

Oddities, Obituaries and Obsessions: Early Nineteenth-Century Scandal and Social History Glimpsed through William Beckford's Newspaper Cuttings

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In January 1833 a person known as Eliza Edwards died of a lung infection at the age of twenty-four. ‘Miss Edwards’, who sometimes used the professional name Lavinia, had appeared on the stage since the age of 14. She excelled in tragic roles, mainly in Tewkesbury, Norwich and other provincial theatres. During the past few years she had been supported by different gentleman. Her most recent protector was Tom Grimstead, of a noted family in Leatherhead, who paid her rent on Linden Cottage, Clarence Gardens, Regent’s Park. But at the time of her death, she had fallen on hard times, and had sold her piano, her jewels, her stage dresses, and even her walking-dress. At her death, letters from various gentlemen were found among her few possessions, most of them making arrangements for meetings in Jermyn Street or at the corner of Conduit Street, or a few hours’ visit at her apartment.

As no friends or relations came forward to claim Eliza Edwards’ body, it was sent to Guy’s Hospital for dissection. There it was discovered to be the body of a perfect man.¹ In other words, ‘Miss Edwards’, with his beautiful long hair in ringlets and pierced ears, was a female impersonator and male

¹ *The Times*, 24 Jan. 1833, Bodleian MS Beckford c.63, fol. 4.

prostitute. At the subsequent inquest, which was so packed out with medical students that beadles had difficulty keeping order, two men confirmed that they had known Mister Edwards in Dublin many years ago, where he was an actor, and alternately passed for a man or a woman. The jury in their findings ‘felt compelled to express their horror at the unnatural propensities the deceased had indecently indulged in, and strongly recommended to the proper authorities that some means may be adopted in the disposal of the body as will mark the ignominy of the crime’.²

Why am I retailing this sensational story to the International William Beckford Society, whose members are more accustomed to hearing about fine art and beautiful landscapes? It’s because, among William Beckford’s abundant collection of *objets d’art* and finely bound books, there was also a collection of scrapbooks and newspaper cuttings. These included no fewer than five reports on the Eliza Edwards inquest, which Beckford clipped from *The Times*, the *Morning Chronicle*, *The Age* and the *Literary and Dramatic Register*.³ Clearly Beckford was interested in this kind of case. The fact that he collected such cuttings shows that he would have entirely disagreed with the editorial that appeared in *The Age* which asserted that such reports should be suppressed, lest they ‘spread pollution into quarters which otherwise would have remained happily ignorant that human nature is debased by the existence of any thing of the kind’.⁴

Beckford’s collection of newspaper cuttings partly reflects his collecting mania in general. Many hundreds of these cuttings cover exactly the topics that we would expect him to be interested in: there are large numbers of cuttings about the social activities of men of rank and fortune, and their

² *Morning Chronicle*, 25 Jan. 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fol. 6.

³ MS Beckford c.63, fols 4–8.

⁴ *The Age*, 27 Jan. 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fol. 8.

obituaries; about foreign travel, and politics in France and Spain and Portugal, though very little about British politics. There are many descriptions of architecture and especially interior decoration; and notices about the sales of remarkable collections of books or art. For example, he clipped out more than 60 reports about the Strawberry Hill Sale in 1842,⁵ and there are also cuttings about the sale of Fonthill Abbey.⁶ But there are also scores of less predictable cuttings, dealing with a much less public side of human nature, the side that was generally excoriated by newspaper editors, but which illuminate Beckford's personality no less than they illuminate the social history of the early nineteenth century. It is this area that I will focus on tonight, though I also want to give you a sense of the range of Beckford's cuttings and how he went about assembling them and making use of them.

The Beckford Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, contain nearly 3,500 newspaper cuttings, mostly dated 1790 through 1844, plus a small stack of complete newspapers which Beckford hadn't yet gotten round to clipping reports from before his death. There are very few cuttings from before 1807, which is when Beckford moved into the not-yet-finished Fonthill Abbey. There are a generous number of cuttings from the 1810s and 1820s, and then an explosion of several hundred cuttings dated 1839 to 1844. The cuttings are collected together in wrappers which Beckford made for himself, usually by taking a sheet of paper the size of a legal pad, then folding it twice vertically and three times horizontally. On the outside of each wrapper he listed the contents, citing the newspaper and date, and sometimes made his own remarks on the report.

⁵ MS Beckford c.81, fols 22–61, 83–123; one wrapper containing cuttings about the sale, fol. 102, has a drawing by Beckford of a Gothic hanging lantern.

⁶ MS Beckford c.82 *passim*.

Sometimes the wrapper has a general label within a drawn cartouche. Some of the cuttings have a black line alongside a paragraph, or a black X at the top corner. This is how Beckford, while reading a newspaper, marked articles to be clipped out later.⁷ Some of the cuttings seem to have been organised before being put into scrapbooks. Many cuttings remained in their wrappers, but I think Beckford constantly shuffled and reshuffled them. Even in March 1844, less than a month before his death at the age of 83, he was still labelling the contents of these packets in the shaky hand of an old man. It is clear that clipping articles from newspapers was a very active pastime for Beckford. Beckford spent much of his life in England as a social outcast, very rarely entertaining others. I have the impression that he had a lot of spare time on his hands, which he spent cutting up newspapers as well as making notes on what he read.

The cuttings in the Bodleian are now pasted into archive-quality acid-free albums, one cutting per page, so the resulting 24 boxes of albums don't give a true picture of Beckford's own scrapbooks. They are arranged in the order in which they were presented to the Bodleian, but have clearly undergone rearrangement at the hands of Boyd Alexander, who had been granted custody of them throughout the 1950s, while he wrote several books about Beckford. Some of the cuttings were later found in Boyd Alexander's own papers, which he had forgotten to put back into the Hamilton papers. Many of the cuttings bear marks of adhesive, which shows they had been pasted into scrapbooks.

Unfortunately only one scrapbook survives intact and still contains the cuttings pasted into it by Beckford himself. This is at the Beinecke Rare Books collection at Yale

⁷ For example, there is a full page from *The Times* for 21 Aug. 1840, with a big black X marking an article on the 'Sale of the Furniture of Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte', MS Beckford c.79, fol. 7.

University. I haven't seen this myself, but Sidney Blackmore has kindly given me his notes listing the news items it contains, from which I've reconstructed many of the news reports by consulting the British Library collection of newspapers at Colindale and even the Digital Times Online. This scrapbook was acquired at the Hamilton Palace sale of 1883; it bears the bookplate of the Earl of Roseberry, who collected Beckfordiana. It isn't altogether clear that the binding is Beckford's. The great virtue of this scrapbook is that it demonstrates that when Beckford pasted his cuttings onto sheets, he arranged them into thematic categories, like a modern scrapbook.

The cuttings in the Beinecke scrapbook are arranged into five major thematic groups: first, fêtes and celebrations, about twelve items at the beginning of the scrapbook; then funerals, about six items; then Law Reports, about sixteen items, the largest group by far; then architecture and interior decoration, about eight items; then a miscellany of eight or twelve cuttings about jokes and hoaxes; and finally, on the last pages of the scrapbook, another six to ten cuttings about masquerades and celebrations.

To give you a broader idea of these five groups, the first few pages, for example, contain cuttings about royal celebrations: a Royal Fête at Windsor in 1805, the Prince of Wales's birthday celebrations at Brighton in 1810, the Duke of Clarence's birthday in 1806, the Prince Regent's Fête at Charlton House in April 1810, the King of France's visit to Blenheim in 1811, and a description of the marriage of Buonaparte in 1810. These cuttings range in date from 1805 through 1811. This suggests to me that Beckford probably arranged his cuttings in a kind of filing system until he had assembled enough to put together as a group into a scrapbook. In this particular scrapbook a large majority of the cuttings are dated 1810–1811, with a smaller group dated 1805–1806, and a

much smaller group dated 1812–1815 all pasted into the final few pages. I would guess that this scrapbook was first put together in 1811, then added to during 1812–1815.

A typical example of the ‘festivities’ group, is a report on Abraham Goldsmid’s fête for the Prince of Wales at his newly-erected Grecian villa at Morden in August 1806. Dinner was served to some fifty people, while eminent singers enlivened the courses with their music. Then the company retired to the lawn for an illumination of the pheasant-houses, while on the river floated ‘an illuminated gondola, surmounted with the Prince of Wales’s feathers’.⁸ This was followed by a short performance in the Concert Room and then a supper for 200 guests from the neighbourhood gentry. Many toasts were drunk to the benevolent Mr Goldsmid, ‘for he had done the State some service’, presumably while dealing in the money market during the Napoleonic war. (Goldsmid would be forced into bankruptcy by problems with a government loan in 1810 and he killed himself, but Beckford doesn’t seem to have collected a cutting about that later event.)

There are many similar cuttings in the Bodleian: for example, a Juvenile Ball at St James’s Palace in 1829;⁹ a Grand Entertainment by Earl Fitzwilliam at Wentworth House in 1832;¹⁰ the famous Eglinton Tournament in 1839;¹¹ and Queen Victoria’s December 1843 visit to Chatsworth and Belvoir Castle, which Beckford described on the wrapper as ‘a lively & faithful description of the scene’.¹² Beckford collected at least a dozen reports about the visit to London in 1843 of the Duc de Bordeaux, a controversial advocate of the divine right of kings;

⁸ The Beckford 409 cutting is dated 23 Aug. 1806, but I am summarising the report in *The Times*, 25 Aug. 1806.

⁹ MS Beckford c.78, fol. 40.

¹⁰ MS Beckford c.78, fols 61–62.

¹¹ MS Beckford c.72, fols 22–24, 31–33, 37–37.

¹² MS Beckford c.65, fol. 50; also fol. 43, in which Beckford remarked on the ‘astounding magnificence of the illuminations’ at Chatsworth.

on the wrapper containing several such cuttings, Beckford wrote ‘More grand company flocking round the Duke of Bordeaux’.¹³

A sad reflection that comes to mind when noticing Beckford’s cuttings about birthday dinners and grand entertainments, is that Beckford, in the normal course of events, would have been a welcome guest at many of these occasions. But due to the rejection of his application for a peerage and due to his general ostracism from society, I don’t believe that Beckford ever attended any such fêtes, at least in England, and the only grand entertainment he gave at Fonthill Abbey – which was ideally made for grand entertainments – was that for Lord Nelson and Emma Hamilton at Christmas 1800. One wonders if there was a mixture of resentment and envy in Beckford’s mind as he cut these notices from the newspapers.

The festivities group is immediately followed by a group of cuttings on funerals – one suspects that Beckford consciously intended this as an affecting contrast, reflecting his fairly sardonic view of life. These include the funerals of the Queen of France, the Countess de Lisle and Princess Amelia, all in November 1810, the funeral of the Duke of Albuquerque in 1811, and the death and funeral of Lord Nelson in 1805.

The Bodleian collection also contains many obituaries, including cuttings about the funeral of the Earl of Egremont at Petworth in 1833;¹⁴ several reports of Lord Byron’s obsequies in 1830;¹⁵ and more than twenty cuttings occasioned by the death of Napoleon in 1820.¹⁶

¹³ MS Beckford c.65, fol. 27; see also fols. 28–29; c.65, fols 31–32; c. 78, fol. 36 ff.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fol. 20.

¹⁵ MS Beckford c.66, fols 123 ff.

¹⁶ MS Beckford c.80, fols 1–21.

Then, in the intact scrapbook, comes a large grouping of about sixteen Law Reports. This begins with a cutting about an extraordinary blackmail case in 1805, the King vs. Passingham and Edwards.¹⁷ Lt. Col. Robert Passingham had seduced the wife of George Townsend Forester. Passingham then conspired with John Edwards and a boy named Collyer, to charge Forester with ‘unnatural propensities’. The idea was to compel Forester to make a large settlement upon his wife, who went to live with Passingham. The conspirators began by writing letters and spreading rumours, then went so far as to lay charges against Forester before magistrates. Forester tried to flee the country, but was arrested on the coast of Kent. Under investigation, the principal witness retracted his assertion and acknowledged that the charge was false. Under questioning by the Bench, Forester was so agitated that he was frequently deprived of speech. Many witnesses testified to Forester’s complete innocence, but eleven witnesses for the defendants, including two clergymen, gave detailed evidence of his having had sexual relations with men. Many of these acts had apparently occurred several years prior to the blackmailing, and no one had complained of them at the time. After a long trial the Jury declared Passingham and Edwards guilty of blackmail.¹⁸ The judges felt that the defendants deserved the most ignominious punishment they could inflict, but they refrained from sending them to the pillory for fear that they would be killed by an indignant mob, so they sentenced them to three years’ imprisonment in Newgate.¹⁹ Beckford was so

¹⁷ *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1805, Beckford 409. My review of the case is based on *The Times*, 23 Feb., 21 May, 27 June, 3 July 1805.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 27 Jun. 1805.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 3 July 1805. The pillory was abolished in 1816 except as punishment for subornation and perjury (of which Passingham and Edwards were found guilty), and totally abolished in 1837.

intrigued by this case that he not only took cuttings about the case, but had a folio copy of the entire proceedings made for himself, and placed amongst his collection of books.

Another notorious court case that attracted Beckford's attention involved Georges Ferrers Townshend, known by his courtesy titles as the Earl of Leicester and Lord Chartley. In 1809 he prosecuted the publishers of the *Morning Herald* for libel, claiming damages of £20,000. The *Morning Herald* in 1808 had published a paragraph stating that 'Articles have been exhibited against a Noble Lord by his Lady, similar to the articles which were exhibited by Lady Audley against her Lord, upon which he was convicted and deservedly executed'. This was a reference to the trial and conviction of Lord Audley in 1631 for having sodomised two of his menservants and having assisted at the rape of his wife. (Beckford, incidentally, also had a complete copy of that 1631 trial in his collection.) The *Morning Herald* had previously announced the separation of Lord Chartley and his wife, and they now reported that 'The wretched son of an English Marquis has absconded, on charges which Lady C. has exhibited against him. A special warrant has been issued for apprehending this Lord, whose infamies have long rendered him a disgrace to human nature.' During a very long trial, the newspaper put up a staunch defence, calling witnesses to prove that there were 'flying rumours' about Leicester's character long before their own reports. 'The fact was, that so far from [Lord and Lady Leicester] having lived happily together, ... three sleepless nights were all they passed together, and after that time they were never in bed, or seldom at board together. The Lady, in the agony of an almost broken heart, ... had been obliged to sit down at the table of her Lord with wretches that are a disgrace to human nature, and who ought not to be permitted to live'. These wretches included Leicester's Italian Secretary named Neri, and two other young men. Neri, a former waiter at the Cocoa-nut Coffee House, had

been visited in his lodgings by Leicester once a week for some eighteen months, and then became Leicester's servant at Trinity College, Cambridge. At Cambridge, Leicester generally wore a pink gown and pink ribbons to his shoes, dressed his hair effeminately, and was nicknamed Miss Leicester and Lady Chartley. The Chapel Clerk of Trinity College acknowledged that 'Many Gentlemen in the College were "like ladies",' and he explained that 'Neri was a musical character' and that he and Leicester 'often played duets together', with Neri playing on the guitar. Evidence was produced to show that Leicester was in the habit of giving gold watches to handsome privates in the Guards. It was clear that the *Morning Herald* could not further damage the reputation of a man who was already notorious. Leicester was awarded damages of only £1,000, much less than he had sued for. Leicester wasn't present in court to hear the derisory judgment, for he had already fled abroad, to Paris. Eventually he settled in a villa near Genoa, where he lived under an assumed name until his death at the age of 77 in 1855.²⁰

Among the law reports are cuttings about the courts martial of two sailors. In 1807 William Berry, First Lieutenant of the *Hazard* sloop of war, was convicted for a breach of Article 29, respecting 'the horrid and abominable crime which delicacy forbids [one] to name'. The main witness was a female member of the ship's crew, who appeared in court 'dressed in a long jacket and blue trowsers'. She explained how 'curiosity had prompted her to look through the key hole of the cabin door', and she saw Berry having sex with a cabin boy.²¹ While Berry was being held prisoner, a small boat drew up

20 G. E. C., *The Complete Peerage*, Vol XII, Part 1 (London: The St Catherine Press, 1953), pp. 812–813. See also H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love* (London: Heinemann, 1970; Mayflower edition, 1972), p. 92.

²¹ *Morning Chronicle*, 6 Oct. 1807, Beckford 409.

alongside the hulk and a woman handed up a letter saying he could yet be saved, for she offered him her hand in marriage. She was sent away and Berry's execution went ahead as planned: 'on the blue cap being put over his face, the fatal bow-gun was fired, and he was immediately run up to the starboard fore-yard-arm, with a 32lb. shot tied to his legs. Unfortunately the knot had got round under his chin, which caused great convulsions for a quarter of an hour' before he died.²² A similar cutting, from 1809, reports on the court martial of James Nehemiah Taylor, surgeon on the ship *Jamaica*, who was also sentenced to hang for having consensual sex with his cabin boy.²³

Sailors and soldiers make a regular appearance in Beckford's cuttings in the Bodleian. For example, in 1827 a sergeant of a distinguished cavalry was drummed out of the barracks for having carried on a homosexual affair. The entire regiment was drawn out, mounted and in full costume, for the solemn ceremonies. The sergeant, guarded by four soldiers with sabres drawn, slowly walked across the yard, his neck encircled by a halter, while trumpets and kettle drums played the Rogue's March. Then there was dead silence for several agonizing minutes as he walked the last few yards out of the barracks gate, alone, carrying only a small bundle of clothes with him – a picture of the archetypal outcast.²⁴

Eight items in the group of legal reports in the Beinecke scrapbook concern a single, notorious case: the arrest of 23 men in a male brothel in 1810, and the subsequent trials and punishment of several of them. Police raided the White Swan public house in Vere Street, Clare Market, at 11 o'clock in the evening on Sunday, 8 July 1810, and arrested the landlord and

²² *The Times*, 22 Oct. 1807 (which isn't in Beckford's cutting).

²³ *The Times*, 14 Dec. 1809, but Beckford made two cuttings, probably from the *Morning Chronicle*.

²⁴ *News*, 23 Sept. 1827, MS Beckford c.83, fol. 139.

the waiter, plus six men discovered having sex in the back parlour, plus more than a dozen men found in the upstairs rooms. Most of these men were discharged because firm evidence of sodomy couldn't be proved, but all of their names and addresses were published in the *Morning Chronicle* the following Tuesday. Many of the men were out-of-place servants, and soldiers in the Guards. While they were being examined, such a large mob collected outside the police office in Bow Street 'that it was almost impossible to pass, and most of those who were discharged, were very roughly handled; several of them were hunted about the neighbourhood, and with great difficulty escaped with their lives'.²⁵

This newspaper report is especially interesting because we know exactly how Beckford responded to it. The report was published in the *Morning Chronicle* on 10th July, and Beckford wrote a letter to his general assistant Gregorio Franchi dated 11th July: 'Poor sods – what a fine ordeal, what a procession, what a pilgrimage, what a song and dance, what a rosary! What a pity not to have a balcony in Bow Street to see them pass, and worse still not to have a magic wand to transform into a triumph the sorry sequence of events.'²⁶

Eventually, the landlord was convicted for keeping a male brothel, and seven or eight men were convicted for an attempt to commit sodomy, a misdemeanour punishable by an hour in the pillory, a fine, and two years in prison. Six of the men were exhibited in the pillory in the Haymarket on 27 September 1810. Beckford took a cutting of this astonishing event. At Newgate prison the men were put into an open caravan, 'in which they were no sooner placed, than the mob began to salute them with mud, rotten eggs, and filth, with which they continued to pelt them along Ludgate-hill, Fleet-

²⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 10 July 1810, Beckford 409.

²⁶ Boyd Alexander (trans. and ed.), *Life at Fonthill 1807–1812: From the correspondence of William Beckford* (1957; Nonsuch reprint 2006), p. 82.

street, the Strand, and Charing-cross.’ When they reached their destination, two additional wings were attached to the pillory so that four of the men could take their place in it at one time. ‘The concourse of people assembled were immense, even the tops of the houses in the Hay-market were covered with spectators. As soon as a convenient ring was formed, a number of women were admitted within side, who vigorously expressed their abhorrence of the miscreants, by a perpetual shower of mud, eggs, offal, and every kind of filth with which they had plentifully supplied themselves in baskets and buckets.’ After they stood their allotted hour, the other two men were placed in the pillory, ‘and were pelted till it was scarcely possible to distinguish the human shape’.²⁷

The editor of the *Morning Chronicle* expressed his view that Parliament should revise the law so as to make the punishment of sodomites more severe, but should abolish their exhibition in the pillory because the resulting sight of the enraged mob was so horrible to behold, and people should not be encouraged to take vengeance into their own hands. The editor went on to say that the new fashion for sodomy could be ascribed to the Napoleonic wars: ‘It is not merely the favour which has been shewn to foreigners, to foreign servants, to foreign troops, but the sending our own troops to associate with foreigners, that may truly be regarded as the source of the evil.’

The pillorying of the Vere Street Coterie was followed by an even sorrier event, for which Beckford also took newspaper cuttings. In December 1810 a sixteen-year-old Drummer of the Guards named Thomas White, together with a 42-year-old ensign named John Newball Hepburn, were convicted of committing the crime of buggery with each other and sentenced to death. The evidence against them came from another Drummer in the Guards, James Mann, who had arranged an assignation between the two men in a private

²⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 28 September 1810, Beckford 409.

dinner room at the White Swan. It seems that Mann had been arrested in the raid on the White Swan, and offered to turn King's evidence in order to save his own skin.²⁸ Hepburn and White were hanged outside the debtor's door at Newgate on 7 March 1811, before a vast concourse of spectators.²⁹

Then in the Beinecke scrapbook, in a sudden shift in theme, there follows a grouping of about ten cuttings on interior decoration. An article headed 'FASHIONABLE TASTE FOR THE GOTHIC' comments on those 'vast edifices' such as Eaton Hall, built 'in the most grand and sumptuous manner of the Tudors' inspired by the 'Abbey of Fonthill, in Wilts. by Mr. Beckford'.³⁰ This is from a series of articles in *The Sun*, including one on 'A GOTHIC DINING PARLOUR', sixty feet long, with entrance recesses in the manner of King's College, Cambridge,³¹ and 'A GOTHIC DRAWING-ROOM' with a cornice emblazoned with arms of the most illustrious families since the time of William the Conqueror – 'Each shield being separated by a gorgeous fretwork, crowned with the Gothic finial – the latter being the *ne plus ultra* ornament characterised under the pointed order'³²

The Bodleian collection also contains numerous cuttings about beautiful houses. For example, Beckford cut out reports about two Grand Balls given by Henry Philip Hope (brother of Thomas Hope the art connoisseur), one in 1835,³³ and one in 1842, at his magnificent mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain: 'Undoubtedly there does not exist in Paris, perhaps in Europe, a private individual possessing a palace

²⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, 6 Dec. 1810, Beckford 409.

²⁹ *The Times*, 8 Mar. 1811, Beckford 409. For a full history of the Vere Street Coterie, see Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2nd edition, 2006), chap. 13.

³⁰ *The Sun*, 16 Jan. 1807, Beckford 409.

³¹ *The Sun*, 16 Jan. 1807, Beckford 409.

³² *The Sun*, 13 Jan. 1807, Beckford 409.

³³ *Morning Post*, 3 June 1835, MS Beckford c.67, fol. 110.

built with so much magnificent and good taste'. It was fitted up 'with more than eastern magnificence', and a dining room 70 feet long and 45 feet high, with walls covered in marble and porphyry.³⁴ Beckford's cuttings on the lavishly decorated mansions of the nobility are matched by an unusual number of cuttings about their destruction by fire: there are several reports about Luton Hoo, the seat of the Marquis of Bute, which was reduced to smoking ruins in 1843;³⁵ the destruction of Wynyard House, near Stockton, seat of the Marquis of Londonderry, in 1841;³⁶ and the destruction of the London home of the banker Philip Hoare in 1840, when 'A favourite dog perished in the flames.'³⁷

The fifth grouping in the intact scrapbook consists of cuttings about odd or amusing events, particularly jokes and hoaxes. One such report, headed 'HOAX EXTRAORDINARY',³⁸ describes how 'some mischievous wag' in 1815 sent letters to half the tradesmen in London, inviting them 'to wait upon the respectable Dr. Hutton, of Bedford-row, with the various commodities [and services] in which they deal.' The first arrival, early in the morning, was a hearse and six horses, carrying 'several coffins, plain and ornamented'. Then there arrived an elegant post-coach with six gaily decorated horses and postillions, expecting to carry a newly married couple to the country. By noon a host of physicians, midwives and apothecaries had arrived, soon followed by suppliers of luxury goods, and then coal-dealers, so many that the coal-waggons blocked up the street. Meantime a pack of boys assembled, and 'cruelly added to the mortification of the disappointed

³⁴ *Morning Post*, 29 Apr. 1842, MS Beckford c.81, fol. 62.

³⁵ MS Beckford c.78, fols. 14, 19–21 (Nov. 1843).

³⁶ Feb. 1841; reports from *Morning Chronicle*, *The Times* and the *Morning Post*, MS Beckford c.64, fols 23–27.

³⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 18 Dec. 1840, MS Beckford c.79, fol. 32.

³⁸ Beckford's cutting was from *The Sun*, 23 Jan. 1815, though my quotation is from *The Times*, 23 Jan. 1815.

candidates for the Doctor's custom, by pelting them most wofully with snow-balls; and a general shout of exultation, accompanied by a torrent of those missiles, generally burst forth' as each fresh tradesman arrived. Another cutting, headed 'BERNER'S-STREET IN AN UPROAR', reports on a nearly identical hoax that occurred five years earlier, when a Mrs Tattenham was beset by tradespeople, with 'Waggon's laden with coals from the Paddington wharfs, upholsterer's goods in cart loads, organs, piana-fortes [*sic*], linen, jewellery, and every other description of furniture, sufficient to have stocked up a whole street'.³⁹ A squad of police officers were busy well into the night trying to disperse the crowds.

The Bodleian collection has more than 200 cuttings enclosed within a single large wrapper marked 'Festivities absurdities &c.'⁴⁰ Beckford took cuttings about eccentric characters such as misers,⁴¹ for example, an 80-year-old man in Winchester who never went to church, ever since his house was robbed whilst he attended Divine Service, and who had no chairs in his house, only a sack of corn to sit and sleep upon.⁴² Odd female characters include a German Baroness who was arrested in Rome after prying ancient bits of marble from three church altars with the aid of a crowbar.⁴³ Another eccentric was a lady in London who regularly met gentlemen in the street around midnight and arranged a second meeting to which she didn't show up, by which time the gentlemen discovered that their watches were missing. Eventually she was discovered to be a governess, who admitted 'that she had always held

³⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, 28 Nov. 1810, Beckford 409.

⁴⁰ MS Beckford c.73, fol. 1.

⁴¹ MS Beckford c.78, fols 47–49.

⁴² *Courier*, 5 Apr. 1821, MS Beckford c.80, fol. 45.

⁴³ *Morning Post*, 3 Jun. 1842, MS Beckford c.64, fol. 90.

prostitution in the utmost abhorrence; but that she had a strong propensity to steal'.⁴⁴

Beckford was struck by supernatural absurdities, for example, reports about a haunted cottage in Windsor,⁴⁵ and a 'MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR' near a farmhouse in the district of Atholl, where large stones moved about without the aid of any perceptible agency, and which resisted the efforts of clergymen to exorcise their spirits.⁴⁶ Beckford also cut out a report of the sighting of mermaids off the coast of Cornwall.⁴⁷

Beckford also had an eye for oddities of a darker nature. One cutting is headed 'HUMAN SACRIFICES IN GOOMSOOR'. Apparently, once a year in this region of India a child was tied to a stake and 'his flesh is cut from his bones in small pieces' by men who dance around him decked out in bear-skins and peacock tails.⁴⁸ Another cutting headed 'SOUTH AMERICAN ATROCITIES' described the capture of two Frenchmen who were forced to pass through a double line of warriors who cut them with swords and spears, but didn't wound them mortally, so as to prolong their agony.⁴⁹ On the wrapper containing this cutting Beckford wrote 'A smash torturing bout'.⁵⁰ The creator of the wicked Caliph Vathek perhaps had a taste for such reports!

In the Bodleian collection there are in fact the remains of one intact scrapbook. About ten large sheets of good-quality, thick laid paper are each folded over once, making a pair of leaves, the sheaf making a total of what is in effect a forty-page scrapbook. Pasted onto these leaves are numerous cuttings

⁴⁴ *Bells Weekly Messenger*, 7 Dec. 1828, MS Beckford c.78, fol. 53.

⁴⁵ MS Beckford c.64, fols 44–45; c.81, fol. 15.

⁴⁶ *Courier*, 17 Oct. 1828, MS Beckford c.80, fol. 77.

⁴⁷ MS Beckford c.82, fol. 99.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 9 Oct. 1841, MS Beckford c.64, fol. 65.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1843, MS Beckford c.78, fol. 4.

⁵⁰ MS Beckford c.78, fol. 1 (cuttings dated 1842 and 1843).

relating to the publication in 1830 of Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron*.⁵¹ Beckford greatly admired Byron, whose life had many parallels with his own, including Byron's flight abroad following rumours about an irregular sexual life. Beckford certainly agreed with Byron's remark that 'this is the age of cant'. Much earlier, in 1821 and 1822, Beckford had cut out reports about Southey libelling Byron as a member 'of the Satanic school'.⁵²

Beckford collected newspaper cuttings about homosexual scandals until the very year of his death. Many of these are carefully wrapped in small sheets of thick writing paper with gilt edges. Quite a few of these cuttings refer to scandals about notable gentlemen who fled abroad, and I think it is certain that he recognised his own situation in the plight of these men. One cutting concerns the noted book collector Richard Heber, who in 1825 suddenly resigned his seat in Parliament and left the country. In 1826 the *John Bull* newspaper reported, with heavy innuendo, that 'Mr Heber will not return to this country for some time – the backwardness of the seasons renders the Continent more congenial to some constitutions'.⁵³

The report added that Heber had 'an over addiction to *Hartshorn*'; this reference to the revivifying spirit of hartshorn was an allusion to a nineteen-year-old antiquary named Charles Henry Hartshorne who spent Christmas 1823 with the 48-year-old Heber and who lived with Heber in London for two months early in 1824. Beckford annotated the wrapper 'H.H.H. Heber

⁵¹ MS Beckford c.79, fols. 43 ff.

⁵² Interestingly, the cuttings dated 1821 and 1822 are contained in a wrapper marked at the head, 'Ex^d. 6th jan^y 1832', MS Beckford c.80, fol. 66. So Beckford certainly read and re-read his cuttings, which were sufficiently well organised for him to locate ten-year-old cuttings that were relevant to Moore's recent biography.

⁵³ Wrapper; *News*, 14 Nov. 1826; *John Bull*, 7 May 1826; MS Beckford c.83, fols. 64, 72–73.

and Hartshorn' (the triple-H perhaps standing for Heber, hartshorn the spirit, and Hartshorne the man). Rumours had been circulating since mid-1824, nearly two years before the *John Bull* libel. Hartshorne successfully sued the *John Bull* for libel, but Heber refused Hartshorne's request to return to England to dispel the rumours about himself. Dr Anthony Hobson in his lecture on book-collecting given at the Beckford Society AGM last June,⁵⁴ said that the libel was certainly untrue. Nevertheless, it is difficult to account for Heber's exile. Sir Walter Scott said that Heber fled to Brussels after being warned by John Cam Hobhouse, Lord Byron's confidante, that a warrant was being drawn up for his arrest. He didn't return to England until 1831, two years before his death. Beckford took a cutting of his obituary.⁵⁵

Whatever the truth of the matter, the cutting about the libel case is particularly sad, because it notes the similar flight of Beckford's boyfriend of many years previous: Heber was 'supposed . . . to have left England for much the same reason that my *Lord Courtenay* – [and] the Bishop of Clogher, *cum multis aliis* [and many others], have deemed it expedient to emigrate to foreign climes'. The original cause of Beckford's ostracism was his alleged relation with William Courtenay at Powderham Castle in 1784. In 1790 Beckford took cuttings about grand entertainments given by Lord Courtenay at Powderham Castle, at one of which Courtenay had paid £100 to have chalk drawings of flowers cover the ballroom floor for dancing. Another cutting reported the anecdote that Lord Courtenay was seen going to Court in a splendid carriage, and an old woman asked John Wilkes if he knew who it was, and

⁵⁴ Dr Anthony Hobson, 'Book-collecting in the age of Thomas Frognal Dibdin', given at the Eleventh Annual General Meeting of the Beckford Society, Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, 10 June 2006.

⁵⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 8 Oct. 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fol. 10, and another short notice of his death, c.83, fol. 11.

he replied that it might be one of ‘the sheriffs come to present an address from the city of Gomorrah’.⁵⁶ Another cutting reported that Courtenay in February 1811 made a precipitate departure on a ship from Liverpool, bound for Brazil, because he had declined appearing before the magistrates to answer charges of sodomy laid against him.⁵⁷ Courtenay in fact fled to France, where he lived in exile in Paris for the rest of his life.

Several cuttings concern William Bankes, MP, who was accused of having sex with a soldier in a urinal outside the Houses of Parliament.⁵⁸ Many nobleman came forward to defend Bankes’s character, and the principal witness set sail for America and refused to appear,⁵⁹ so Bankes was acquitted. Beckford took a cutting of this incident, which happened in 1833. Then almost ten years later, in 1842, Bankes was again arrested for having sex with a soldier, this time in St James’s Park. Beckford took another cutting describing this case, and wrote on the wrapper ‘The case of the soldierly Mr. Bankes’.⁶⁰ On this occasion Bankes forfeited a £5,000 bond of recognisance and fled to the Continent.⁶¹ Bankes was declared an outlaw, and he never again returned to England, though despite this he continued to embellish his wonderful country house at Kingston Lacy.

There are another fifty or sixty cuttings on this subject in Beckford’s collection, including reports of blackmail⁶² and suicides,⁶³ prosecutions of clergymen⁶⁴ and soldiers,⁶⁵ and

⁵⁶ *Morning Post and the World*, 4 Aug. 1790, Beckford 409.

⁵⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 25 Feb. 1811, Beckford 409.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 26 June 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fol. 12.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 28 and 30 June 1833, MS Beckford c.63, fols 12–13.

⁶⁰ MS Beckford c.81, fol. 80.

⁶¹ *Morning Chronicle*, MS Beckford c.81, fol. 32.

⁶² E.g., MS Beckford c.63, fol. 9 (1833); c.74, fol. 28 (1828).

⁶³ E.g., MS Beckford c.75, fol. 84 (1825).

⁶⁴ One such cutting refers to the Bishop of Clogher, and says that ‘Other Clergymen of the Established Church, too, have of

investigations into vice at Harrow and Sandhurst.⁶⁶ The cuttings probably reveal more about society's prejudice against homosexuals than about the private lives of gay men. In terms of the history of jurisprudence, there is one very interesting case involving John Grossett Muirhead of St George's, Hanover Square. In 1825 Muirhead picked up an apprentice lad outside a print shop in Sackville Street, off Piccadilly, and took him to a coffee house for a pint of cider and biscuits. There he showed him some indecent prints, fondled him, gave him a crown, and arranged for another meeting. Eventually Muirhead was arrested for doing the same with three lads in the back room of an oyster shop. (Muirhead, incidentally, was a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice and a Director of the Auxiliary Bible Society.)

At his trial he didn't deny the facts, but argued that there were no legal grounds for a prosecution: 'first, that it was not an assault, because [he] had the consent of the party; and secondly, it was not an offence indictable in the present shape, because it was committed in private'. But the judge re-confirmed that privacy and consent were no defence in such cases: 'In crimes of this atrocious description, consent or non-consent did not alter the offence, as it was an offence against

late years figured occasionally in Police Offices, and not for taking liberties with *females*'; *Examiner*, 1 Apr. 1827, MS Beckford c.75, fol. 23. A typical headline is 'FLIGHT AND DISGRACEFUL CONDUCT OF TWO RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITES', about clergymen accused of assaulting boys in Manchester in 1832; *News*, 29 Apr. 1832, MS Beckford c.83, fol. 81.

⁶⁵ For example, Beckford took two cuttings about a raid in 1830 of a public house in the Strand where soldiers from the Horse Guards Parade met with their clients; a mob of 500 people pelted six men with mud as they were taken to the police station; *Morning Chronicle*, 17 and 19 Apr. 1830, MS.Beckford, c.67, fols 178 and 181.

⁶⁶ MS Beckford c.70, fols 68–69 (1842).

public morals, not only because it was committed in a public coffee-room, but because it was an attempt to destroy the morals of youthful members of society.’ Muirhead was sentenced to nine months’ imprisonment for one offence, and six months’ imprisonment on a second indictment. He pleaded for clemency on the grounds that he was 72 years old and infirm, and not likely to survive prison. The judge said he would be treated humanely.⁶⁷ He certainly did survive prison, for three years and nine months later Beckford took another newspaper cutting, a report that Muirhead was arrested in Dover for a similar offence.⁶⁸ Soon afterwards, he fled to the Continent. So Beckford had followed Muirhead’s career over a period of nearly four years, just as he had followed the careers of William Bankes and William Courtenay.

The cuttings are especially valuable when read in conjunction with Beckford’s reactions to the reports, contained in his letters to Franchi. His most scornful comments were expressed upon the hanging, in 1816, of John Attwood Eglerton, a waiter who had a wife and children and who was accused of sodomy by a stable boy. It took the jury only ten minutes to return a verdict of guilty and a sentence of death.⁶⁹ Beckford wrote to Franchi on 22 September: ‘Tomorrow (according to the papers) they are going to hang a poor honest sodomite. I should like to know what kind of deity they fancy they are placating with these shocking human sacrifices. In a numerous list of thieves, assassins, housebreakers, violators (“a man for a rape”) etc., he was the only one to be sent to the gallows; all the others were “respited during pleasure”. The danger must be great indeed and everyone in the country must

⁶⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 22 Oct. 1825, MS Beckford c.75, fol. 68; *The Age*, Sept. 1825, MS Beckford c.71, fol. 34.

⁶⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, 27 July 1829, MS Beckford c.75, fol. 69.

⁶⁹ Beckford 409, unidentified newspaper, Oct. 1816.

be running the risk of having his arse exposed to fire and slaughter.⁷⁰

Beckford's scrapbooks and newspaper cuttings haven't received much attention by historians of 'scrapbooking', yet they occupy an important and unique place in that history. There are some scrapbooks made by the Hale family from 1746 to 1830, but they contain coloured prints and satiric cartoons by the likes of Cruikshank and Gillray, with only the occasional clipping, usually a poem or report of a humorous incident.⁷¹ Several eighteenth-century print collectors pasted their prints into scrapbooks. Horace Walpole pasted newspaper cuttings into some of his printed books. Walpole also assembled a scrapbook in 1776 which consists mainly of poetry that he cut out of journals, but with some obituaries and literary notices. This is basically a literary specimen book.

In the Library Company of Philadelphia there are hundreds of scrapbooks of newspaper clippings compiled by Mathew Carey, a publisher and political pamphleteer who went to America in 1784 and died there in 1839. Some of the volumes are labelled Law, Politics, Manufacturing and Trades, and so on. They probably provided source material for Carey's progressive campaigns for civic and economic improvements.⁷² However, there is nothing quite like Beckford's collection of oddities and scandal until the Edwardian era, when an eccentric named George Ives assembled scrapbooks containing

⁷⁰ Beckford pasted into his scrapbook reports from the *Morning Chronicle*, 22 Sept. 1816, and the *News*, 29 Sept., and wrote again to Franchi on 3 Oct. concerning a list of names that Eglerton had given to the prison chaplain on the night before his execution

⁷¹ The entire collection is being digitised and will soon be available on the web at <http://library.ohio-state.edu/record=b5436451>; I am grateful to Lucy Shelton Caswell, Curator, Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library, for allowing me to examine the beta version of the site.

⁷² I am grateful to Ruth Hughes, Chief Cataloger, Library Company of Philadelphia, for this information.

extraordinary reports about showers of frogs, black magic, transvestism, homosexuality, lynchings, and so on, with wonderful headlines such as ‘MAN BITES DOG’.

Beckford’s scrapbooks provide a handy shortcut to the gay history of this period, and they illustrate the depth of social intolerance during this era. They are valuable for the light they shine both on society and on Beckford’s personal life. Scrapbooks obviously reflect the interests of those who assemble them, but they can represent more than just a person’s hobbies. It is clear that Beckford’s cuttings reflect not only his professional interests as a collector, but also his private interests, not to say his proscribed interests. The practice of collecting scraps and cuttings, by focusing attention on a specific range of topics, can serve a psychological function in shaping one’s identity. It seems to me that, through these scrapbooks, we can see the kind of identity that Beckford constructed for himself, as simultaneously a being of superior rank and an outcast, specifically a member of an oppressed sexual minority. This may be their most uniquely valuable feature, though of course they are well worth perusing even if you are more interested in Gothic dining rooms or mermaids in Cornwall.

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