

Hidden Histories - coded lives

Anne Lister (1791–1840)

Lister was a well-off Yorkshire landowner, diarist, mountaineer and traveller. Throughout her life she kept diaries which give a detailed account of her daily life, including her lesbian relationships, her financial concerns, her industrial activities and her work improving Shibden Hall.

Her diaries contain more than 4,000,000 words and about a sixth of them - those concerning the intimate details of her romantic relationships - were written in a code using a combination of algebra and Ancient Greek.

The code used in her diaries was deciphered by the last inhabitant of Shibden Hall, John Lister and a friend of his, Arthur Burrell, in the 1930's.

When the content of the secret passages was revealed, Burrell advised John Lister to burn all the diaries.

John Lister did not take this advice, but instead continued to hide Anne Lister's diaries behind a panel at Shibden Hall.

In 2011, Lister's diaries were added to the register UNESCO Memory of the World Programme.

Find out more

Author Helena Whitbread published some of Anne Lister's diaries in two volumes in 1988 and 1992.

The biography **Female Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority: the Anne Lister diaries 1833-36** by Jill Liddington was published in 1998.

In 2010, BBC Two broadcast a production based on **Lister's life, The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister**, starring Maxine Peake as Lister. **Revealing Anne Lister**, a documentary featuring Sue Perkins, was broadcast on 31 May 2010 on BBC Two.

