

We welcomed 3 new members, today. They were Madeleine, Anne and Ian.

The Scandalous Peer led by Catherine

Introduction: Who was the peer? It was a story of deathbed marriage, duels, abortion and torture so who could it be?

Members looked at the ppt slides and listened to clues as to the identity of the peer. Many knew as the clues were revealed.

It was Mary Eleanor Bowes.



Mary was born in London in 1749. George Bowes, her father, took her to live at Gibside, Co. Durham. Here, she was given a good education and through her father, began to love growing a variety of nature's gifts from the soil.

Her father died when she was 11. She became extremely rich so had many suitors. However, when she was 16, she decided to marry the 9th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne. They had 5 children but Mary and John Lyon had little in common. On marrying Mary, he had to take the name Bowes.

Members received a packet in which was a bulb (not from Gibside!) to plant and we looked at a diagram of Gibside to see its layout and the buildings and vegetation present during Mary's lifetime.

He died 1 years later so once again, Mary became a sought after wife.

SCANDAL! She quickly arranged a marriage due to being pregnant with not her husband's child but that of George Gray. She had an abortion.

Enter Andrew Robinson Stoney an Anglo-Irish soldier and charmer. He duped Mary into marriage pretending to have fought a duel for her and being severely wounded. On his **deathbed**, he was carried to the altar to marry Mary. After the ceremony, he made a miraculous recovery to entertain his whole family.

Torture: He deprived Mary of her family, money, food and tortured her. On one occasion, he organized her abduction but a brave gardener at Gibside stepped in and saved her.

Bowes set about destroying Mary's reputation.

Divorce: There followed a bitter divorce.

Bowes ended up in court and he was imprisoned. Mary kept her fortune. Unable to pay his solicitors, his sentence was further imprisonment. The divorce continued until Mary died. Bowes was left penniless possibly giving his name to the phrase 'Stoney broke'.

Her achievements: Gibside remains as a testament to her achievements

She supported expeditions to different continents from which was brought exotic and unusual fruits and flowers. These she cultivated in the Orangery. A primary source showed that she even managed to grow pineapples in Co. Durham!!

Mary died in 1800: Mary was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Her children inherited her wealth.

Her two books were published and a novel entitled, 'Barry Lyndon' was written by Thackeray and based on her life with Bowes. It has since become a film. Other books have been written about her amazing life.

After two disastrous marriages and numerous scandals, it was an irony if the story was true of her being buried in her expensive, bejewelled wedding dress. Many still search for it!



Today, Gibside is still there and a wonderful place to visit and learn more about Mary Eleanor Bowes.