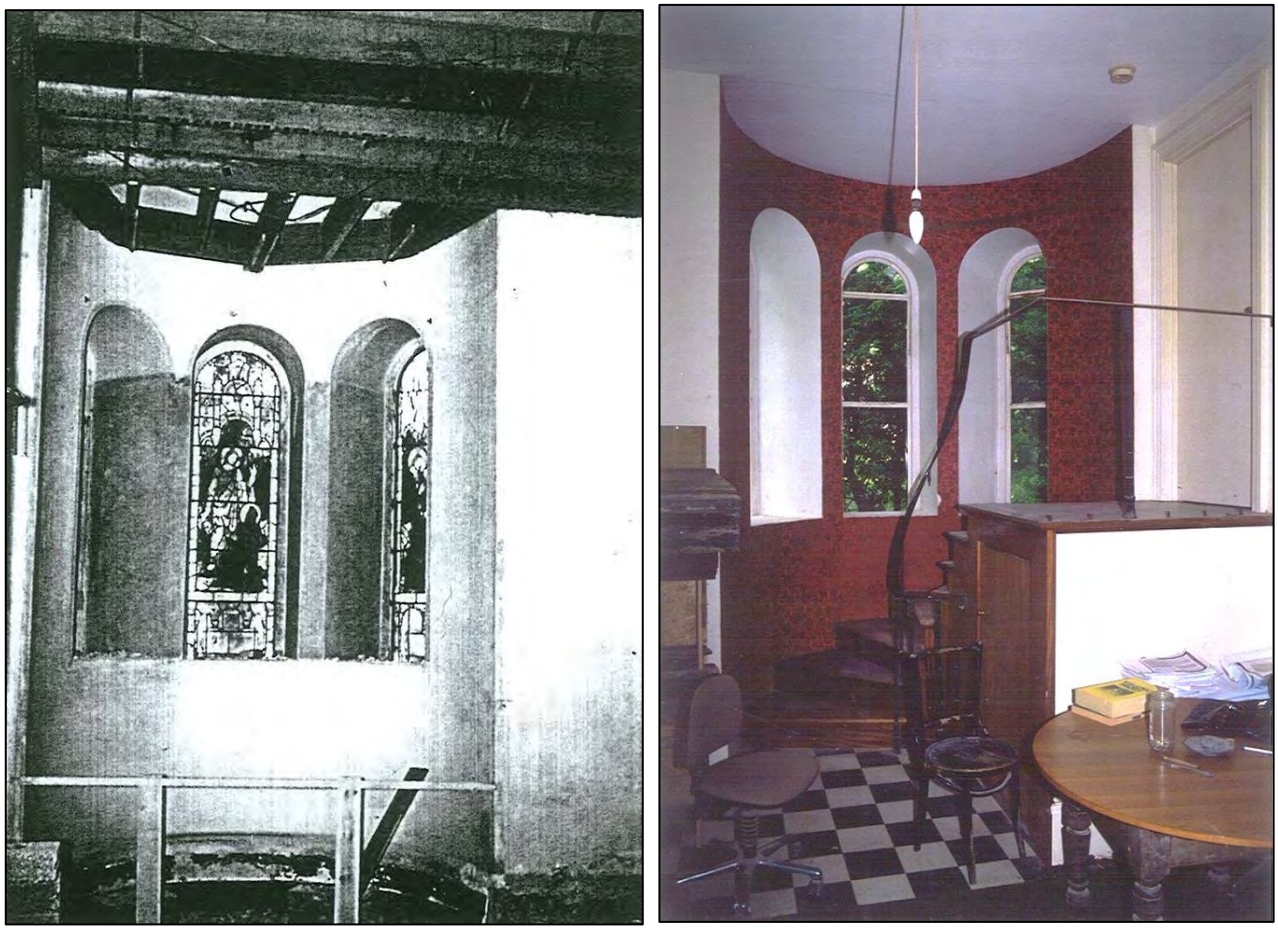


Figure 53: The west end of the Scarlet Drawing Room during the Hilliards' conversion. The ceiling has been reinstated. The stained glass was put in after 1931. Right: The same view showing the staircase inserted to link the two floors of Beckford House.

The bed-sitting room was also taken over as a museum room in 1978, re-opening the old opening onto the Tower staircase which had been blocked in 1931.

A new door was cut through into the Etruscan Library space, and new windows inserted in the southern elevation of the Drawing Room to match those below. The Tower stairs, blocked off when the two-storey chapel was formed, required new stairs which emerged onto a landing passage partitioned off from the Crimson Drawing Room, with doors off to three bedrooms and bathroom.

Returning downstairs, the single-storey annexe also became a small flat, intended for a caretaker. A bathroom was inserted in the former pump room, and a staircase well cut off from the north room (a bedroom) with a timber staircase installed, leading down to a basement kitchen. The semi-circular window at ground level was unblocked.

By 1977, however, the Hilliards decided that they wished to make more permanent provision for the Tower, and so it was transferred by deed of gift to a newly formed Beckford Tower Trust. This Trust was set up to preserve and maintain for public benefit buildings, features and objects of historical and architectural interest relating to Beckford's life and work at Fonthill and in particular at Beckford's Tower; to maintain the Beckford Museum collection at present in the Tower as a public museum; to educate the public in Beckford's and works and to administer the Tower and oversee its maintenance. From the formation of the Trust, a more rigorous regimen of maintenance began.

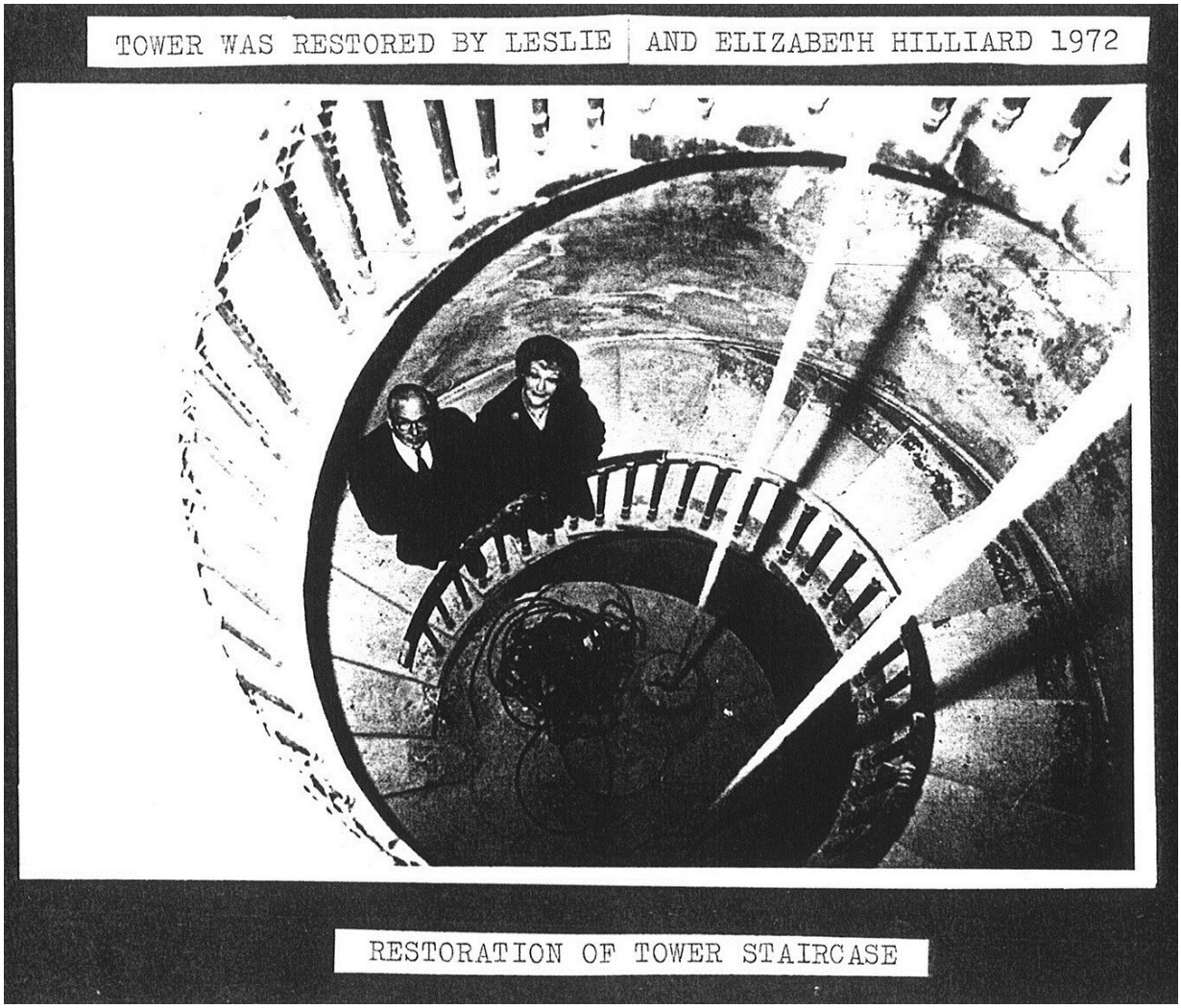


Figure 54: The Hilliards, who rescued the Tower in 1970 and transferred it by deed of gift to The Beckford Tower Trust in 1977.

Problems continued, however, especially the leaking of the Tower roof. By 1985 the lantern was again giving concern, and English Heritage became involved. From 1994-6, an increase of a quarter of an inch was recorded in the lean of lantern. Meanwhile, corrosion not just of original ironwork, but also of steel members inserted during the 1930s repairs, was causing problems. A programme of urgent repairs was proposed early in 1995 and an application made for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. A grant of £462,500 was offered if the Trust could find matching funds. A public appeal (which included the Beckford Masked Ball, held in Queen Square in September 1998) together with contributions from many charitable funds and support from the Bath Preservation Trust and the Beckford Tower Trust brought the total amount available for the project to some £650,000.

This fund-raising enabled a comprehensive programme of renovation to begin. Scaffolding was erected, and thorough structural and archaeological surveys were carried out (Figure 55). Serious design faults in the original construction of the Tower became apparent, such as water penetration through the lead covering on which the eight cast iron columns at the angles of the lantern rested. This had caused rot in the wooden support beams upon which the whole lantern structure rested. The tilt of the Tower had been merely stabilised, not eliminated, in the 1898/1901 repairs by Hayward and Wooster. To reinforce this work done some thirty years earlier and to eliminate decay which had occurred since in many of the structural members, in the 1930s Mowbray Green had introduced steelwork to replace the original timber beams off which the lantern structure had been raised. To lighten the load of the roof, he abolished the eight lengths of acroteria altogether, a lot of which had already become detached and fallen to the ground. There was no option but to dismantle the whole lantern structure, during which process it was discovered that the lantern's wooden framework had also been poorly constructed.

Figure 55: The Tower during the Beckford Tower Trust restoration, 1997-9.

Instead of being properly tenoned together, some of the members were joined with four to six inch spikes, and other were not even full lengths, but rather were of short lengths butt-joined together. The courageous decision was taken to rebuild the entire lantern frame, using original timbers wherever possible. With the tilt of the lantern at last corrected, the acroteria could also be reinstated in cast iron. It was during this process that traces of gold were found under layers of paint being removed from the cast iron roof sections and the cast iron columns. This confirmed contemporary reports that the entire lantern had been gilded and was the justification for a splendid restoration today using 23.5-carat English gold leaf, the purest available.

The interior decoration of the Belvidere was also meticulously recreated by the BTT, using Willes Maddox's contemporary illustrations and paint and plaster analysis. The Belvidere now appears much as it would have done in Beckford's day, complete with X-framed stools and worsted damask curtains. Landmark visitors have access to the Belvidere, with its stunning views of the surrounding countryside and the weather that sweeps across it.

On the first floor of the accommodation block, the Hilliards' partitions and staircase were removed and the Crimson Drawing Room reinstated as far as feasible as a museum room (see plans following), although the Sanctuary had to be sacrificed. The BTT also installed a new heating system, which represents an updated version of Beckford's own hot air system, by which heat is blown up the height of the Tower from the basement.

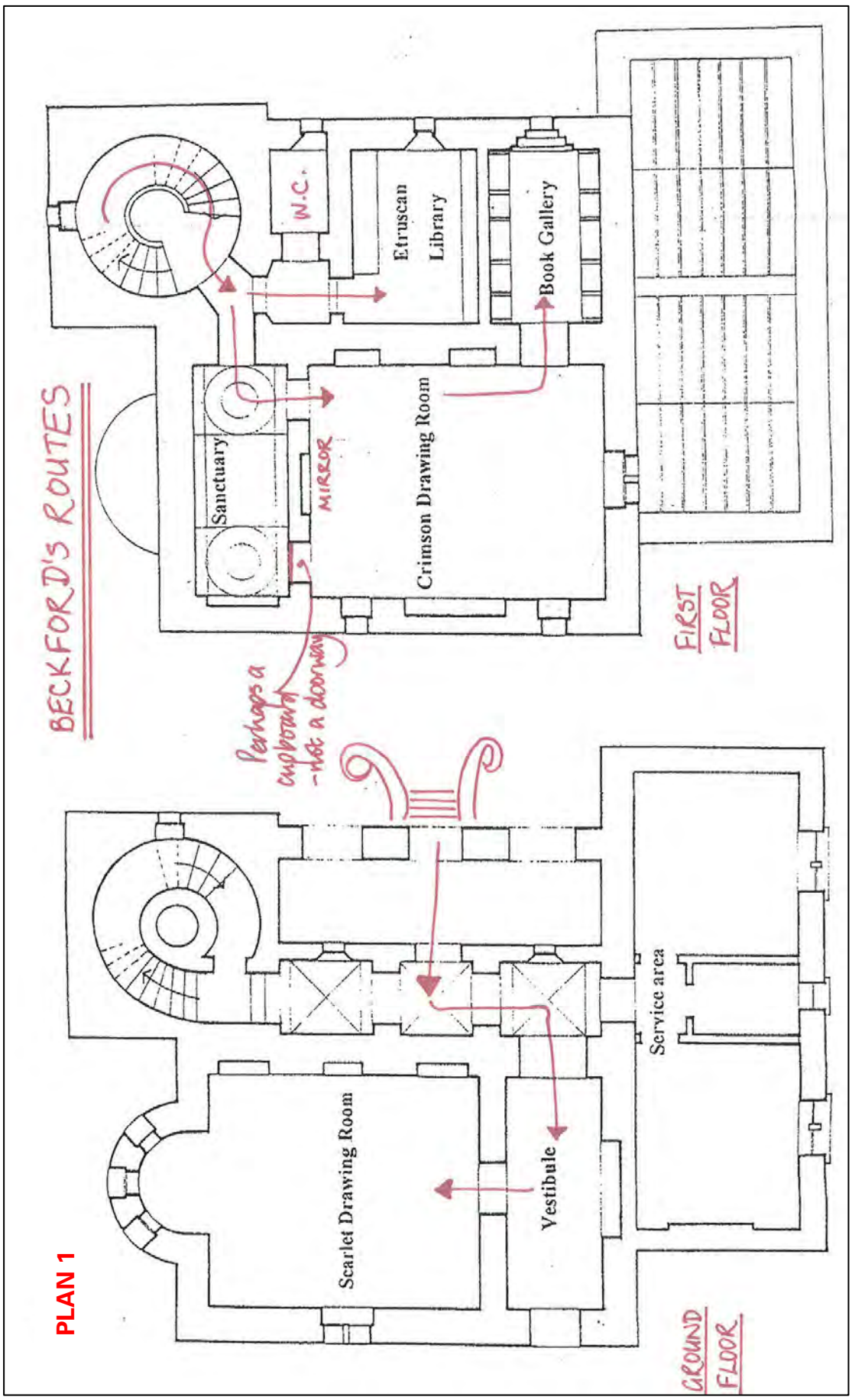
Meanwhile, the ground floor of the accommodation block was not faring so well, and the BTT had no funds available for it. In October 1998, Theo Williams approached the Landmark Trust.

John Schofield's Brief Summary Report, written for the Landmark Trust in December 1998, give an idea of its bleakness at this stage, but also of its potential:

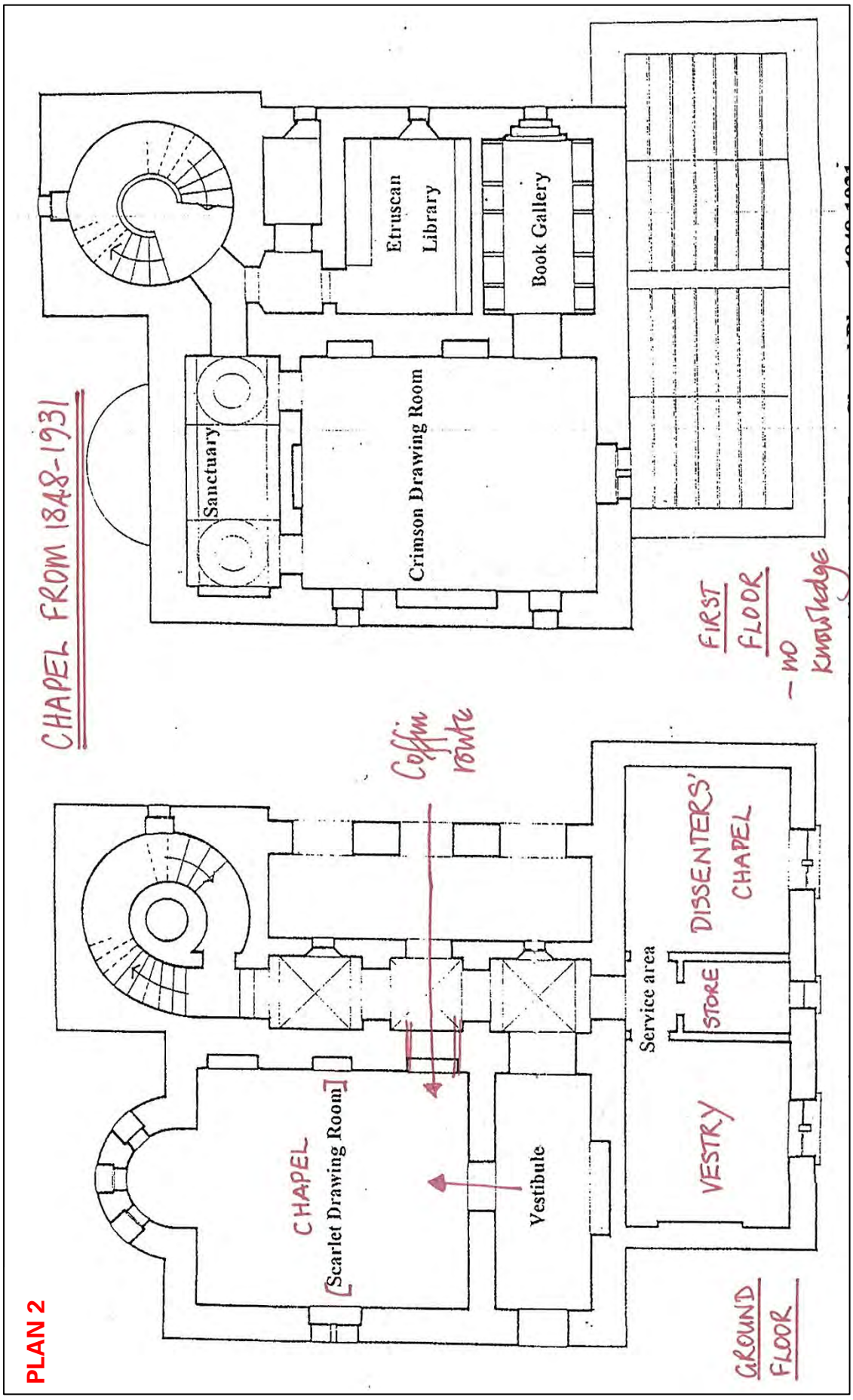
> 'When built, this was a very richly fitted-out and decorated building. Now, however, almost all the interiors have been stripped back to the shell, leaving a series of unconnected architectural volumes, many of which have, unfortunately, suffered rather unskilled division. Modern replastering has not helped it visually or physically. Having said that, the plan is strong, a logical response to Beckford's particular requirements. Something of the architectural sequence and distinctive character of these rooms survives to be detected. The most complete space is the long axis of the Entrance Vestibule from the foot of the Tower Stair to the Old Pump Room. It is an exciting and evocative interior and it gives a hint at what could be recovered elsewhere…
>
> 'It has to be said that the fire and the work of the 1930s and 1950s have had a pretty disastrous effect on one's enjoyment. Walking through these bare, ironed-out spaces, we asked ourselves what could be done to retrieve their architectural qualities and to re-kindle something of the mood they once engendered…
>
> 'With imagination and a good inclusive scheme, the basis is there for an evocative and beautiful change of mood.'

With faith in that vision, in 1999 the Landmark Trust took on a sixty-year lease of the ground floor, and a new phase in the Tower's existence began.

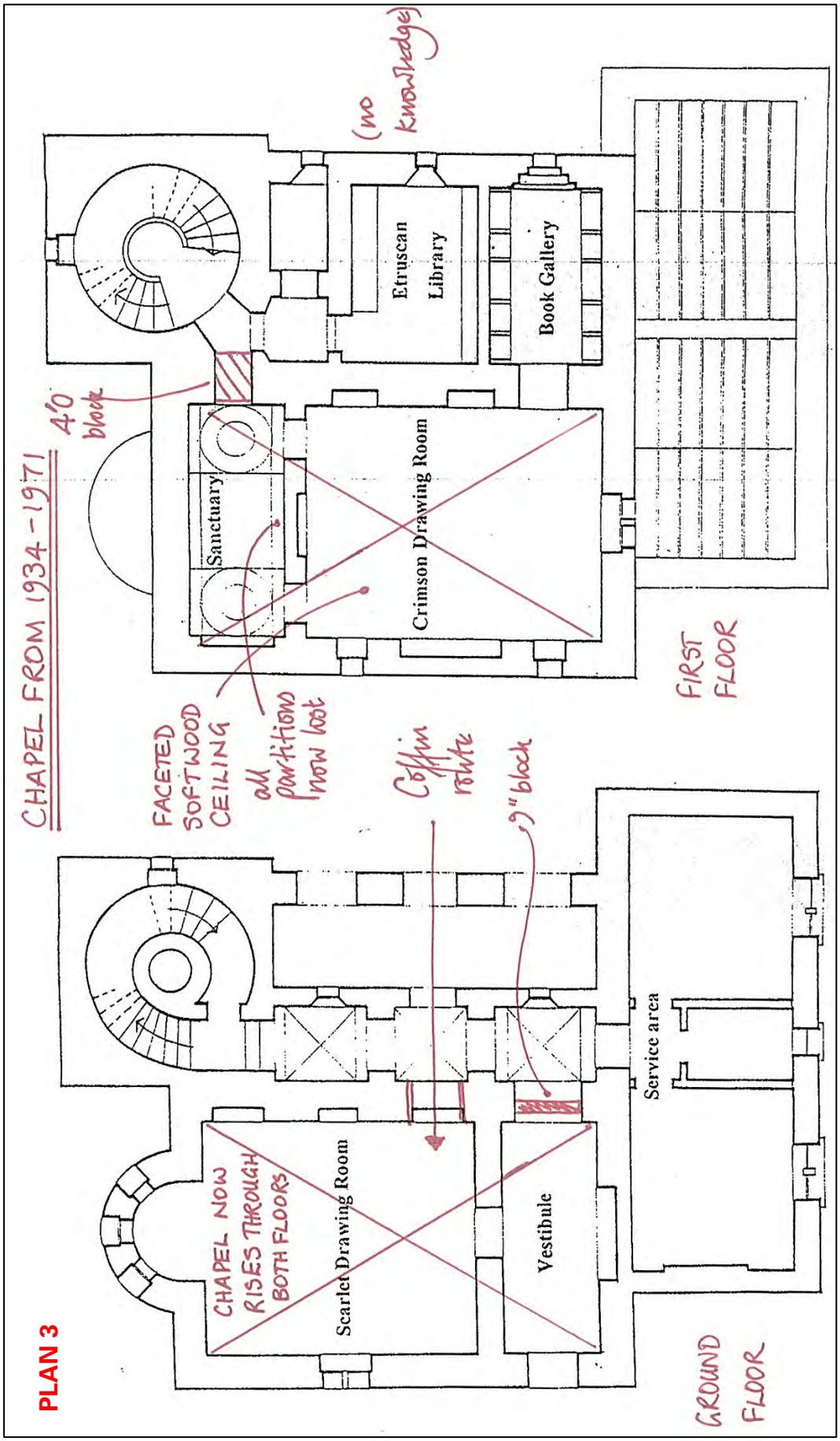
Tower floorplans



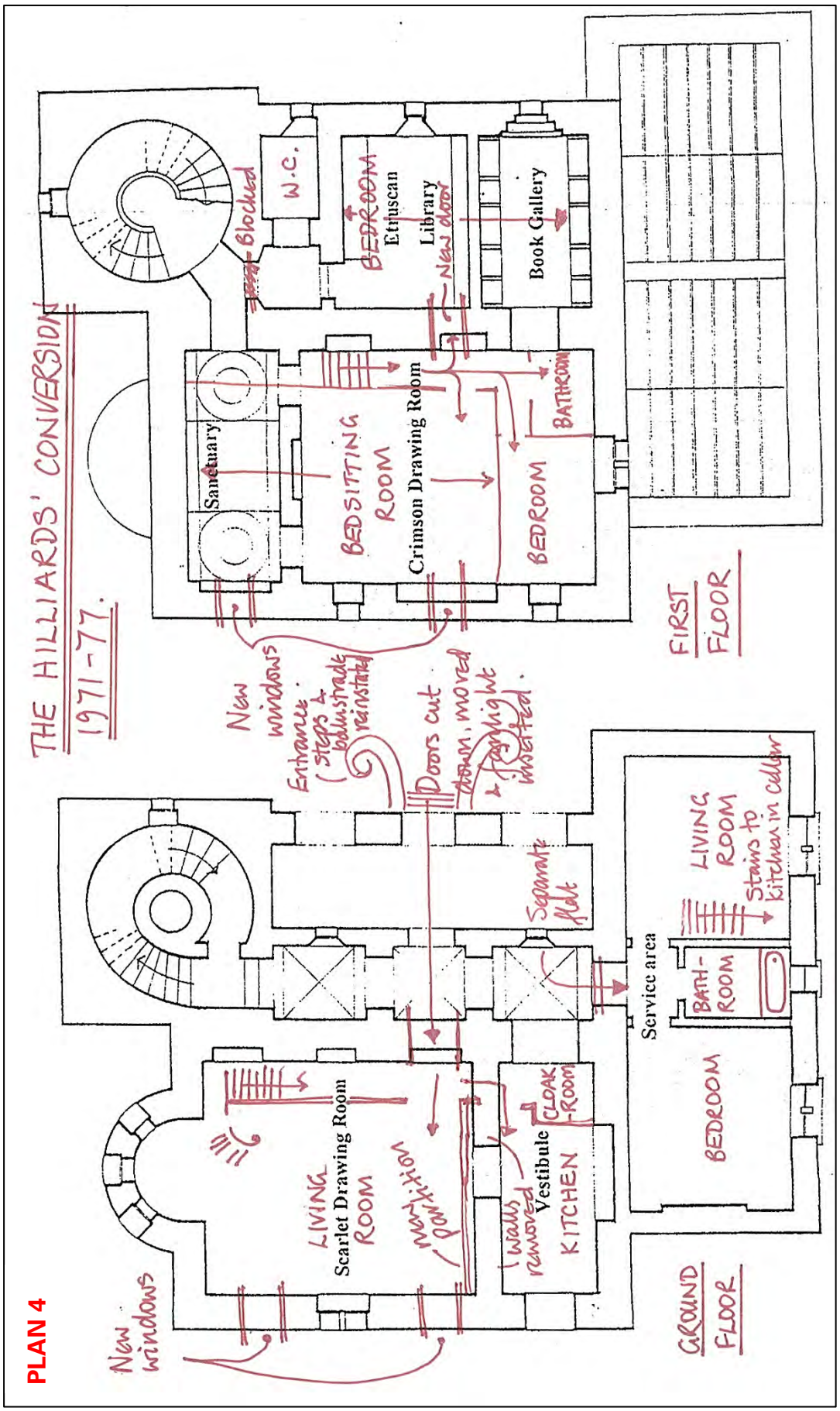
Plans of Beckford's Tower, from drawings of the Tower made by Goodridge in 1845: The Chapel Phase 1848-1931 (not to scale)



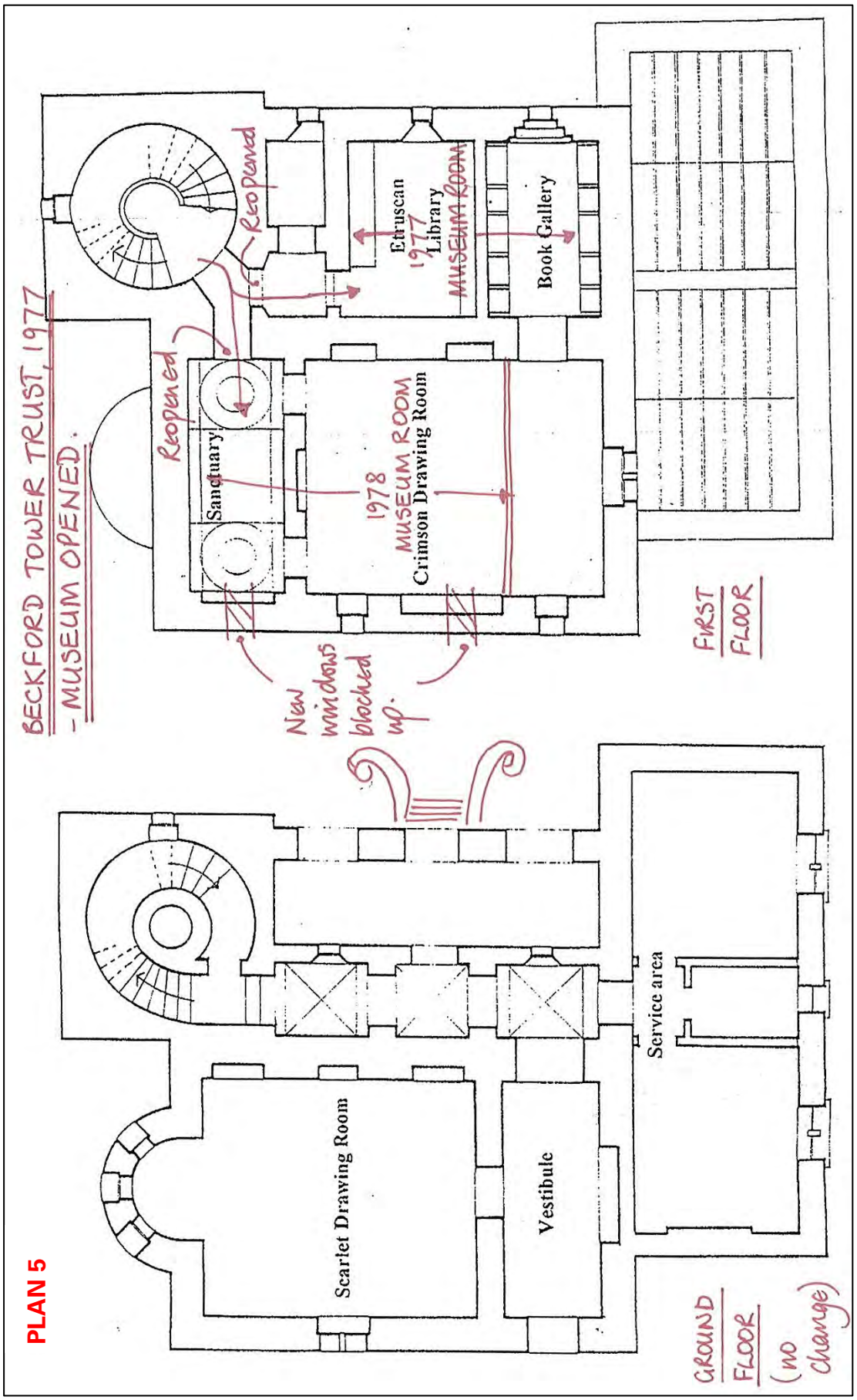
Plans of Beckford's Tower, from drawings of the Tower made by Goodridge in 1845: The Chapel Phase 1848-1931 (not to scale).



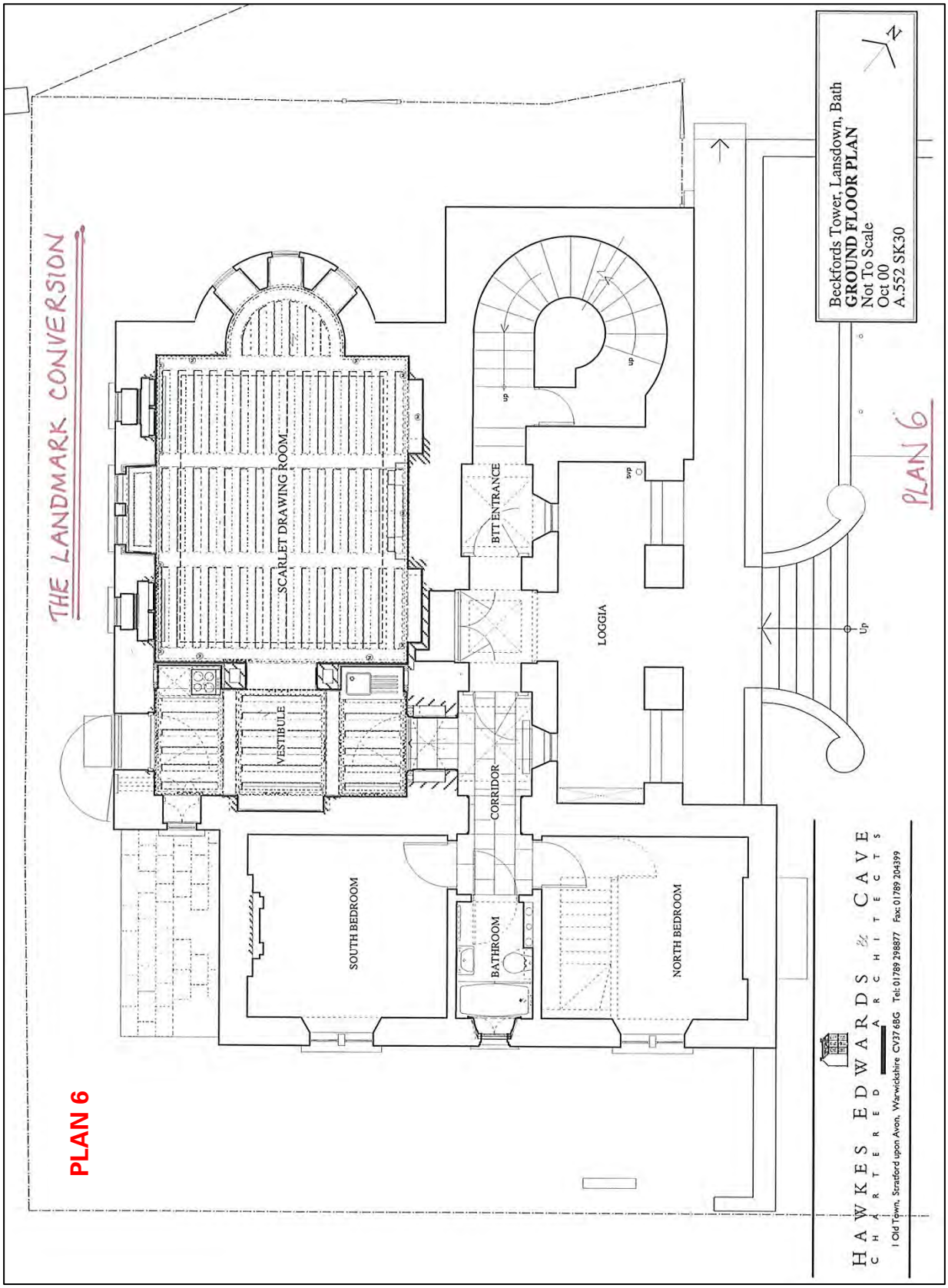
Plans of Beckford' s Tower, from drawings of the Tower made by Goodridge in 1845: The Chapel Phase 1934-1970 (not to scale).

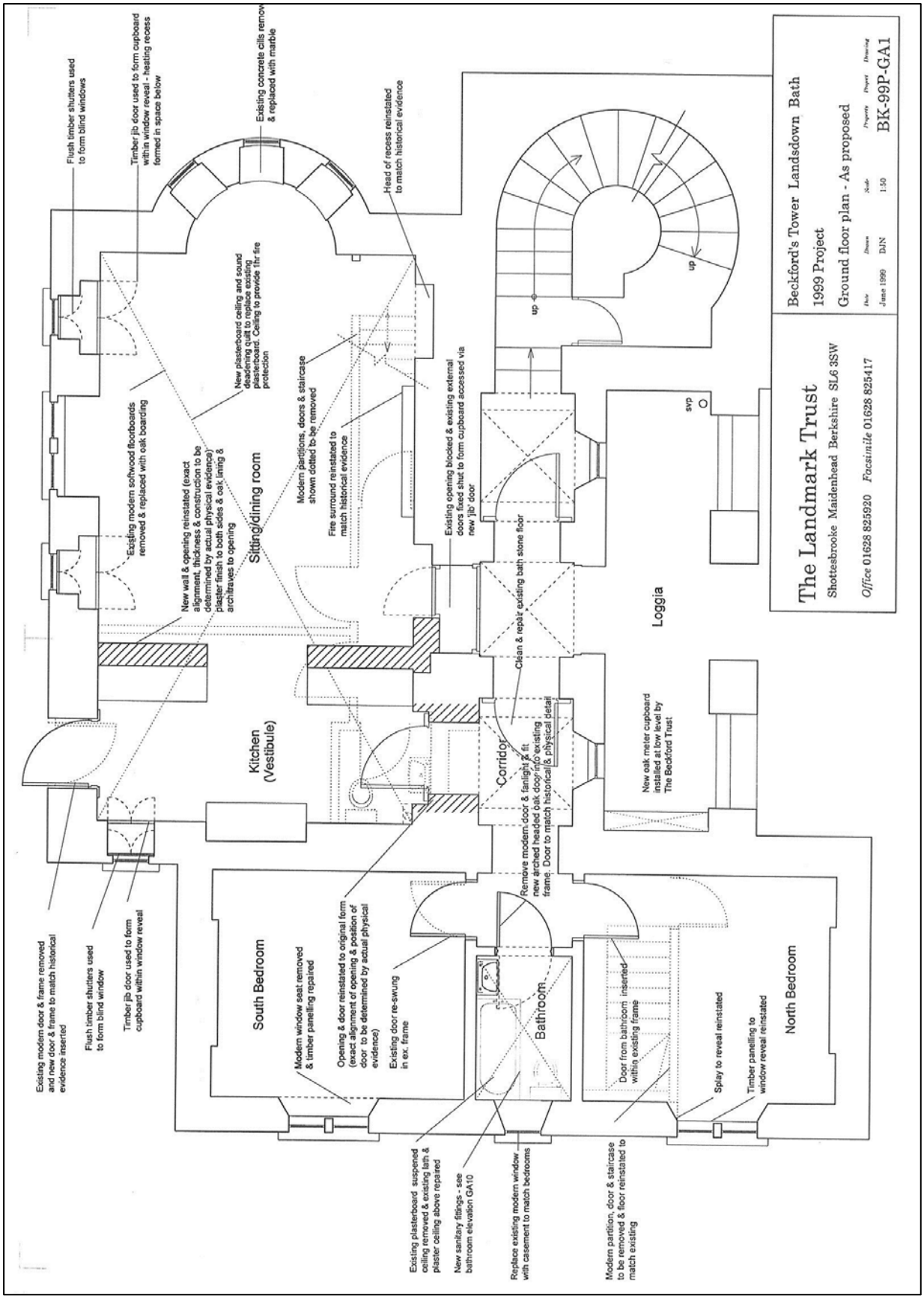


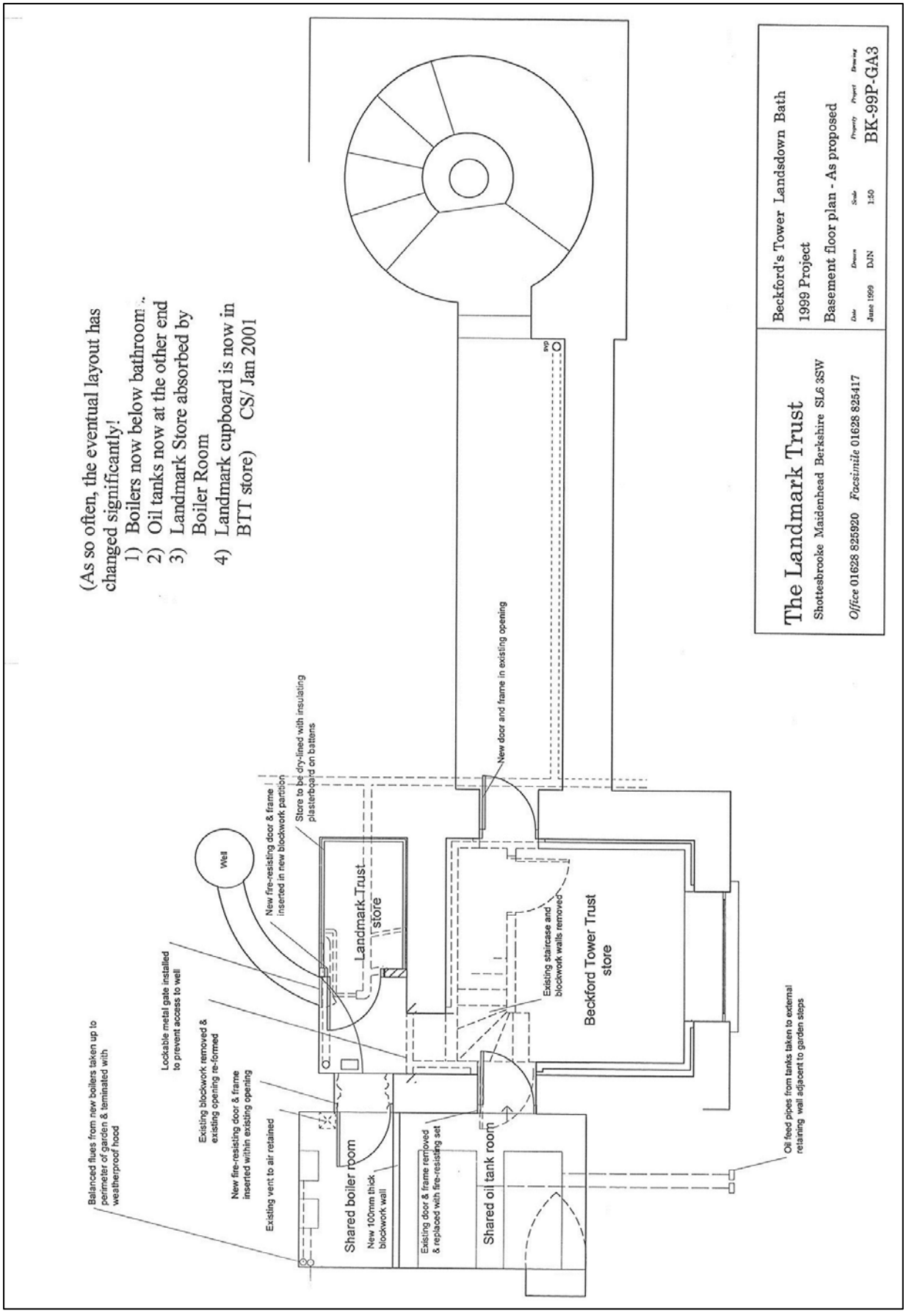
Plans of Beckford's Tower, from drawings of the Tower made by Goodridge in 1845: The Hilliards' Conversion 1972-1977 (not to scale).



Plans of Beckford' s Tower, from drawings of the Tower made by Goodridge in 1845: 1977 Beckford Tower Trust (not to scale).


THE LANDMARK CONVERSION
PLAN 6
Beckfords Tower, Lansdown, Bath
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
Not To Scale
Oct 00
A.552 SK30
SCARLET DRAWING ROOM
VESTIBULE
BTT ENTRANCE
LOGGIA
CORRIDOR
SOUTH BEDROOM
BATHROOM
NORTH BEDROOM
HAWKES EDWARDS & CAVE
CHARTERED ARCHITECTS
1 Old Town, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6BG Tel: 01789 298877 Fax: 01789 204399


Beckford's Tower Landsdown Bath
1999 Project
Ground floor plan - As proposed
BK-99P-GA1
The Landmark Trust
Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Office 01628 8259220 Facsimile 01628 825417
Sitting/dining room
Kitchen (Vestibule)
Corridor
Loggia
South Bedroom
Bathroom
North Bedroom
svp
up
Flush timber shutters used to form blind windows
Timber jib door used to form cupboard within window reveal - heating recess formed in space below
Existing concrete cills removed & replaced with marble
Head of recess reinstated to match historical evidence
New plasterboard ceiling and sound deadening quilt to replace existing plasterboard. Ceiling to provide 1hr fire protection
Existing modern softwood floorboards removed & replaced with oak boarding
New wall & opening reinstated (exact alignment, thickness & construction to be determined by actual physical evidence) plaster finish to both sides & oak lining & architraves to opening
Modern partitions, doors & staircase shown dotted to be removed
Fire surround reinstated to match historical evidence
Existing opening blocked & existing external doors fixed shut to form cupboard accessed via new 'jib' door
Clean & repair existing bath stone floor
New oak meter cupboard installed at low level by The Beckford Trust
Remove modern door & fanlight & fit new arched headed oak door into existing frame. Door to match historical & physical detail
Existing modern door & frame removed and new door & frame to match historical evidence inserted
Flush timber shutters used to form blind window
Timber jib door used to form cupboard within window reveal
Modern window seat removed & timber panelling repaired
Opening & door reinstated to original form (exact alignment of opening & position of door to be determined by actual physical evidence)
Existing door re-swung in ex. frame
Door from bathroom inserted within existing frame
Splay to reveal reinstated
Timber panelling to window reveal reinstated
Existing plasterboard suspended ceiling removed & existing lath & plaster ceiling above repaired
New sanitary fittings - see bathroom elevation GA10
Replace existing modern window with casement to match bedrooms
Modern partition, door & staircase to be removed & floor reinstated to match existing


(As so often, the eventual layout has changed significantly!
1) Boilers now below bathroom ..
2) Oil tanks now at the other end
3) Landmark Store absorbed by Boiler Room
4) Landmark cupboard is now in BTT store) CS/ Jan 2001
The Landmark Trust
Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417
Beckford's Tower Landsdown Bath
1999 Project
Basement floor plan - As proposed
Date June 1999 Drawn DJN Scale 1:50 Property Project BK-99P-GA3
Balanced flues from new boilers taken up to perimeter of garden & teminated with weatherproof hood
Lockable metal gate installed to prevent access to well
Existing blockwork removed & existing opening re-formed
New fire-resisting door & frame inserted within existing opening
Existing vent to air retained
Well
New fire-resisting door & frame inserted in new blockwork partition
Store to be dry-lined with insulating plasterboard on battens
Landmark Trust store
Shared boiler room
New 100mm thick blockwork wall
Existing door & frame removed & replaced with fire-resisting set
Shared oil tank room
New door and frame in existing opening
Existing staircase and blockwork walls removed
Beckford Tower Trust store
Oil feed pipes from tanks taken to external retaining wall adjacent to garden steps
RWP

Landmark's restoration of the accommodation block

Early discussions

The Landmark Trust was first approached about Beckford's Tower as long ago as 1965, when the Trust itself had only just been formed. At that stage, Landmark was unable to take the Tower on, and it eventually passed into residential use in the 1970s. The Beckford Tower Trust acquired the Tower in 1977 and in October 1998, Theo Williams, Secretary of the Beckford Tower Trust, again asked Landmark if they were interested in leasing the ground floor. This time the answer was 'yes' and the Tower was nominated as Landmark's Millennium project.

The initial philosophy behind the renovation of Landmark's area of the Tower was one of simple repairs and alterations to restore the historic architectural spaces, without going as far as a full restoration. We aimed to create a comfortable flat by recreating the space and proportions as in Beckford's time (though not to reinstate any decorative features) and to carry out only work that could be reversed in the future. Any refurbishment of the Corridor, Vestibule and Scarlet Drawing Room to recreate Beckford's interiors was to be left for future fundraising, since despite a very pleasing response to the Millennium Appeal, the proceeds would cover no more than basic renovation.

However, we soon realised that this level of refurbishment simply would not do justice to the Tower. At this stage, a very generous legacy was made to the Landmark Trust by Mrs Gladys Theodorson, part of which the Trust was able to make available for the interiors. The decision was then taken that the 'chapel interior' (Corridor, Vestibule and Scarlet Drawing Room) should not be merely made comfortably habitable, but should after all present a recognisably 'Beckfordian' interior. The main sources for such treatment came from colour lithographs by Willes Maddox, done shortly before Beckford's death in 1844 (see earlier illustrations) and his watercolour of the Scarlet Drawing Room.

Goodridge's drawings, surviving plans and visitors' descriptions were also consulted. This bold decision set the whole project on a different footing and started us down a different route. Interestingly, in carrying through the decision to make the finishes as true as possible to the original scheme, the design team found that decorative detail often carried structural implications as well. For example, arch-headed recesses had to be reinstated to a lintel arrangement. Fortunately we had the chapel conversion drawings to refer to. The Tower's initial conception had clearly been a holistic one, closely integrating its interiors with its architectural structure.

During all these initial discussions, the Landmark Trust team benefited from the knowledge and advice of several people who were to remain key throughout the project, notably Theo Williams (Beckford Tower Trust and Landmark Trust trustee), Jesca Verdon-Smith (Beckford Tower Trust) and Will Hawkes (architect). An invaluable resource was also provided by comprehensive historical and archaeological reports written by Pat Hughes and Jerry Sampson respectively. These were commissioned by the BTT, and have provided considerable input for this Album. Since then, more valuable research has been done by Dr Amy Frost, curator of the Tower and its museum since 2008.

EXTERIOR

The Landmark Trust arrived after the repair of the outside of the Tower, undertaken by the Beckford Tower Trust, was largely complete. As well as general restoration of the fabric, they had replaced the acroteria and regilded it and the lantern.

The cemetery, declared redundant in 1970, had become overgrown. Clearing and cataloguing was paid for by private donations and funds from the BTT and Bath & North East Somerset Council. The BTT replanted species that would have been known to Beckford. New cemetery railings were erected against the public roadway in May 2000 to replace the original Coalbrook Dale castings removed during the 1939-45 War.

The front doors are largely original, although in Beckford's day they were on the outer face of the building. Putting them back was considered but rejected, as this would have made separate access to the building by both Landmark guests and Museum visitors awkward. They had been retained as being important to the late chapel phase after 1931, when they opened directly into the drawing room. Since this doorway was not there in Beckford's day, we blocked it up and used the depth of the wall to create an internal store cupboard. The appearance of full-height doors has been restored by replacing the arched head, which was cut down in the 1930s to insert a glass fanlight.

INTERIOR

At the outset, Landmark was confronted by a 1970s conversion of the earlier funerary chapel, which had been increased to two-storey height after a serious fire in 1931. The 1970s conversion had altered the interior spaces of both floors still further and removed any last remnants of Beckford's finishes not lost in the fire. The single-floor annexe had been converted into a flat (corresponding roughly to the bedroom and bathroom areas, with a kitchen in the basement below the North Bedroom accessed by a staircase, which we removed). The Hilliards had made the chapel area, including the former Vestibule area, and the Crimson and Scarlet Drawing Rooms into a two storey maisonette known as Beckford House, linked by a staircase inserted between the two drawing rooms in the north west corner. The rooms and lobbies had been crudely divided by lightweight internal partitions. We stripped out these partitions and staircases with most of their associated mechanical and electrical services and were then free to reinstate as much of Beckford's original floor plan as was feasible.

Scarlet Drawing Room

We are still unsure about a lot of the detail of construction in this room. The size and position of the alcoves was identified within the 1930's plaster, although their original heights are more problematic as later alterations had removed most of the evidence. The room was then re-proportioned by removing the semi-circular arch heads to the recesses on either side of the fireplace and squaring them off as originally built. Windows on the south side dating from the chapel conversion have been blocked internally, to return the original symmetry of the arch-headed windows and relate them to the treatment of the vestibule.

Putting up the wall hangings in the Scarlet Drawing Room.

A plain plaster-board ceiling had been inherited from the 1972 reconstruction of the first floor by the Hilliards, leaving our drawing room drab and ill-proportioned. Theo Williams especially championed the reinstatement of some form of coffered ceiling; a *trompe l'oeil* effect was considered, but a theatrically inspired, coffered effect in softwood was found to be hardly more expensive.

Unfortunately, the ceiling height could not go back at its original height, as the inserted floor for the refurbishment of the first floor by the BTT has deeper floor joists than the Goodridge originals. The difference in height explains why the window arch heads have been slightly cut into where they meet the ceiling. The inserted staircase between the ground and first floors was removed, insulation inserted and a simple plaster-board ceiling inserted for fire protection. John Mann (the consulting engineer used by both the BTT and Landmark) donated some designs for structural strengthening to ensure that loadings from the Museum plus a possibly deconstructed coffered ceiling were not excessive.

Will Hawkes worked on the re-establishment of the rest of the joinery, the window panelling, skirtings and fireplace. This was not straightforward, since the lithographs do not provide sufficient detail for accurate reproduction and the room's proportions have subtly changed. Much of the joinery is necessarily inoperative, but we are pleased with the end results which are convincing, as far as we can tell.

The overall impression of luxury in the Scarlet Drawing Room has been further enhanced by the use of colour in the wall hangings. They have been carefully researched; they are in fact not moreen as originally, but rather a cotton moiré with a watermarked sheen that imitates moreen. The fabric and braid were specially woven and dyed by Context Weavers of Helmshore, to a width of 32 inches rather than today's more usual 54 inches. They were hung by Beldecor Designs.

The softwood floor is probably not at its original level, in being slightly higher than the entrance lobby. A specially commissioned carpet made by Ulster Carpet Mills imitates Beckford's original.

At present, the 1930s steel casement windows have been kept, since they are close in appearance to the plate glass originals. In time, it is hoped to return to plate glass. The Tower Trust's 2024 works have reinstated cast iron grilles on the exterior, using as reference a single surviving original example in the corridor, although finding that each window was a different size made this not entirely straightforward. A reference in a Beckford letter revealed that only the roundels were gilded rather than the entire grille.

The fireplace was always a sham, probably holding a hot air grate fed from the Tower furnace immediately beneath. With new heating to keep the building warm, a summer-board was felt to be the best solution, especially as one is shown by Willes Maddox, and radiators were installed.

The partition between the Scarlet Drawing Room and the Vestibule was slightly problematic. Although it stands on the foundations of the old wall, there is still uncertainty about its exact relationship to the Vestibule external door. Recessing the units into this partition wall preserved precious space in the kitchen. The archway to the vestibule represents the architect's best estimate of size and detailing; the lithograph shows the central doorway, but the detail is difficult to interpret.

Vestibule/Kitchen

As originally, the Vestibule (now the kitchen) once more runs across the full width of the Scarlet Drawing Room and connects into the Corridor through a re-opened semi-headed door-opening. This doorway had been blocked in 1931 when the original chapel was enlarged by pulling down a partition to merge the Vestibule and Scarlet Drawing Room. The doors are massive and architecturally significant, and John Brown, one of Landmark's in-house joiners, was asked to construct them. The external door is made of oak, the internal ones of Douglas Fir. What is now the bathroom door is thought to be the only whole original door. Using it as an example, close attention was paid to the construction of the new doors, double-siding and lapping the timber to build up the massive thickness while also guarding against shrinkage. Some fine pieces of traditional joinery are the result.

The ceiling was again 'coffered'. The pilasters, which look as if they support the ceiling entablature, are in fact intricately tied up with the geometry of the ceiling timbers, mirror recess and doorway into the Scarlet Drawing Room - another example of the comprehensive nature of the original conception of the building. Wall hangings are clearly inappropriate for a kitchen, so matching paint has been used instead. The dado panelling in the Vestibule has had to allow for the requirements of a modern kitchen. While the new kitchen units are inevitably a modern introduction, on the opposite side the marbleised console table with its arcaded mirror is a slightly modified reproduction of Beckford's original, made by Mark Smitten to designs by Landamrk furnishing manager John Evetts. The original stands today in a house in the Circus in Bath.

The kitchen before work started…

…and nearing completion.

The console in the kitchen awaiting its marbleisation.

As in the Scarlet Drawing Room, a window inserted in 1972 to light the Beckford House kitchen and sited on the right-hand side of the console to the left of has been blocked internally and turned into a storage cupboard. This leaves the room rather dark except for light that enters from the doors, not untypical for a Victorian vestibule, especially one full of treasures.

The Corridor

The arch-vaulted entrance lobby was least damaged by the 1931 fire and the finishes are believed to be largely as in Beckford's day. The lobby window is one of the few that remain in its original state of plate glass with a cast iron grille, and there are even traces of some gold leaf still left on the inner face. The bedroom end has been altered to install later bedroom doors, as was the external entrance door.

The floor we inherited was laid to concrete and perhaps at a slightly different level from the original. Blankney limestone slabs from Lincolnshire have been laid over, being similar in appearance to Bath stone and also reliable at the necessary thickness.

North & South Bedrooms

The bedrooms' similarities permit them to be considered together. Different plaster finishes revealed during renovation indicated that they had been extensively modified over the years, so the existing plaster was simply made good. Examination of the window architraves reveals the different plaster thickness in both rooms, which complicated the window joinery. A modern staircase leading down into the former kitchen below was removed.

Although there is a chimneystack above, the fireplaces and flues were found to be blocked (it is not clear whether this was their original state), but a fireplace hearth was discovered beneath the mastic floor covering in the south bedroom.

View along the corridor to the foot of the Tower steps.

It was decided that the south bedroom would benefit aesthetically from a fireplace, so a fireplace in need of a future was reduced in size and carefully reassembled. It is contemporary with the Tower and the mouldings are fully in keeping with Beckford's style.

The sash windows are interesting in that the sashes rise into a slot in the external stone walls, as did the original windows in the Belvidere. Much of the original oak joinery survives, although most of the panelling beneath is lost. This was re-made in a simple style which follows the shutter boxes and architraves. A single original shutter with its catch survives.

We inherited the skirtings, and have repaired and extended them. The cornices are a new introduction to give a feeling of grandeur to the rooms, although their subsidiary nature is emphasised by the wall colour. The doors and architraves are a later change and have been left, although they do not sit entirely comfortably with the heavy scale of Beckford's corridor archways and doors.

Bathroom

This is believed to have been the well pump house, and we have deliberately kept it as a lower grade room with unplastered window reveals and simple mouldings and finishes. The need for boilers to serve the building was a problem and we eventually installed them in the cellar below the bathroom, which meant taking the flues through the bathroom in a casing. As in the kitchen, careful thought was necessary for the arrangement of the fittings.

The doorway provided more clues than anywhere for a Beckford door lining, with clear indications of hinge and lock mortises and some early graining and varnishing. Door handle heights throughout have been matched to this door. The sash window is new, to match those in the bedrooms, and replaces a very crude earlier frame.

The bathroom in the early stages of renovation.

Heating

There was an urgent need for heating in the Tower itself – by March 2000 the oil-painted surfaces were growing mould. The cost of installing gas to the site was prohibitive and so an oil-fired system was chosen jointly by Landmark and the BTT. The Landmark heating system is fired by boilers in the basement, to a relatively straightforward copper pipe system leading to the cast iron radiators. (The Tower itself is heated by a large fan that shoots hot air up the Tower).

Much has changed in the last twenty years, and the Tower Trust's 2024 works saw the installation of Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) heating and photo voltaic panels, hidden behind the parapet of the accommodation block.

This was one of the Landmark Trust's more flamboyant projects, its boldness entirely appropriate to mark the turn of the new millennium and to help rescue a highly significant and imposing building.

Addendum

Theo Williams, Surveyor with Bare Leaning & Bare of Bath and then Trustee of both the Beckford Tower Trust and the Landmark Trust, on the Acroteria:

'You mention that there was only a single length left – there was only a single leaf left, found somewhere in the undergrowth when not known and taken into the museum's collection.

'From this single leaf – an angle leaf – the remainder of the design was drawn up to replace what was taken down in 1931 by Mowbray Green. I suspect that by then quite a bit of the ironwork had dropped off through rusting fixings.

'Of course after we had battled through the redesign of the 8No. lengths, looking at Jon Millington's pictures to decide on how many leaves per length, after the job had been done, we discovered a Mowbray Green sketch detailing what he had found in 1931 still in situ along one of the eaves – we both agreed but it would have saved time if we had had the sketch.

'Hey Ho!'

2023-4 works to the Tower by the Bath Preservation Trust

While not strictly part of the Landmark story, the capital works undertaken by the Bath Preservation Trust (who absorbed the Beckford Tower Trust in the intervening years) were a major intervention in the Tower's life. The Tower had continued to suffer water ingress even after the 2000 campaign and had deteriorated so much that it was briefly on the Buildings at Risk Register. Two panels in the lantern had rotted quite away. It is a reminder of the ongoing maintenance burden for any historic building, and in this challenging structure and site, required a significant injection of cash to correct. This was chiefly enabled by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Landmark accommodation was unchanged by these works, other than the addition of the window grilles.

The Tower was once again entirely scaffolded (the Landmark had to close for the duration). General stone repairs and repointing were carried out, and this time, the water ingress was traced definitively (it is to be hoped!) to the columns of the lantern. There were some adjustments in materials: fibreglass seamless gutters were adopted instead of lead ones (a plastic paint applied in 2003 to seal the joints had only worked for about eight years) and accoya timber was used, as a sustainable hardwood. The 2000 gold leaf had all gone from the Tower panels and so only the columns and acroteria were redone in gold leaf, measures having to be taken to prevent it blowing away in the wind. The rest is gold paint. The Tower is once more floodlit at night but now with LED lights.

The Grotto was partially unblocked during works, a new lower entrance to the grounds was created plus an accessible toilet block and Beckford's paddocks re-acquired. There is now access to the Vault below the Tower and the museum interpretation has been freshened throughout, after a series of workshops consulting the community and affected groups. The Trust is to be congratulated on a triumphant restoration, ensuring the survival of the tower for many years to come.