



THE
BOWES MUSEUM
BARNARD CASTLE



HANDBOOK
PRICE SIXPENCE

INTRODUCTION.



THE BOWES MUSEUM and PARK was founded by John Bowes and Madam Joséphine Bénéôte Bowes, Countess of Montalbo, his first wife. It first began to take shape in the minds of the donors about the year 1862, when they were touring Europe collecting for their own pleasure, after which all their efforts were aimed to one end, and that was to found a public museum.

Madam Bowes being a French lady naturally desired that the Museum should be erected in her own country looking towards England, that of her husband, and Calais was suggested, but the disturbed state of French politics decided the question and Barnard Castle was selected because it was the nearest town to Streatlam Castle, the ancestral home of the Bowes Family. The site was selected in 1865 and four years later the Foundation Stone was laid by Madam Bowes (Countess of Montalbo) on Saturday, November 27th, 1869. The trowel used on the occasion is in the Museum and bears the following inscription :

*On Saturday, the twenty-seventh day of November,
Anno Domini 1869, this Trowel was used by Joséphine
Bénéôte Countess of Montalbo, wife of John Bowes of
Streatlam Castle, Esquire, in placing the first stone of
her Museum.*

Architect : J. E. Watson, of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

The Building was designed by Mr. Bowes' French Architect, Monsieur Jules Pellechet of Paris, who had the assistance, in the carrying out, of Mr. J. E. Watson, Architect, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with Mr. Joseph Kyle, of Barnard Castle, as Contractor.

The French Renaissance style of the building was adapted from the Tuilleries that was burnt down in the Communist Riots of 1871. It also resembles the Hotel de Ville at La Havre. The building stone used was from the local quarries on Mr. Bowes' Estate at Streatlam and Stainton.

The polished granite used for the stairs and columns of the Hall was from Aberdeen, and that for the landings was from Craighleith, near Edinburgh. The chequered floor was added at a later date and is of Belgian Marble and Hopton Wood Stone.

The Building, which cost over £100,000, was not finished at the deaths of the Countess in 1874 or of John Bowes in 1885 and it was not until 1892 that the Museum was opened to the public. The Trustees, who now govern the Museum under a Scheme of the Charity Commissioners, came into being in 1896.

Madam Bowes left all her personal property to the Museum, and John Bowes dedicated the years that he survived her to carrying out her ideas, and at his death bequeathed the sum of £125,000 as an endowment. All through the letters of John Bowes, of which the Museum own many thousands, he was always insistent that the idea of the Museum was that of the Countess of Montalbo and that he was only carrying out her wishes.

To write of all the difficulties and changes of fortune that have beset the Founders and the Trustees of the Museum since its inception from 1862 to the present day would make an interesting but very large book, which cannot be attempted here. The purpose of the Handbook is to draw attention to a few of the treasures contained in the Museum, and enable the visitor to carry away some idea of the extent and variety of the exhibits.

To anticipate a question which will probably be frequently asked in the future, as it has been in the past, let it here be stated that all the contents of the Museum, with the exception of part of the Natural History Collection, the Dr. Brown Ethnographical Collection, which were purchased, and a few miscellaneous contributions from local donors, were brought together and placed in the Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Bowes. Their names will be handed down to posterity as the munificent donors of a building which, with its contents, forms a lasting memorial to their generosity and love of Art, and is absolutely unique; no other small town in England being possessed of a Museum which can in any way compare with the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle.