

GERTRUDE LOTHIAN BELL (May 18th talk)

Anthony Wood is not only a master of his facts, but a master of delivery and enthusiasm. His talk on Gertrude Bell was riveting, especially as she is not as well known as her contemporary, Lawrence of Arabia, or other influential women of the period.

Not only was she arguably one of the great figures of the 20th century, but perhaps also of her age. Born into wealth and privilege in Durham in 1868, she had a first class education, an Oxford degree and an awareness of the responsibility of her position.

She had a brilliant intellect, and over her life was a mountaineer, a writer and translator, a political officer, garden designer, map maker and surveyor, archeologist and linguist, teaching herself many of these, and often being 'the first', and particularly the first woman to achieve the goals she set herself.

Her six major travels through the Middle East were how she became involved in the politics of the area, and played a major role in the establishment of the state of Iraq.

These travels, although usually comprising merely two or three attendants and a horse, mule or donkey, did also involve the careful packing of a Wedgwood dinner service.

Surprisingly, Gertrude Bell was not a Suffragette, feeling that most women had enough to do and didn't have the resources to get properly involved, and also that change should be brought about by less violent means than were being employed at the time.

She never sought fame, and ended her life in slightly strange circumstances after an illness in Iraq, in 1926.

Anna Thompson