

Anne Lister: Gentleman Jack

By: Paige Platter

A businesswoman, landowner, and diarist, Anne Lister was well known throughout Halifax, West Yorkshire. She lived in Shibden Hall with her sister and her aunt until she married and her wife moved in. Lister's life was full of adventure and mischief no matter where she was.

Lister was born to Jeremy Lister, a soldier in the 10th Regiment of Foot. Lister had 4 brothers and 1 sister, however only Lister and her sister survived past age 20. (Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire, with Additions). Lister attended many schools, but it was Manor House School in York where she met her first love, Eliza Raine. Lister and Raine were roommates until Lister was asked to leave. Raine was to live with Lister until she found out Lister was cheating on her with Isabella Norcliffe and Mariana Belcombe, who also attended Manor House School. This revelation sent Raine to Clifton Asylum. (The Early Life of Miss Anne Lister and the Curious Tale of Miss Eliza Raine). That didn't stop Lister from pursuing multiple women though. Lister stayed in touch with Belcombe and continued their affair even after Belcombe married. However, Belcombe was ashamed of being seen with Lister in public due to Lister's appearance. Lister was known to wear full black attire and take part in unbecoming activities for a lady, such as owning and operating a coal mine. (The life and loves of Shibden Hall's Anne Lister).

Lister also enjoyed traveling Europe. She made her first trip in 1819 when she was 28 with her 54-year-old aunt, also named Anne Lister, to France. She returned to Paris in 1824 where she met Maria Barlow, whom she then proceeded to have a romantic relationship with. Lister then took both her aunt and Barlow on a tour of Switzerland and Italy. (Gentleman Jack: A Biography of Anne Lister). In 1828 she returned to Shibden Hall, where she stayed for a year before leaving once more for Belgium and Germany. There she hiked the Pyrenees and headed into Spain. (Les Femmes à la découverte des Pyrénées). Lister returned to Shibden in 1831 where she found her father and sister so annoying that she left almost immediately, heading this time to the Netherlands with Belcombe. (Gentleman Jack: A Biography of Anne Lister). From 1826 to 1832 she spent very few weeks at Shibden while she traveled around Britain and Europe avoiding her family.

Lister met Ann Walker many times before but by 1832 Walker had become a wealthy heiress and the two became friends and something more. The two were lovers for two years before they took communion together on Easter Sunday in 1834 at Holy Trinity Church, Goodramgate, York and considered themselves married. (Recognition at last for Gentleman Jack, Britain's 'first modern lesbian'). Walker then moved into Shibden Hall and used her fortune to restore and repair the building. In 1838 Lister added a Gothic tower to the main building which she used as her own library and had tunnels dug for the staff to move without disturbing her.

Anne Lister died on 22 September 1840 aged 49 of a fever at Kutaisi in the Republic of Georgia while traveling with Walker. Lister's body was embalmed and sent back to the UK where she was buried in the parish church in Halifax. Shibden Hall was left to Lister's cousins, but Walker

was permitted to remain living there. However, Walker's family had her declared mentally insane and spent the rest of her life in Clifton Asylum. (The Shibden Hall Estate). Lister and Walker's love story was immortalized by HBO's Gentleman Jack mini-series.