

(Dead Ladies Show Music - "Little Lily Swing" by Tri-Tachyon)

SUSAN STONE: Welcome to the Dead Ladies Show Podcast, I'm Susan Stone. The Dead Ladies Show celebrates women who achieved impressive things against all odds while they were alive. The show is recorded in front of a delightful audience in Berlin and here on the podcast we bring you a special sampling from these events. Dead Ladies Show co-founder Florian Duijsens is here with me today. Hey there!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Hi!

SS: And we have our other co-founder back on stage at our lovely venue ACUD in this episode — translator extraordinaire — the extremely well-shod Katy Derbyshire. Florian, please tell everyone who Katy will be talking about.

FD: Katy will be talking about Anne Lister, a person she's excellently placed to talk about, as she has just finished translating one of the first full-length biographies of Anne Lister. Now Anne Lister, as you'll hear very soon, excelled at very many things traditionally thought to be within the purview of men rather than women in Regency-era England, such as business, mountain climbing, seducing scores of women — Anne Lister did it all. She left behind copious coded diaries that provide an unparalleled glimpse into her life and her sexual habits.

SS: Indeed. Now, here's Katy to tell us more.

KATY DERBYSHIRE (ON TAPE FROM LIVE RECORDING): Yes, here we go. I'm going to talk about Anne Lister, who lived from 1791 to 1840 so — 1840 is significant because photography was invented in 1839. So we don't have any photos of Anne, but we do have this one portrait by Joshua Horner, who never actually met Anne.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS AT PORTRAIT)

It was painted after her death and doesn't she look pretty with that kind of eyeshadow going on? She didn't really look like that but we can see in the portrait, she's wearing all black. So we can tell it's after 1817, which was when she decided to only ever wear black. The original emo, I suppose.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

She was very, very unconventional — it was a very unconventional choice. The only people who wore black were men who were going traveling on horseback at that time. She was also probably thinner than this photo, she looks rather kind of firmly-shaped here. She was much thinner than that, and those curls on the side of her head, they were fake. They were just pinned on. So, she considered herself gentlemen-like and said that she "knew how to please girls."

("WOO" YELLED FROM AUDIENCE)

The locals often called her Gentleman Jack, and there was not much she could do about that. So we know a lot about this woman because of her diaries. She wrote 24 volumes of journals in tiny handwriting, as you can see here. A part of it in secret code which she invented herself. So there's an estimated 4 million words, which will probably take nine years to transcribe. So we don't have all of her diaries in their entirety in print. She wrote in detail about everything: what she ate, her digestion, (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER) the weather, money issues, her political views, and quite explicitly about her love life and sex life. She was also a great letter writer. So we have those too. And in 1984, the historian Helena Whitbread began transcribing these jour-

nals. People had already known and worked out the code but other researchers were a little bit little bit squeamish let's say, about publishing anything she wrote. Whitbread went on to publish two books of journal extracts taken from 1816 to 1826, and here she is in a video with Sue Perkins from the Great British Bake Off. It's going to be very, very British the whole talk — very British.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: I started decoding it symbol for letter, symbol for letter. And gradually I came to get to know the code very well. I think the first little sentence I came across that indicated her sexuality was different to the norm was, "I think I will go to Russia and find myself a wife." And immediately it all fell into place.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: After seven years of dedicated work, Helena finally published her book in 1988. And Anne Lister's unconventional life was revealed to the world.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: I have to say that the reception was good, and there were just one or two pockets of, 'How could you do this?' And —

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: Let sleeping lesbians lie.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Yes and also um, how, how dare you go into such personal detail about an individual, what right —

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: But you didn't. She did, in her journals —

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Yes, exactly.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: And I have to say, I think she left it for history.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Somebody called it the Rosetta Stone of lesbian history.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS AND HOOTS)

KD: Yeah, it is. I'm not going to read any of the explicit bits, (AUDIENCE CRIES) but I'll tell you where to find them. I'm going to show you a little bit more detail. Both the clips are taken from the BBC documentary. "Revealing Anne Lister."

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: So we can see here the script degenerates into series of letters and symbols, the bits that are encoded I'm assuming are the bits that are most pertain to her private life.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Yes.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: And then surely that's going to whet your appetite. You think, 'now this is going to be filthy!' She's put — she taking's the time —

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: No! I didn't think it was going to be filthy! (Laughs)

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: Oh good, there's a juicy bit coming up! Yeah, yeah, I went to the doctors. Yes, I bought some mutton, I had a veal chop, oh hang on. Here we go. (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) And then you're into the code.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: I am. What I saw was, I was into the romance, not the filth. (Laughs). Kiss is sex. Orgasm, right okay.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: So if Anne Lister asks you for a peck on the cheek you'd be in trouble.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: That's a different sort of kiss.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: And there's a cross here. What's the cross?

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Oh the tiny cross there, that indicates autoerotic practices.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: Right, okay. That's a very academic way of putting it. (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) I have great respect for the demure way in which you've handled that.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: That is the — yes.

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: She's made do.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Yes, she's —

SUE PERKINS IN VIDEO CLIP: On those long Halifax winter nights.

HELENA WHITBREAD IN VIDEO CLIP: Yes.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

KD: So let's come to a key person in Anne's life, her Aunt Anne Lister. Now this is going to be very confusing — they didn't have very many names in England at the time — many of the key characters are called Anne. (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) I apologize in advance. Here's an oil painting of Anne Lister Senior by Thomas Bins.

Now Anne lived with her Aunt Anne, and the unmarried brother Uncle James for a while, as a child, she didn't really get on with her own family. And again as an adult. Later the two Annes travel together, and they lived together in Paris for a long period. Aunt Anne was a supportive confident who approved of Anne's love for women. And the picture shows us that the Listers were the kind of family that could afford to have an oil painting done. And here's where they live to Shibden Hall near Halifax in Yorkshire. I suspect it wasn't always that sunny.

So around 1813, Anne persuaded Uncle James to leave his estate and the house to her in his will. It was very, very unusual at the time. Upperclass women in those days either married or depended on relatives for the rest of their lives, so owning land for Anne meant that she had an income from rent from farming, and from mining, that kind of thing, and it meant independence. The house is actually fairly modest, it looks kind of rustic, right? I wouldn't put up with such a small place, but anyway, so Anne was very proud of her family heritage and status but money was always tight, and she really wanted somebody to share the financial burden, let's say. It's open to the public — you can go there you can see the two paintings in this part — a lot of dark wood — this is the main body of the house can see and painting and her Uncle James they're both done by the same guy.

I think I've teased you enough; I'm going to come to Anne's love life. I'm going to give you a quick rundown of Anne's main flings and romances. Now, I don't have pictures of any of these women, but you just have to imagine them. She liked them kind of petite and sweet. (Laughs)

Her first love was Eliza Raine. She was the illegitimate daughter of an English doctor and an Indian woman. The two girls met at boarding school and shared a room (Laughs) and later a number of secrets. Sadly, though Eliza ended up in a mental asylum.

Isabella Norcliffe was the next one along, she was a hunting shooting and fishing kind of girl from New York — not New York, York! They had a sort of an on-off thing for years, although Anne rather disapproved of her drinking — she claimed she only had five glasses of wine a day but Anne wasn't sure. Isabella made the mistake of introducing Anne to Mariana Belcombe, who was another doctor's daughter with many sisters, which was convenient and her brother — she had one brother who ended up running the asylum where Eliza was locked away.

Mariana married Charles Lawton but continued to sleep with Anne, although she did grow increasingly uncomfortable with Anne's strange ways. In fact — and what didn't seem strange to anyone — Anne went on honeymoon with the couple, (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) and when they moved in together she stayed with them for several months. At the time she was also seducing Mariana's sister Nantz Belcombe, despite her bad breath.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

Sadly, Charles was a bit of a philanderer, and he contracted an STD which he passed on to Mariana, and Mariana duly passed on to Anne. It was really — nobody could identify it, hadn't been identified by medicine at that point. It was never really cured — horrible things they did to her — but anyway. Then Anne moved to Paris, where she was together with a woman called Maria Barlow, who was a widow with a daughter. They moved in together, but it only lasted a couple of weeks once she got her way. She ditched her for a long-term correspondent called Sibella Maclean who was from the Scottish nobility. She was kind of ill health, and basically while she was waiting for Anne to move to Paris with her, Anne spent the winter up in Yorkshire with Mariana, so Sibella left her. Next up was this woman called Vere Hobart, who was a rich heiress. The two of them moved in together and rented a house together on the South coast of England but she went and married a man.

And last but not at all least was Ann Walker, who was a wealthy neighbor but she didn't come from a longstanding aristocratic background so it took Anne while to notice her, let's say. Ann Walker became Anne Lister's wife if you like, in 1834. She needed some persuading, which is laid out in graphic detail in Anne's journal, but eventually moved into Shibden Hall. And Anne being the romantic type, named one of her coal mines after her.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

They made each other beneficiaries of their wills, they shared a pew a church, they showed themselves as a couple, and traveled a lot together. Basically Ann Walker financed Anne Lister's business ventures. Now Anne as you can tell was never really quite satisfied — she liked to play the field. Now here's Langton Hall — a little bit posher. I think this is the right one, there are a number of Langton Halls in England. I think this is the right one. It was the country pile of the Norcliffe family and Anne was there for several months in the winter of 1820. Obviously, Isabella Norcliffe was there too, as well as her friend Mary Vallance, Nantz Belcombe of the honeymoon seduction, and Nantz's and Mariana's sister Mrs. Harriet Milne were also there.

So imagine the scene, we have five young ladies on a long winter night in cold Yorkshire and this is what Anne wrote in her journal: "In the evening Mrs. Milne played. Hung over her at the instrument. Afterwards, sat next to her, and paid her marked attention." At bedtime, Anne stayed another "near half hour in Mrs. Milne's room." Next that night, Anne spent near an hour with Nantz Belcombe. "She told me of attention to Mrs. Milne, and that I had taken no notice of her or Miss Vallance, and that she was sure Miss Vallance had observed it, and felt as she did."

“I said I could not help it. Mrs. Milne was fascinating.” While she was at it, Anne knocked on the next door, then went half an hour to Miss Valance. “Got out of her that she had observed me to Mrs. Milne and was a little jealous. Nantz then came to my room having expected me again in hers and stayed almost till I got into bed. Her love for me gets quite as evident as I could wish.”

So despite all this flurried activity, Anne didn't manage to get one of her famous kisses that evening. So eventually she compromised instead and settle down with Ann Walker. They traveled a lot together, and on their second trip to France, Anne bought the rights to say that she was the first person to climb this mountain here, Mount Vignemale in the Pyrenees. Now she wasn't actually the first person — the first person was a local man, but she paid him to take her up the second time. So she was the first official climber, but a Russian Prince said that it was him. He went up a couple of days later — it was a bit of a race to the top, and of course, the press believed him. Still they did name this little bit of the mountain after her. It's called Lady Lister Col.

Apparently a *col* is the lowest point on a mountain ridge between two peaks. (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) So she wasn't in you know, in the strict sense of the time she wasn't a Lady Lister she was just Anne Lister. Obviously she was a dead lady. So by 1839, rather bored and doing badly in business, and arguing, Anne and Ann went on a long trip. Anne Lister told Ann Walker that they were only going to Russia. I mean she already had a wife, but they were only going to Russia, but they ended up as far as Baku. Now this is the Google Maps routes suggestion how to get from Halifax in Yorkshire to Baku in Azerbaijan. They didn't go by car clearly, they didn't even have railways in Russia at the time. But you can see it is over 3000 miles. They traveled by horse-driven coach all the way across Scandinavia to St. Petersburg. And Moscow up here on the right — this is not their exact route.

While in Moscow — look at this beautiful lady here — this is princess Sophia Alexandrovna Radziwill — Anne Lister had a big crush on her and she's one of the few women who we have pictures of. She was richer significantly than Anne, and I think she would make a wonderful jigsaw puzzle (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) with all the lace and the ribbons and the hair curls, that would be really good for a jigsaw. So they continued in a vehicle called a *kibitka* which was a sort of a sledge with a cover over it along the frozen Volga River to the Caucasus as far as Tbilisi then on to Baku. Their coach — Anne and Ann's coach — so the servants were in one of these adventurous vehicles here. Their coach had glass windows but Anne broke two of them accidentally which was unfortunate because the temperatures went down to minus 37 degrees centigrade.

It was a tough trip. There was no such thing as hotels obviously, they needed a military escort as conflict was raging. They slept on commandeered floors but they also attended royal balls. Basically there were sightseeing, they saw a lot of nature and strange-to-them places. They were the first women tourists in this region. In Baku they visited actually the second of the harems that they went to. This one belong to the Persian jeweler Hadji Baba. This is what Anne wrote about it. You can see she overcame her qualms about the first one, where she felt the women were imprisoned, to rather enjoy this one.

“Was so much amused among the women that we sat there 'til after eight, about an hour, I should think. We found the floor covered with handsome carpeting, and three chairs placed at the head of the room for us. And women standing all around the room, perhaps about 20 — enough to quite fill the room. Hadji's son, a youth with sprouting beard, and a woman servant handed tea and sweetmeats and pistachios. Two or three of the women were handsome, the rest not at all. Wide silk trousers hardly distinguishable from petticoats — generally red or crim-

son — and belaced or bejeweled jackets and veils, necklaces and bracelets, and head ornaments, and large Chinese-looking earrings and three-inch diameter round brooches stuck in the middle of the chest and front, full of rubies, emeralds etcetera, mounted in enamel and gold.” She did like detail; I mentioned that, right?

“They danced at that our request the Georgian dance danced at Tiflis, but much better, much more naturally, especially one rather older girl, perhaps aged 20, who was quite taken with us. She hugged and embraced Madame Tcheckmarev for two or three minutes and me for half as long, at parting and promise to come and see us in spite of their Prophet! How she managed the bonny wriggle-and-lifting petticoat I know not, but it was well done, and the animated eye and strong cracking of thumbs bespoke the interest she evidently felt. All cracked or struck their hands together in cadence with the dance, and so did I, and to their apparently great delight I made as much ‘handy’ noise as any of them. On leaving, just went up to Hadji and the Commandant and one or two more men. They had had sweetmeats but had probably been less amused than we.”

So we don't know quite what happened because she stopped writing her journal, but Anne fell ill and died in Kutaisi, which was then capital of Georgia, on the 22nd of September 1840. Ann Walker somehow managed to get her body embalmed, and took it all the way back across the land to Yorkshire for burial. Now here's a real life picture; it doesn't look much like that portrait which was actually based on it. Unknown artist. You can see she did have a bit of a mustache going on, and is indeed thinner. Anne Lister led an impressive life. She was — she lived kind of semi-open lesbian relationships, she rejected convention to enjoy sex and independence, she climbed mountains, traveled widely, and left a very significant record of her life and times. But she wasn't entirely likable. She was a terrible snob, she employed child labor in her mines, and she forced her tenants to vote Tory (AUDIENCE BOOS) — she wasn't allowed to vote herself. (AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

On one occasion, she visited this place here, which was a treadmill in Coldbath Fields Prison in London. Now this was a complicated but pointless machine to keep prisoners occupied in a kind of a hamster wheel, just to punish them. They'd spend hours on it. She wrote, “I got upon it for two or three minutes, and have nothing to say against it. Cannot imagine how it could do any harm.” (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) She also, when she saw prisoners being deported from Moscow to Siberia, they had to walk from Moscow to Siberia, she wrote, “Walk never more than 22 verse a day and rest every two days.” The state, she said, “paid for their food and clothing and none are sent for forced labor but those condemned to great crimes — murder and was the other crime? Brigandage. The lesser delinquents, many sent to colonize the country and some parts in the South have a better climate than Moscow.”

So Anne Lister is actually having a bit of a moment right now. On the left here you can see the 2010 BBC TV movie “The Secret Diary of Miss Anne Lister” starring Maxine Peake. I wouldn't recommend it unless you like historically inaccurate lesbian bodice rippers.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS, CLAPS)

We enjoyed the subtitles — my favorite subtitles were ‘lustful groaning’ and ‘distant explosions.’ There weren't actually explosions. But you can look forward to an 8-part TV series also on the BBC which you clearly are really into, and starring Suranne Jones here on the right — it is the right — whom you may have seen in “Dr. Foster.” And it's written by Sally Wainwright; you may have watched her program, her series “Happy Valley.” It's very, very good. So I know I'm looking forward to that.

But if you read German you don't have to wait, because this lovely lady on the right Angela Steidle has written actually the first full biography of Anne Lister in German, and I've translated

ed it. Here it is. (APPLAUSE FROM AUDIENCE) It's got this slightly obscene pink ribbon you can't see in the photo yes, and so it's being edited as we speak. So look out for it under the title "Gentleman Jack," from Profile Books. I don't know when it's out, but I'm sure I tell you all and you can find out. It has the juicy bits in it. And you can find out in much more detail all about Anne Lister. Thank you for listening.

(LOUD APPLAUSE FROM AUDIENCE; APPLAUSE FADES OUT)

SS: Katy Derbyshire on Anne Lister. And since that talk was recorded in June, there have been a few bits of news, as Katy said, Anne is having a moment. So first of all, on July 28 a round blue plaque — they're used all over the UK to indicate important historic places — one was placed on the wall at Holy Trinity Church in Goodramgate, York, which is where Anne wed Ann in 1834. The church is by the way, no longer operational but can still be visited. The plaque is bright blue and has a rainbow border. Florian, would you please read for us what it says?

FD: Inside the beautiful rainbow circle, it says, "Anne Lister 1791-1840. Gender non-conforming entrepreneur Anne Lister celebrated marital commitment without legal recognition to Anne Walker in this church Easter 1834."

SS: Thank you. It is a lovely thing. But there has been a bit of controversy over the terminology now. Anne is often referred to as the 'first modern lesbian,' and some are disappointed and angry that the word lesbian is not found on the plaque. So far, York Civic Society has responded saying, "We recognize that this has hurt people. And we apologize. We've heard the criticism, and we are open to the idea of updating the plaque in the near future. We want to listen to everyone's voice, both those who are unhappy with the plaque's wording and those who are happy with it." Florian, were you surprised by this?

FD: I was not surprised. I think we're living in a moment where a lot of terminology is under discussion. And it's very important that we keep talking about these things. And we make sure that we use words in which people can recognize themselves. Now, of course, in retrospect, it's very hard to say what Anne Lister would have recognized herself as, and whether — what she would make of even a rainbow logo. Whether she would like it. I feel like didn't she wear only black? So she might not, you know, she might not be into rainbows. What I think is the most important is that we honor the lives of these women. And we keep talking about them. And I think even controversies like this, as long as they're held civilly and productively, can only have a good effect on society because they increase visibility of people who don't fit the social norm. And yeah, I think that's great.

SS: And Anne didn't, and that's one of the reasons she is she's like a hero to many people. And the church is where, as far as we know, where the first wedding of two women in the UK was held. So it has become an important place for lesbian women as well and other people who want to celebrate that, and I think I guess what I understand they were kind of getting at with the terminology in a sense was, you know, Anne Lister did what she wanted. She didn't do what was expected of women at that time. She did things that as we said were traditionally thought of to be in the men's world. You know, she kicked ass — you know she did all the things — she inherited property, even though she couldn't vote. You know, the world may have been trying to hold her back, but she still went forward. So I guess in a sense they were trying to address this, but the way that they did has become problematic.

But there is sort of a next chapter on this. Just in the last week, the latest from the York LGBT History — that's one of the three groups that worked with the York Civic Society to commemorate Anne Lister with this plaque — they say that they plan to unveil a new plaque in February for LGBT history month, and we'll have to wait to see what it says. *

FD: And there's one other piece of Anne news which I have to share. Katy referred to in our talk to "Gentleman Jack" by Angela Steidele, the first substantial biography of Anne Lister, which she recently translated from German to English, and we can now tell you the publication date for that book is very soon, November 1. You know, in time to stock up for Christmas, and you can pre-order now. The publisher Serpent's Tail has posted some early excerpts, and we'll definitely link to that in our show notes, which you can find at deadladiesshow.com, where you can also see some of the few existing paintings of Anne. None especially (Laughs) accurate or flattering certainly, but they will give you a sense of her, and what she was like.

The site is also home to our Hall of Dames, where you can see and read more about the other ladies we've featured in the past, so do check that out.

SS: Okay, now this episode marks the end of our first year and first season. Yay!

FD: No!

SS: Yay! No! Yay! No! It's been a great ride from Hypatia's murder, math, and mayhem to Anne Lister's list of ladies. If you've missed any previous episodes you can find them wherever you listen to podcasts, as well as of course on our website. If you subscribe however, you'll always have a lady waiting for you. We are going to take a short break — I mean it's really short— so there won't be a September episode, but we'll be back with the start of our new season in October. So next month you'll get a promo from us with some information telling some of the exciting things ahead in Season Two. You can see two live shows however in September. If you are in New York on the 5th, check out our US-spin off at the KGB Bar in its debut, and if you're in Berlin find us at ACUD on Tuesday, the 11th of September. It's Florian's birthday, too.

FD: It's true. Which we'll be celebrating with DJs playing music by only dead women. So we'll have a very special Aretha Franklin moment, I'm sure.

SS: Yes, dance, dance our way out of there. Okay. If you miss us in the interim, which I hope that you do, let us know. We await your tweets, Facebook messages, Instagram comments; find us @deadladiesshow or email us info@deadladiesshow.com. We would also really appreciate it if you could leave us a review and share us with others so we can spread the lady love. Our jaunty theme song is "Little Lily Swing" by Tri-Tachyon, which you can find on SoundCloud, which also hosts all episodes of the Dead Ladies Show Podcast. We're of course on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, RadioPublic, ACast, PocketCasts and Google Play Music. Thanks to Florian.

FD: Thank you Susan.

SS: And thanks to all of you for joining us. I'm Susan Stone.

(Dead Ladies Show Music - "Little Lily Swing" by Tri-Tachyon)

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>, Copiously edited by Susan Stone.

* *The new plaque, dedicated February 28, 2019, says: "Anne Lister 1791-1840 of Shibden Hall, Halifax. Lesbian and Diarist; took sacrament here to seal her union with Ann Walker, Easter 1834."*