



EDITH DURHAM'S BOLD EDWARDIAN COLLECTION OF BEAUTIFUL BALKAN THINGS ELIZABETH GOWING

The Arts Society Fylde
Lowther Pavilion Theatre
4 February 2026 at 2.00pm

Welcome back after the Christmas and New Year break - and we're immediately plunged into a new and rather exotic world. The very word "Balkan" can conjure up thoughts of tricky history lessons (no space here to summarise the First Balkan War - or the Second Balkan War, if it comes to that) or Albania under Enver Hoxha or holidays in Yugoslavia or Lutomer Riesling (the best-selling wine in the UK in the 1980s, apparently) or Olivia Manning. Of course, the movements of different ethnic, religious and political groups have created a complex pattern of shifting borders and cross-border loyalties: the dreadful events following the break-up of Yugoslavia are, of course, only 35 or so years ago.

Today's lecture goes back to the start of the last century to introduce Edith Durham (1863-1944), who travelled across the unexplored Accursed Mountains between Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania, to what are now UNESCO World Heritage Site monasteries and through bazaars she describes as 'glowing with goods'. Elizabeth Gowing, on her first visit to The Arts Society Fylde introduces us to (in Edith's own words) 'Such costumes as I have never seen before and never shall again perhaps'; the lecture is illustrated with rich fabrics and great stories. Edith Durham produced watercolours and, in seven published books, recorded the objects she collected, the landscapes she visited and the people she met. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and was the first woman to become its Vice President. Elizabeth Gowing's own book *Edith and I; on the trail of an Edwardian traveller in Kosovo* (2013) was the first biographical work on Edith Durham in English and was described by The Times as 'the most delicious and delightful read of the summer'.

ELIZABETH GOWING

Elizabeth Gowing studied at Magdalen College Oxford before training as a teacher and working in Lambeth, Hackney and Islington. She moved to Kosovo in 2006 and there worked with the Ethnological Museum in Prishtina and co-founded 'The Ideas Partnership', a charity working on education and cultural heritage projects. She speaks fluent Albanian and has translated two books (the unauthorised biography of Yugoslavia's longest-held political prisoner, Adem Demaci, and the memoirs of one of the leaders of the 1912 uprising) and is the author of four books about Kosovo – *Travels in Blood and Honey; becoming a beekeeper in Kosovo* (2011), *Edith and I; on the trail of an Edwardian traveller in Kosovo* (2013); *The Rubbish-Picker's Wife; an unlikely friendship in Kosovo* (2015) and *The Silver Thread; a journey through Balkan craftsmanship* (2017). Her latest book (2022 - with Robert Wilton) is *No Man's Lands: 8 extraordinary women in Balkan history*. Elizabeth is a regular contributor to Radio 4 (*Saturday Live, Excess Baggage, From Our Own Correspondent*) and the BBC World Service. She has worked as a member of the advisory board of GuideKS, the NGO for Kosovar tour guides, and of the board of Faktoje, the Albanian fact-checking organisation.



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Edith and I, Elizabeth Gowing, Elbow Publishing, 2013

High Albania (1909) and *Through the Lands of the Serb* (1904), Edith Durham

Albania: Slavic women from the village of Vraka north of Shkodra, Edith Durham, 1913
Elizabeth Gowing, photo credit Jonada Jashari