

If you would like to discuss the possibility of a presentation to your group or organisation, do give me a ring on 0191 414 0684. My email address is valsully@hotmail.co.uk.

I offer a choice of two 45 to 60 minute illustrated talks – ‘The Courageous Countess’ and ‘Birds, Bowes and Books’. Each is illustrated by over 50 colour photographs on Powerpoint.

If you have your own projector/screen/computer, that’s great, but if you don’t, I’ll bring my own.

I charge £40, including a round trip of up to 30 miles from my home in Blaydon-on Tyne. For any mileage above that, I ask for 30p per mile.

THE COURAGEOUS COUNTESS

Mary Eleanor Bowes has for a long time been known as ‘The Unhappy Countess’, which I believe does her a disservice, hence the title of my talk. I begin with a précis of the history of Gibside and the life of her father, George Bowes, whose fortune was made in coal and who built the landscape garden at Gibside. After an outline of Mary Eleanor’s upbringing and influences, I give a brief summary of her first marriage and its consequences.

What happened to Mary Eleanor after she was widowed is the source of her notoriety. I set out the historical context by outlining relevant aspects of Georgian society, especially the legal status and acceptable treatment of women in the eighteenth century, and then give a synopsis of her abusive second marriage and its repercussions. I discuss the nature of domestic abuse and its effects, and then talk about her eventual escape, her dramatic abduction and her long legal battles. Eventually, without any precedent in English Law, she was awarded restoration of her properties. This achievement, as well as other aspects of her life and legacy, deserves recognition.

BIRDS, BOWES & BOOKS

In this talk, I begin by outlining two hundred years of the Bowes family’s history, from Elizabeth Blakiston Bowes - who is credited with beginning the accumulation of Gibside’s wealth - to the wondrous creation of The Bowes Museum.

My nineteenth-century novel *Molly Bowes* uses a semi-fictional heroine to tell the story and her lifetime embraces an eventful and dynamic period in the history of the north-east.

I talk about all the research topics that went into the making of the novel: London debtors’ prisons; the last years of Emma Hamilton; the Peterloo Massacre; The Society of Friends; Teesdale and the Lead Routes; the Land of Oak & Iron; the transformation of Newcastle, including the Art Academy and the Lit & Phil; Thomas Bewick, Thomas Sword Good and other artists; Chartism on Tyneside; Winlaton and Crowley’s Crew; Joseph Cowen and his involvement with Garibaldi and European political plots.