

Code broken on encrypted 200-year-old diary, revealing secrets of Britain's first lesbian marriage

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Gentleman Jack:

- Based on decoded diaries of Anne Lister, who confounded society's expectations of women in 19th-century England
- Stars BAFTA winner Suranne Jones in what *Indiewire* calls "one of the year's best performances"
- Co-stars Sophie Rundle (*Bodyguard*) and Gemma Whelan (*Yara Greyjoy* in *Game of Thrones*)
- Created by four-time BAFTA winner Sally Wainwright (*Happy Valley*)
- 8.2/10 rating on IMDB/89% rating on Rotten Tomatoes
- #40, Best TV Series of 2019 So Far, Rotten Tomatoes
- Renewed by HBO for a second series



As *Slate* put it, "It's tempting to believe that Anne Lister was the most fascinating person of the 19th century."

Born in 1791 in Halifax, England, Lister confounded her society's expectations of women at every turn: she was a landowner and industrialist who dressed like a man and had an astute mind for business; she travelled widely and studied under a surgeon in Paris when she was forbidden to attend university; and she married a woman in what's thought to be Britain's first lesbian marriage.

If you've never heard Lister's name before, we recommend the eight-part HBO - BBC One co-production *Gentleman Jack*, now available to binge on Showmax.

Set in 1832, the first season follows Lister (BAFTA winner Suranne Jones from *Doctor Foster*) as she returns to England determined to transform the fate of her faded ancestral home, Shibden Hall, by reopening her coal mines and marrying well

- to a woman.

"Anne Lister is an oddity. She was a curiosity to be stared at, severe but also striking," says Jones, whose performance as Lister has been praised by Indiewire as "one of the year's best," by Slate as "flawless" and by *The New York Times* as "a marvel, exuding vitality, charisma and sexual confidence."

"She had a nickname: Gentleman Jack, because of how she looked and the rumours of what she did with women around the area," continues Jones. "She was an entrepreneur, a lesbian, and an all round brilliant woman. Anne Lister was strong, funny, vulnerable. She's so full of energy; more energy than she knows what to do with. She has this utter joy within her. But above all she's courageous and that's what I love about her. She existed in a world where the word 'lesbian' didn't exist and there was no community, there was no group. There certainly weren't words like 'bisexual' or 'gender non-specific' or 'gender fluid'; there was nothing like that. But even though she wasn't 'out' as a lesbian, she had found a way to navigate her relationships, under the radar of society."

Sophie Rundle (*Bodyguard* and *Peaky Blinders*) plays Ann Walker, a sheltered heiress who catches Lister's eye - and who happens to be seriously wealthy. "She was just overwhelmed by Anne Lister, by this extraordinary woman. She was really drawn to her but I think didn't realise that what she was feeling was the stirrings of love or attraction, because there was no language for it."

She puts Lister's behaviour in context. "We are starting to imagine that you are allowed to choose who you love, how you behave, and how you dress, and that's what this woman was doing 200 years ago."

Lister documented her own story in the five million words of her diaries, encrypting the most intimate details of life. "She wrote in code because what she was doing could be regarded as criminal," says creator, writer and co-director Sally Wainwright, who won Best Drama and Best Drama: Writer BAFTAs for both *Happy Valley* and *Last Tango in Halifax*. Wainwright calls Lister's decoded diary her "biggest resource."

Gentleman Jack co-stars Gemma Whelan (Yara Greyjoy in *Game of Thrones*), BAFTA nominee Timothy West (*Last Tango in Halifax*), and BAFTA winner Gemma Jones (a.k.a. Bridget Jones' mum), among others.

The series has an 8.2/10 rating on IMDB, where it trended on their Most Popular TV Charts, and an 89% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, where it's at number 40 on their list of the Best TV Series Of 2019 So Far, with a critical consensus that "Suranne Jones' boundless charisma brings the indomitable Anne Lister to vivid life in *Gentleman Jack*, a gently revelatory series that mines terrific humour from the icon's unapologetic forward-thinkingness."

The Financial Times hailed *Gentleman Jack* as "a sparkling delight"; *New Statesman* called it "sexy, lively and huge fun;" *The Hollywood Reporter* praised it as "funny, smart and touching;" and *The Wall Street Journal* described the series as "utterly seductive."

Unsurprisingly then, HBO has already renewed *Gentleman Jack* for a second season.

"This person existed; this is an actual person in our history," says Jones. "It's amazing that we don't know more about her but of course that's the beauty of what we're doing and why it's so relevant now, because she was hidden away and now we get the chance to celebrate her."

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<https://www.showmax.com/eng/tvseries/xzqdg9o8-gentleman-jack>

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