

## **Walking from the Beckford Arms**

### **In the company of Nick Cowen**

The first walking experience offered by Nick Cowen is, quite naturally, the environs of the Beckford Arms itself.

#### **In the footsteps of the Caliph of Fonthill.**

Nick Cowen will lead you into the secluded world of William Beckford. His inherited wealth, at the age of nine, founded on sugar and slavery, made him “England’s wealthiest son” but his notoriety as a young man then caused him to be ostracized from English society. After his grand European excursions, he then returned home to Fonthill and began the construction of the most outrageous gothic folly, Fonthill Abbey, denying access to all but a chosen few. Beckford was also a visionary collector of paintings and drawings, books and furniture and a commissioner of extraordinary objet d’art, setting the trends that future collectors, such as Prince Albert would follow. As an author, at the age of twenty-one, he wrote *Vathek*, a brilliantly strange and influential oriental fantasy whilst he also penned some of the very best travel writing ever written, recording his European and Portuguese experiences. To enter Beckford’s world is to experience an alluring and often uncomfortable fascination.

William Beckford’s story forms just part of a long and remarkable history here at Fonthill, which includes the house and estate of one of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> most important courtiers, transferred during the Interregnum to the man who signed the king’s death warrant. A fabulously wealthy gunpowder magnate, returned from India who then purchased Fonthill Abbey from William Beckford and “the Napoleon of shopkeepers” who was the founder of the Morrison dynasty, the current owners of Fonthill Estate. Combined with the building and subsequent destruction of at least five spectacular houses, all within a stone’s throw of one another, the established parkland planting of numerous generations and the various

remodelling of the clear Fonthill Brook into one of the longest lakes in Wiltshire, there really is extraordinary history here on the doorstep. It is also a beautiful walk to boot!

Depart on foot and return to the Beckford arms, 4-5 miles (depending on short extensions), 3 hours max. Some steep but relatively short gradients. Walking boots or wellies and suitable wet weather clothing essential.

For two persons- £50 (minimum fee)

£15 per additional person.

A maximum of up to five persons, including Nick, can participate per walk. Contact Nick Cowen for more details and arrangements;

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07871 286956 (non smart phone)

Nick Cowen looked after the public rights of way in South Wiltshire as the Senior Rights of Way Warden for 30 years, before retiring last year. Nick is also a published author who has illustrated his own books, a fine art graduate, a landscape photographer, an accomplished musician and an amateur archaeologist with a mass of local flint axes and arrowheads from previously unrecorded sites. He loves maps and is rubbish at modern technology.