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**The Ladies of Llangollen, Anne Lister and Vita Sackville-West:
How is the evidence of their sexuality reflected in the presentation
of their estates and built heritage?**

A thesis submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David
in partial completion of BA Honours Heritage Studies

July 2020

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Introduction

Within this dissertation there will be a reflection on the issues that have affected the LGBTQ+ community, with a focus on the erasure of LGBTQ+ representation in heritage institutions. The remodeling of Plas Newydd, Shibden Hall, and Sissinghurst Castle, owned and refurbished respectively by the lesbians the Ladies of Llangollen, Anne Lister, and Vita Sackville-West, will be examined.

The ongoing curatorship of these properties will also be interrogated. Have the curators, the guardians, allowed the authenticity of the previous resident's lives to be realized? Has there been due regard paid to the preservation of the authentic voice, through ensuring that the sexuality of the previous inhabitants and their relationship with their home is fully represented? Or is the lack of attention on the resident's sexuality equal to erasure of a that inhabitant's identity, and therefore the curator is not actually preserving the heritage or being accurate in their representation of the house.

An example is the Ladies of Llangollen, who were effectively removed from the LGBTQ+ representation that they were attempting to present in their home, Plas Newydd, although their voice remains in the fabric of the building and the remodeling they undertook. If the curators presenting houses or museums are restricting what is present in a property, a false narrative of the property's heritage is constructed. LGBTQ+ individuals, and their heritage, have been hidden from the public view for centuries, due to the stigma surrounding such topics.

During the 19th century homosexuality, especially in women, was much more open and informed than the history books seem to tell us. Lesbians have for a long period of time been hidden in plain sight, with apparently no necessity to make lesbianism illegal. Chapter 1 of the dissertation will provide 3 case studies; the Irish couple, the Ladies, a Yorkshire businesswoman, Anne Lister and the English author and garden designer, Vita Sackville-

West. All these women have made themselves known, not just by the freedom and open nature of their sexuality but also by their relationship with their estates and built heritage. The properties they resided in are still preserving their legacy.

Issues in the research arose when gathering the resources for the case studies, in particular the photographs and illustrations in Chapter 1. Access to the properties was not possible after March 2020 because of museums and heritage institutions closing due to Covid-19. Images of the exteriors were available for all of the properties online, but interior images were rare, and only a minimal amount of description or information was available about the appearances of the interior of the houses, particularly Plas Newydd to which photographic access to the interior was not previously been available in any case. This made it difficult to find detailed descriptions and varied photography on rooms such as the Anteroom, without access to the estate, as the webpage is surprisingly lacking in any description of the interior of the house. Furthermore, Anne Lister's Moss Hut at Shibden, which she designed and built for her lover Ann Walker, is now nonexistent as its building materials were so ephemeral. Photographic evidence of the site of the Moss Hut was difficult to gain access to as well and only a few images of a replica existed, which was designed for the television drama *Gentleman Jack* that presented a fictional perspective of Anne Lister's life with reference to her diaries. However, it was possible to find relatively detailed descriptions of Shibden on the Cadw website, and the Historic England website which has in depth information on each of the houses. Textual sources include *The Ladies of Llangollen* (Gordon 1999), *Uses of Heritage* (Laura Jane Smith 2016), *Gentlemen Jack* (Chroma and Wainwright 2019) Chapter 2 focuses on discussion of LGBTQ+ erasure and identity within the heritage of these three properties, and the theoretical aspects, with queer theory and authenticity being the main approach to the debate.

Queer theory and authenticity/heritage scholars such as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Shelia Jeffreys, Adrienne Rich, Michel Foucault, John Ruskin and Laura-Jane Smith, provide enlightening perspectives and analyses to the discussion. The 1990's brought the introduction of queer theory into academic and cultural debate, deriving from gender studies and women's studies, when Teresa de Laurentiis began to popularize the term

'queer' in 1991. Queer theory emerges from the discourse of gender theorists like Judith Butler, highlighting concerns of the heteronormative erasure of Queer people in society and describing the contemporary reality of gender, sex, sexuality and identity. Adrienne Rich states that 'lesbianism' is removed from plain sight, not even written out of history as it was barely even written in. Rich also states that heterosexuality appeared to be almost compulsory alongside the removal of lesbianism (Rich, 1994). Foucault's theories, based around the ideology of power=knowledge and the formation of social control in societal institutions, explore the notion that all identities are social constructions, and are demonstrate further forms of a power dynamic. For LGBTQ+ scholars the experience of being outside the binaries of male/female, female/masculine and or heterosexuality have become dominant. Where feminism highlights the contrast between gender and sex, Queer Theory offers the perspective that all identities are social constructions, (male/female, black/white, tall/short) and that they are forms of power dynamics rather than suggesting the social expectation that sexuality is determined at birth (Slater, 2020).

The term 'Queer' is not describing a singular item, but rather a diverse variety of practices and priorities within the theory, for example the representation of same-sex desires which can be seen in literary texts, media and images as well as the analyses of social and political relations regarding sexuality (Spargo, 1999). An example of this can be seen in the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, whose desires, wants and needs can be seen through letters detailing their affection for one another, and representing the impact their marriages had on their relationship. Chapter 3 finalizes the discourse, by applying the research into the women and their properties as case studies in tandem with theories in question and looks towards the future possibilities and development of this topic.

Chapter 1: The Houses and their Residents

Plas Newydd and the Ladies of Llangollen

History of Plas Newydd

Plas Newydd was originally a two storey, four roomed, vernacular stone cottage in Llangollen, North Wales, The Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby, lived together 'in uninterrupted friendship' (Gordon 1999) in the cottage, renamed Plas Newydd (New House, in English), from 1778 until Eleanor's death in 1829 and Sarah's death in 1831. In 1809 Mary Carroll, Eleanor's maid, bequeathed Aberadda Field to the Ladies estate (Cadw 2020). Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby's life together at Plas Newydd resulted in extensive interior and exterior renovation, a small library extension, along with the remodeling of the garden and landscape (RCAHMW 2020).

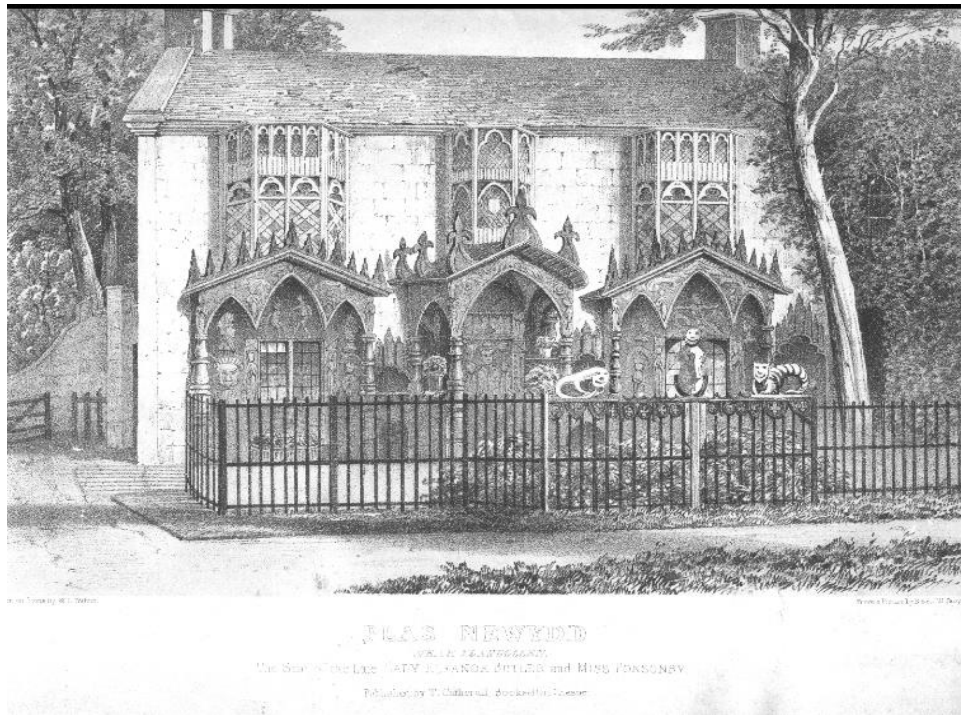


Figure 1, Plas Newydd in 1820, Llangollen Musuem 2012,

General Yorke of the Erddig Family bought the property in 1876, adding a large wing (see Figure 2) along with the black and white mock Tudor cladding (Cadw 2020). The Yorke extension was removed in 1963, the reasons for its removal are unknown (Figure 3).



Figure 2, Photo of Plas Newydd in 1880, People's Collection 2020



Figure 3 removal of extension, Llangollen Museum 2012



Figure 4; Plas Newydd, Extension, date unknown, Llangollen Museum 2012.

Plas Newydd was passed to Llangollen Town Council in 1932 until 1974, when Glyndwr District Council took it into their hands to protect the house (Llangollen Chamber of Trade & Tourism 2018). After the purchase of the estate during the 1930s by the local authority, its use continued as a public park, with added features a playground, a small golf facility, and the raising of playing fields, other associated buildings, and the conversion of the lake into a boating lake. In 1951 the house was registered as Grade II listed the listing was last amended in 1989 (Historic England 2020). Plas Newydd is now run as a museum by Denbighshire County Council and is now restored back to being essentially as it was when the Ladies were in residence, except for General Yorke's addition of black and white external cladding on the front of the building.



Figure 5, Plas Newydd in 1970 without patchwork cladding, Llangollen Museum 2012

The Ladies of Llangollen

The Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler (1739– 1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755 – 1831) were a 19th century lesbian couple (Archives, 2020). They were both Catholics and from Ireland, but had very different childhoods. Eleanor Butler grew up with her parents in Kilkenny Castle, whereas Sarah Ponsonby was an orphan taken in by elderly relatives. In 1778 the Ladies eloped in order to be together and escape the pressures that their families were placing upon them to marry suitors (Gordon 1999). Despite the disapproval of their families, and the gossip that occurred in both London and Dublin coffee shops at the time, they continued to live together for the next 50 years in their Llangollen home, Plas Newydd, which they remodeled with unique and extensive renovations. The Ladies were reclusive and only allowed certain people to visit their home, these were often well-known society and literati figures including Lord Byron, The Duke Wellington, and Anne Lister. Their visitors often brought them gifts to help with their renovations including wooden carvings and other unusual items. (Gordon, 1999) the Ladies became celebrities of their day, appearing on plates and other souvenirs and attracting many followers. They were buried

together in the Llangollen Churchyard (Cadw 2020), along with their maid Mary Carroll (Gorden,1999).

Remodeling of Plas Newydd

Remarkably, despite financial difficulties, the Ladies managed to fund the building developments and interior architecture of the house, and buy the surrounding land which they landscaped and laid into gardens. The library extension on the east end of the house was built in 1778 and remains the library today. Inside the house they added oak carvings, stained glass and arched doors transforming it into a Gothic style, and in 1792 there were further alterations which added an additional room, some service rooms, and a cellar (Cadw 2020).

Sarah Ponsonby was fortunate to have friends who gifted her church salvage and reclaimed architectural items, including stained glass and carved roofing originally from Valle Crucis Abbey in Denbighshire. She was able to use these for the oak paneling that covered the walls, and the delicate pillars, and Gothic arches which surrounded the windows or doors in the rooms. The carved doors, walls and hidden corners in Plas Newydd had a significant number of religious symbols such as saints, devils, and angels.

It is as if the Ladies had ironically recreated a Gothic church like atmosphere, within their home, creating a church like space within which their relationship would be accepted. The use of the reclaimed items also suggests a reclamation of their lives and identities from their lack of acceptance in Ireland.

This reflection of their personalities and relationship through their remodeling of Plas Newydd included changing its name from Pen y Maes, meaning ‘top of the field,’ to the much grander Plas Newydd, meaning the ‘new mansion’ or the ‘new palace’ (Welsh DIC 1993). The changing of the house’s name possibly shows the desire for a new start for the Ladies after they fled from Ireland to begin a life together, leaving their mark, and their heritage on the property for centuries after their deaths.

The changes to what was originally a very simple cottage property were extensive including the library extension, adding carved exterior doors, three black Gothic arched wooden canopies over the front ground level windows of the house as well as a thick heavily carved canopied archway over the centrally positioned entrance. This canopied central archway forms a splayed porch with seats. The windows of the house are scattered with fragments of the stained glass and diamond leaded clear glazing in the smaller bay over the entrance. These are linked by carvings close to the library bay window. The right bays have two light windows enjoining the heavy black bordering surrounding the windows. Within the interior the house has various carvings throughout, including carved doors, stairs and bannisters, and the handrails which both have intricate carvings on them such as large animal carvings. The carvings (*Figure 6*) are taken from pieces of furniture Ladies rescued from derelict houses, churches and other sites.



Figure 6, lion animal carving, Plas Newydd, 2020

Inside the dining room the walls are wooden with similar intricate carvings covering all panels of the wall, an arch shape is made with carvings underneath is the fireplace. There

are 5 rooms in the house; The Oak Room, The Anteroom, the Library, the kitchen along with the guest bedroom and their own bedroom. Each room is unique with different designs decorating each. The Oak Room was originally the kitchen, later it become the drawing room. There is an inscription on the fireplace that records the visit of the Duke of Wellington and a carving of a hare, one of many carvings in the Oak Room. Both the Oak Room and the Anteroom have Spanish leather hangings added later by General Yorke, who lived in the house from 1876 -1890.

The front window in the Anteroom contains medieval glass within it and it is this glass that gives the house its listing as medieval. The Library is a taller room with a ribbed ceiling with bosses as well as further pieces of medieval glass, additions from the Valle Crucis Abbey. The State Bedchamber (their guest room) has an early egg and dart cornice and stout barley twist columns to chimney pieces (British listed Buildings 2020).

Shibden Hall and Anne Lister

History of Shibden Hall

Shibden Hall is a Grade II* listed building in Halifax, Yorkshire (Calderdale Museums2020). The original hall was timber-framed and was built for a cloth merchant, William Otes, who was recorded as living in 'Schepdene' in 1420 (Historic England 2020).

Shibden Hall was occupied by the Lister family for 400 years, with Anne Lister taking on the management of the hall and estate in 1826, and fully inheriting in 1836. She made considerable changes to the interior and exterior of the house, and to the estate. The grounds were laid out in the 1830s by a Mr. Gray of York who was incorporating structures designed by the architect John Harper. The original 1500's timber framing of the hall house was been strengthened by some later stonework, including the insulation of a three-storey west tower in a Norman style, with a pyramidal style roof designed by John Harper in 1836 (Historic England 2020).

After Anne's death in 1840 Dr John Lister inherited the estate Lister's son, also named John, inherited the estate in 1923, on Lister becoming bankrupt, his friend and local councilor Mr. A S McCrea bought Shibden Hall and later presented the estate as a park to the people of the East Halifax. The park was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1926. Lister lived out his life in the house, and on his death it was handed over to Halifax Corporation who in 1933 opened it as a museum.

The main entrance of Shibden Hall is situated to the north side with the garden front facing towards the south.. Overlooking the terrace, in Gothic style, is a three-arched stone sheltered porch-like area overlooking the terrace. The Hall is placed facing hard slope halfway down a hill with the park and gardens surrounding (see *Figure 7*).



Figure 7, Shibden Hall with lake in view, BBC 2020

The early 17th century stone barn, now a museum of rural life, is a Grade II* listed, as are the surrounding buildings that face towards the north of the Hall, which is separated by the forecourt. The south-west section of the property is divided from the rest of the park and Hall with the estate being bounded by stone walls (*Figure 8*) (Historic England 2020).



Figure 8, Stone walling around Shibden, Historic England 2010

Restoration work is ongoing at Shibden Hall. A reveal of recent restoration includes work that Calderdale Museum has undertaken to Shibden Hall's grounds and refurbishment of the gardeners' underground tunnel, discovered 2 years prior to the restoration work in 2009. Significant pieces brought back to life by the institution are the Lister Lions which were stolen from Shibden Hall in 1996. The Lions were commissioned by Anne Lister in 1837 (Historic England 2020).

More recent changes have been made to the presentation of Shibden Hall that reflect the re-evaluation of Anne Lister's life and sexual identity following the TV series *Gentlemen Jack* and various works that include extracts from her diaries (Choma, Wainwright 2019). This will be discussed later in the dissertation.

Anne Lister

Anne Lister (1791 -1840) was a remarkable woman for her lifetime, as detailed in her journals. From 1816 onwards she wrote at least 5 million words within her lifetime, totaling 7,700 pages (Wyascablog 2020). The journals were for private and encoded, were

for personal use and were not planned to be published. However, the encrypted code has been the reasoning for her acquired 'fame'. It describes in detail her lesbian sexual experiences, as well as the trials and tribulations of everyday life at Shibden Hall (Choma, Wainwright, 2019).

Prior to Anne Lister inheriting Shibden Hall she gained control over the estate finances and the running of the business side of Shibden Hall. On the death of her uncle Anne inherited Shibden, the family secure in the knowledge that due to her sexuality Anne was unlikely to marry thus ensuring that Shibden stayed within the Lister family. Anne continued to run the house, estate and Shibden's business interests, including developing the coal pit on the estate, until her death in 1840 (Choma, Wainwright 2019).

When she was 14 years old she was sent to a boarding school, which allowed her to explore her sexuality away from home and judgmental views of her parents who already had concerns about her behavior. These early experiences allowed Anne to discover that she was lesbian in a time where it was deemed almost impossible for two women to be a couple. Her diaries were hidden away by John Lister behind a bookshelf for 40 years to avoid any embarrassment they may have caused the family. When they were found they were placed in the care of UNESCO, and in 2011 the diaries were accepted into 'The Purpose of Memory of the World' collection to ensure preservation and ongoing access to the largest collection of social commentary the world has seen (UNESCO 2020). Despite the diaries being private, Anne deserves recognition for never hiding her sexuality.

Many of her business competitors might have found an unmarried woman having her own property, and managing it without help from a male, unsettling with Anne's sexuality was widely and often negatively discussed throughout society. But some people were extremely supportive of Anne and her sexuality, for example Anne's aunt. Anne finally 'married' her lover Ann Walker in 1834. However, strain was placed on their relationship with expectations Ann Walker to marry a male suitor. The social pressure caused Ann Walker multiple times to attempt to end their relationship, and due to societal expectations the two women nearly did not marry.

Remodeling of Shibden Hall

Anne Lister found fault in Shibden, calling it a 'comfortless' house. On the death of her aunt and her father she set to improving Shibden with refurbishments and remodeling with architect John Harper of York.

Before the 1830s it appears that the main entrance and approach to the Hall had been directed from the south, as can be seen in *Figure 6*, John Horner's watercolour c.1815 (WYAS 2020).

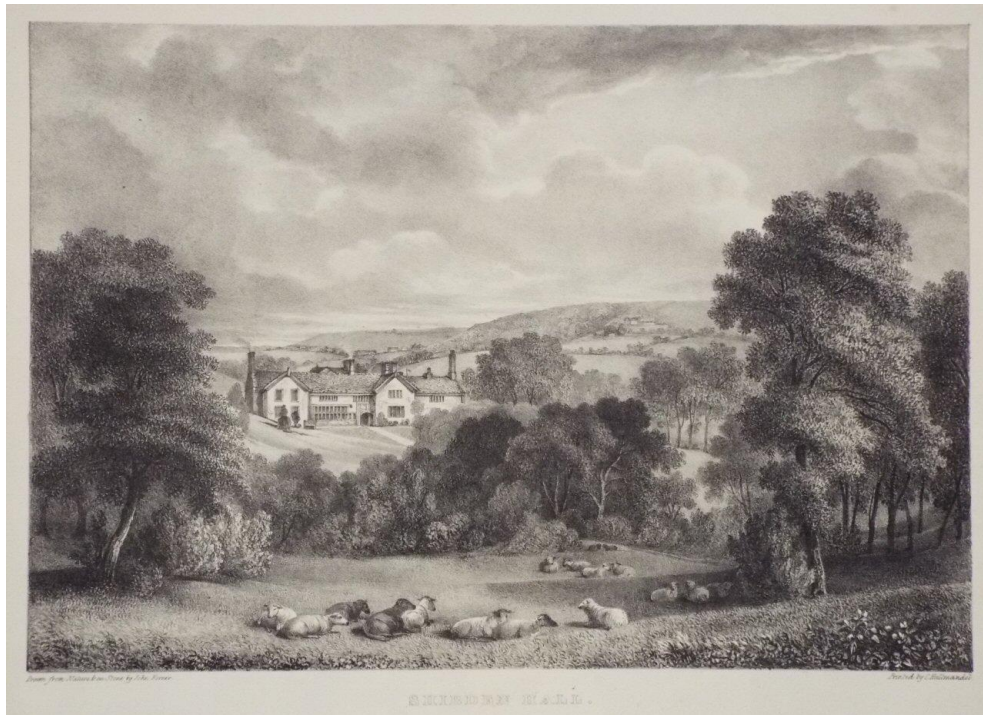


Figure 9, John Horner water-colour of Shibden Hall c. 1815, RareOldPrints 2020

The drive systems were redesigned, and the course of Shibden Hall Road was altered with the softening of the line into a sweeping curve (Sheeran 1990). In 1836 Anne Lister employed John Harper of York to remodel the Hall itself, and he provided drawings and sketches for further structural works in the grounds (Historic England 2020). William Gray of York was employed to lay out the grounds using Harper's designs. A large stone terrace

was constructed to the south and east of the hall and was brought together by a further terrace above towards the west (Historic England 2020). The south terrace was laid in 1836 over the former southern approach (Watercolour, John Horner c. 1815, WYAS).

Anne Lister had the pleasure grounds and the garden, including the cascade (*Figure 12*) that laid out in 1836, with other additional features being added later, during the 1850s, by John Lister. In the 1830s Anne developed the park and lake, incorporating trees which were marked as original field boundaries (OS 1854). Trees continued to be planted during the rest of the 19th and 20th centuries (Historic England 2020).

Anne Lister's redesign of the house was to allow an internal and an external experience, to emphasize the history of the house and to show her status. She incorporated the Gothic style into the interior of house by removing the Tudor ceiling and creating a medieval effect with the installation of a gallery, a reproduction Tudor fireplace and paneling (Historic England 2020) (*Figure 10*).

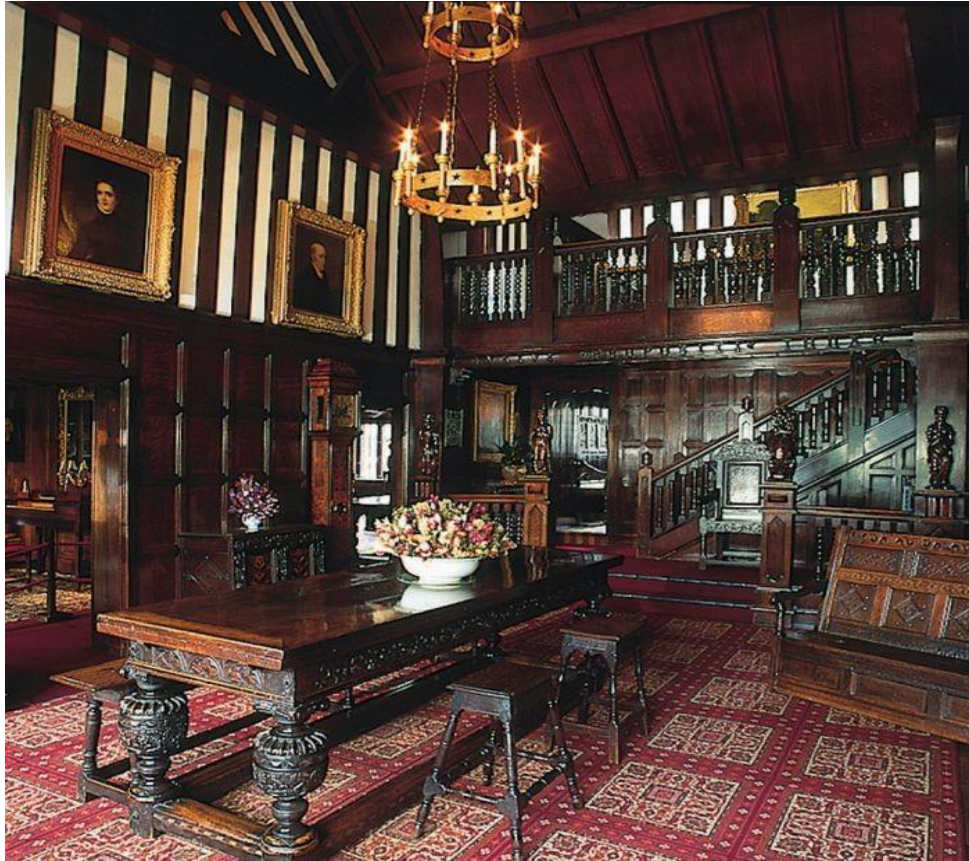


Figure 10, Shibden Hall entrance. Calderdale Museums 2020

Anne Lister designed a Moss Hut which she used for intimate meetings with Ann Walker at the beginning of their relationship during the same time frame in which male landowners were constructing obelisks and towers (Historic England), an interesting contrast. There is little to no evidence remaining of the Moss Hut, only a brief visualization of the replicated Moss Hut on the HBO and BBC TV Series *Gentlemen Jack* (BBC 2020).

Towards the south of the gardens are the informal wooded pleasure grounds developed by Anne Lister. The pleasure grounds are divided into two sections. The west half leads to the Shibden Hall Road into Cunnery Wood (Historic England 2020) and extends towards the west down to the end of the North Wood. The east section faces down the hillside through the North Wood and onto the lake. On the south side of the west terrace, there is a small valley with a broad stone cascade from which a stream leads down to a pond. On the west side of the cascade, (*Figure 11*), showing Dr John Lister's sons, there is a wide stone tunnel

which leads towards the Shibden Hall Road where two ponds follow the woods through the valley (Historic England 2020).



Figure 11, Dr John Lister's sons Charlie and John playing in front of the cascade, Shibden Hall Twitter 2020

Sissinghurst Castle and Vita Sackville-West

History of Sissinghurst

The National Trust title for Sissinghurst is Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens, and there is an assumption that a park was established at Sissinghurst with the building of the Tudor house which was stated in the deeds at Sissinghurst to have been built in the 1500's (National Trust, 2020). The park is also mentioned in the deeds between 1531 and 1631 (National Trust 2020).

The buildings which form Sissinghurst Castle are made up of several discrete elements. These include a long north to south, red brick Tudor range, built in 1490, which is Grade I listed. This was converted to living areas in the 1930s and in 1965 by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson. It faces out onto an outer paved and hedge-enclosed forecourt . The range was built as the servants' quarters, onto the house which the Baker family built to replace the original model manor house, which was sited within the moat, where the present orchard is now placed. The range is divided centrally near the gatehouse. Its central arch, erected by Sir John Baker in 1535, leads into the inner courtyard towards the far east side where the red brick, three storey Elizabethan Tower, along with its octagonal turrets, is placed (Historic England 2020). This is where Vita Sackville-West wrote most of her work.



Figure 12, Sissinghurst entrance. National Trust 2020

The Elizabethan Tower was built during the 1580s and restoration started on it in 2017. The Tower is one of the oldest remaining parts of the Sissinghurst and along with the Priest's house and the South Cottage is Grade II* listed. The South Cottage is located inside the gardens of the courtyard house, and it is possible that it may have been built by Sir John Baker's son Richard. The Farmhouse of Sissinghurst Castle is Grade II listed and situated on the south side, with a view of the Castle forecourt (Historic England 2020).

Sissinghurst, like Shibden Hall, saw a variety of owners including the De Bereham family during the middle of the 13th century, The Baker family from 1490, and from 1756-1763 the military occupied the property to use as a prison resulting in a significant amount of damage. In 1764 the property was partially demolished by Sir Horace Mann, with the remains being used as the parish poorhouse. In 1814 it was sold to a farmer, Barton Cheeseman (in 1903) who sold it to another farmer William Wilmshurst in 1926, and in 1928 it was put up for sale. In 1930 Vita Sackville-West and Harold purchased the estate.

Vita Sackville-West

Vita Sackville-West, Lady Nicolson (1892 – 1962), was a garden designer and writer of journalism, novels, and letters and diaries (National Trust 2020). She also wrote poetry, including *The Land* (1926) and *The Garden* (1946). In partnership with her husband, Sir Harold Nicolson, the couple designed the gardens at Sissinghurst with Vita providing the planting and Harold planning the architectural design (Historic England 2020).

Vita grew up in her beloved childhood home of Knole (*Figure 13*). She was unable to inherit Knole due to it being entailed, and it was passed onto her cousin who was the next male heir. This was deeply upsetting to Vita, and she was determined to create her own garden at Sissinghurst as she had done at Knole.



Figure 13 , Knole, National Trust. 2020

The layout of family life at Sissinghurst was unusual, with the family split up into different buildings. In 1931 the tower was restored, resulting in a room for Vita which together with the other two rooms is open to visitors (Historic England). Vita resided in her Tower next to a portrait of Virginia and Harold resided in the South Cottage, the first building that was made habitable in 1930. As the children grew up they lived in the Tudor range at the front of the estate. This arrangement provided a privacy and independence that Vita and Harold's relationship required.

Vita and Harold's marriage was not a traditional one, and both had numerous same-sex affairs throughout their marriage. The relationships that Vita had were intimate and personal, and her lovers would often stay with her at Sissinghurst. During 1918-1921 Vita had a relationship with Violet Trefusis (née Keppel) and later had a love affair with the writer Virginia Woolf (1882 - 1941). Photos of her are portrayed in the novel (*Figures 14, 15, 16*).

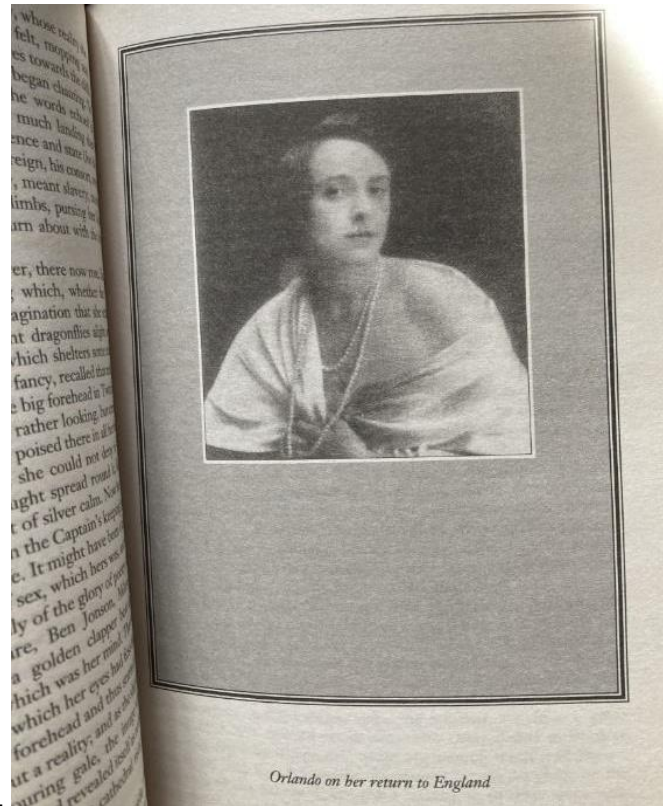


Figure 14, 'Orlando' or Vita', Woolf 1928;2004

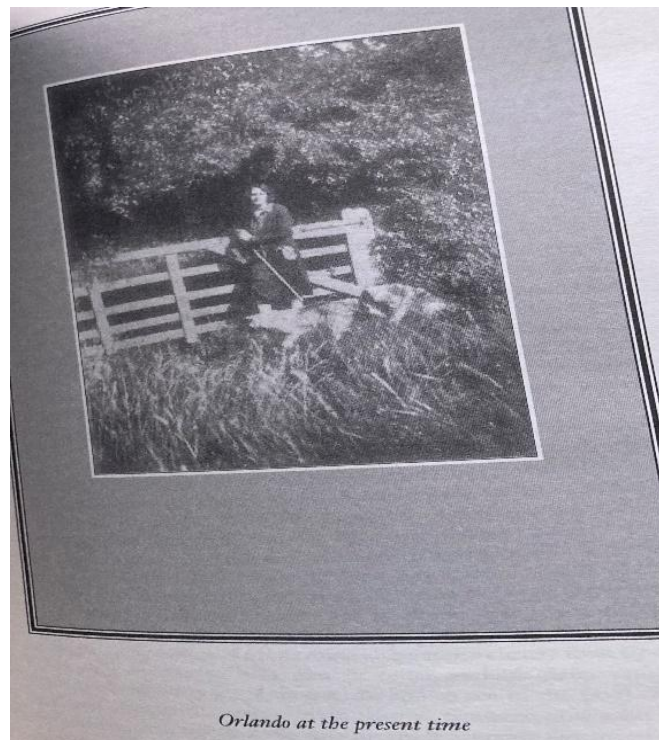


Figure 15, 'Orlando' or Vita at current time of book 1928, Woolf 1928

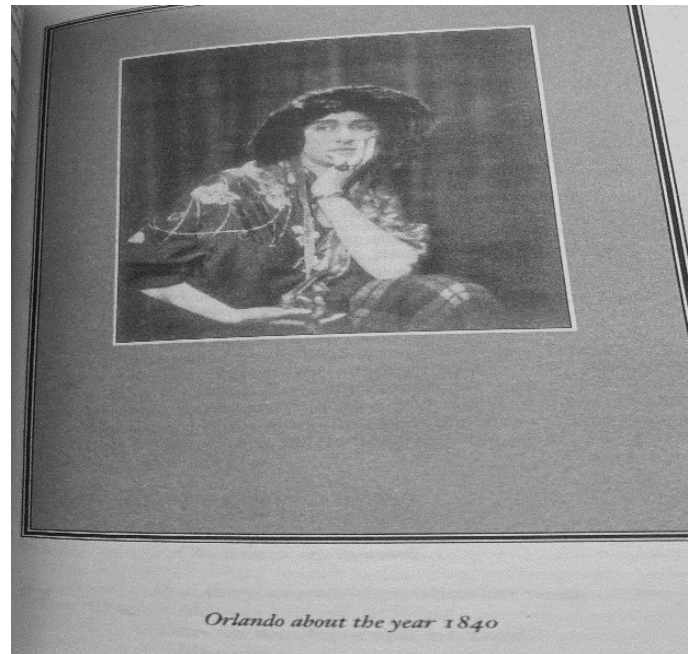


Figure 16; 'Orlando' or Vita in 1840, Woolf, 1928; 2004

As well as lovers visiting Vita at Sissinghurst, Vita also visited Virginia Woolf's summer cottage Monk House. Virginia Woolf, who lived there with her husband, had an outhouse built in order for her to write, and this is where Woolf completed *Orlando* (1928) a novel inspired by Vita Sackville-West.

Despite the significance of Virginia and Vita's love affair, and the impact of Vita and Harold's relationships on the compartmentalized living arrangements at Sissinghurst, there is very little information provided by the National Trust webpage. Vita's sexuality is however discussed in the *Who was Vita-Sackville-West?* discussion post (National Trust 2020), and a framed portrait of Virginia Woolf sits on Vita's desk in the Tower.

Remodeling of Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens

Sissinghurst Castle has a formal garden, created on the late 12th century moated site by Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold, using the surviving built 16th century features and the surrounding land which had formed parts of the 16th century park. The park was planted with parkland trees during the 20th century along with the gardens which were designed and planted by Vita Sackville-West and husband. In 1932 a broken avenue of popular trees was planted, which run towards the east up to the Castle entrance (Historic England 2020).

Renovations at Sissinghurst were ongoing from when they bought the property and the gardens also were extensively redesigned over the same period. The gardens surrounding the entrance to the east and west, as well as the moat to the north and east of the estate were created and planted during the period of 1930 to around 1939 (Historic England 2020). Harold Nicolson designed the structure for the Rose Garden, and it was planted in 1937 where the former kitchen garden used to be. The high brick wall with the crescent shaped arbor was built in 1935 (Historic England 2020).

Despite such a strong collaboration between the pair in designing and building the gardens, it was Sir Harold that is credited with designing the formal layout for the garden's enclosures which were linked via views, and Vita who is credited with the enthusiastic planting (Historic England 2020). Between 1930-1939 the formal gardens located by the entrance range and near to the arms of the moat in the direction of north and east were created (Historic England 2020). Fragments of the avenue of Poplars, where 36 trees were planted, can be viewed from the south areas where the present parkland is located. Two lakes were created (c. 1930) which are enclosed by woodland (Historic England 2020). A small vine-covered loggia, placed in the north-west corner, served as an outdoor dining room for the family.



Figure 17, View from Nuttery, Sissinghurst, National Trust 2020

The path from the White Garden from the west and along the south side of the Priest's house leads towards the garden which is known as the Delos. The lawn is enclosed by walls covered with climbers on the north, west and south sides, with the west and south walls being Grade I listed (Historic England 2020). Contained within the Tower Lawn, which was established in 1931, is a small sunken garden which was originally built as the Lion Pond in 1930 but was drained in order to form the current garden in 1939 (Historic England 2020). There is a statue of Dionysus which was installed in 1932 but was replaced in 1995, it is located on the site of the southern moat arm with the statue being the focus.

An Octagonal gazebo, in memory of Harold Nicolson, was erected by his sons in 1969. The Orchard was more than likely established during the 1900s and developed by Vita and Harold in 193. It contains a dovecote, erected in 1954, as well as a Greek altar. (Historic England 2020).

Chapter 2: Discussion

When reflecting on how heritage institutions present LGBTQ+ Heritage it is useful to consider Queer Theory and notions of Authenticity, including the work of core Queer theorists ; Teresa De Laurentis, Michel Foucault, and Eve Sedgwick: Gender and Feminist scholars who discuss Queer theory or versions of early sexology in their work, including Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Shelia Jefferys. John Ruskin, Laura Jane Smith and Alison Oram discuss the sense of authenticity and the relevance of heritage values with Oram in particular considering the relationships between the love and space between women in the historic house, and this allows an exploration of whether the heritage industry presents the homosexual space of these women to the public with integrity.

Heritage and Museum studies scholar Laura Jane Smith states in *Uses of Heritage* (2016) that:

‘Heritage is a multilayered performance, this performance is by visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation that incorporate a sense of remembrance and monumentalizing while constructing the concept of place, by belonging and understanding the present.’ (Laura Jane Smith 2016)

In considering past representations of LGBTQ+ heritage it is important to take care in addressing matters that have had a 'difficult' past and comparing to the progress that is slowly being made in society, including the heritage institutions that care for LGBTQ+ properties. LGBTQ+ history or heritage has long been shut out of history. Reflecting on the present, with the inclusivity that heritage institutions are now producing including exhibitions exclusively about LGBTQ+ property owners such as The Ladies of Llangollen, Anne Lister and Vita Sackville-West, can feel almost like an invasion of their privacy. These individuals, who were themselves oppressed and hid in plain sight, are now having their domestic and psychological interiors exposed to the public gaze. There is an inherent

challenge in replicating the original layouts and atmospheres, if such houses are to each be time capsule representing the authentic voices of both house and owner (Ruskin, 1988). One of the main challenges of these problematized spaces is highlighted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who claims that "Queer may refer to the ways in which the multiple elements of an individual's gender and sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Brideoake 2005).

In considering how visitors experience and negotiate authenticity, it is the networks of relationships between objects, people and places that appear to be central, not the things in and of themselves" (Jones 2010). This is important with these houses and how they have been presented, especially to the LGBTQ+ community who have a stake in the presentation of their values in that heritage.

Seeing the Light: Re-evaluating LGBTQ+ Heritage

Historic houses and LGBTQ+ society have influenced and constituted the shaping of built history, with domestic spaces having been places of solitude and refuge to escape the heteronormative society that abused LGBTQ+ individuals for leading 'distinctive' or 'uncustomary' lives.

In honoring a painful and complicated past, LGBTQ+ Heritage is attempting to restore and unveil houses to the public and present lives and personalities in an authentic setting. These heritage sites are given a range of values; they can be a heritage multivalent (Smith 2016). To illustrate, Plas Newydd has an historical value on account of the generations inhabiting the house before the Ladies of Llangollen resided there; furthermore, there are the aesthetic values of Plas Newydd with the striking exterior and interior with the oak carvings and oak paneling styled in a patchwork Gothic theme; the exterior also has the gardens which reflect the Ladies' personalities, as does the treatment and remodeling that The Ladies underwent in representing the house. This resulted in society and literati

visitors, and tourists, as Plas Newydd became an attraction inspiring the cultural imaginations of those who visited, a site for discourse on the ladies intellectual abilities in thus redesigning Plas Newydd to suit their strong personalities (Reynolds 2010), and also a source of gossip about the Ladies 'lifestyle' in the coffee houses of London and Dublin. (Gordon 1999).

There are a range of cultural items which have platformed these women as celebrities of their day, for example the 19th century souvenirs celebrating the Ladies of Llangollen seen in the People's Collection (Plas Newydd, 2010), and souvenirs of today which can be found in the Plas Newydd gift shop. Some of these items can include; plates, jugs, and paintings which in relation to these women present the Ladies of Llangollen in their complete black outfits and top hats (*Figure 19*)(Plas Newydd 2010). Another example of further cultural representation of these women can be seen with the recreation of the Moss House that Anne Lister designed for Ann Walker in order to seduce her into submission, it was recreated for a BBC series 'Gentlemen Jack' which presents a perspective of how Anne Lister may have lived her life through the detailed account of her life in her diaries and her possessions that were left in Shibden Hall. There is a load of books which have been written about Anne Lister and extracts from her diaries are incorporated into the texts and a book has been written about the Moss Hut from local authors.



Figure 18 Ladies souvenirs, Plas Newydd, 2010

Calderdale Museums have a merchandise site that has Anne Lister quotes on keyrings, on their site, they also have a display of sealed cards that are uniquely hand-painted watercolour of different positions of Shibden Hall by a local artist Jane Austin (*Figures 19& 20*)



Figure 19, Original front door of Shibden, Austin, 2019 Figure 20, Shibden Hall, near Cascade, Austin, 2019

Calderdale Museums have begun to commemorate Anne Lister by mentioning her on the Shibden Hall webpage of Calderdale Museums, however; they describe Anne only being a diarist with no mention of her sexuality (Calderdale 2020).

Sissinghurst Castle has an overt historic value, with records from the late 12th century evidencing that Sissinghurst and its gardens were originally a moat guarded house situated underneath the present orchard (Historic England 2020). In certain aspects, Sissinghurst could be classed as having a claim to a spiritual value with the Priest's house, a detached property sitting at the edge of the White Gardens that was possibly originally attached to the 1570 Elizabethan mansion (Historic England 2020). Overall, the authentic value of Sissinghurst is clearly curated in the preservation and restoration of the property, the exhibitions, and the marketing of Sissinghurst which is carefully presented to visitors to increase awareness of its history therefore enabling a direct connection towards the estate as they experience its contextual surroundings. Here, John Ruskin's 'voicefulness' in relation to historic buildings that have the feel of having long been inhabited and developed by different generations of humanity, applies to Shibden Hall, Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens as well as Plas Newydd; all these houses have had numerous owners as well as the thousands of people that visit each house via heritage tourism.

The renovations and restorations that historic houses undergo in order to be presented to the public is dramatic to bring in and allow for significant numbers of visitors for a brief period of time, and this has left a long-lasting effect on the characteristics of a historic house. Ruskin states that there is no question about expediency or the feeling of whether we decide to preserve the buildings of our past or not, as the heritage industry has no right to disturb these sites. They are not owned by us, but they are part of the heritage of all the generations following us (Ruskin 1849).

Authenticity is the network of relationships between objects, people and places that appear to be the most significant part, not the things that are in and of themselves (Ruskin 1849, 233-34). When people experience the raw authenticity of an object it is 'something akin to aura or voicefulness that they articulate' (Jones 2010), and people can develop a connection just through the atmosphere that can have an impact on these relationships between people and objects and places. One example is Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens, where different generations of people and visitors who represent the many lives and history of people that have passed through, and the different conditions of the buildings during its existence; from the Elizabethan house and tower which once was a 17th century prison used for captured French prisoners, to the opening of the South Cottage to the public in 2017 (National Trust 2020). Other examples are The Ladies of Llangollen's remodeling of Plas Newydd influencing Anne Lister in her remodeling of Shibden Hall; and Virginia Woolf, one of Vita Sackville-West's lovers, considering '*The Jessamy Bride*' (an allusion to The Ladies of Llangollen) as a title for *Orlando* before deciding to take Vita Sackville-West as her subject for *Orlando; A Biography*, 1928 (Woolf, 2003). Within these examples it is possible to see the network between people, objects and places evidencing LGBTQ+ individuals referring back and forth to each other across time, in order to create a sense of community whilst 'hidden in plain sight'.

Despite sexologists during the 19th century displaying strong differences of opinions towards lesbianism, with opinions gradually changing through the 20th century sexologists

such as Havelock Ellis in 1897 through to Michel Foucault in 1976 discuss homosexuality in a positive light.

Havelock Ellis's book *Sexual Inversion* (1897) was the first work to view homosexuality as neither a disease nor a crime. His approach was new and controversial for academia in the Victorian period, and *Sexual Inversion* became the first English medical textbook which addressed homosexuality following the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment (Dixon 2009).

Michel Foucault's most notorious book for the period *History of Sexuality* (1976) discusses the aspect of 'Victorian sexual repression' 'Foucault's view or argument is that sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social & cultural rather than biological origins' by saying this Foucault did not suggest that sexuality did not exist, he is stating that through cultural and social origins it encourages how someone explores their sexuality not through their genetics and this could be throughout someone's life-time that they are exploring or a short period of time (Spargo, 1999).

Hidden in Plain Sight: Erasure of LGBTQ+ Heritage

Sexologists during the early 19th century appear to have had a profound lack of enthusiasm for feminism and the lesbian manifestations that these sexologists believe to be happening within the feminist movement. By the late 19th century sexologists began to apply 'scientific' descriptions of lesbianism (Jeffery's 1985). This act of apathy against the female population is an ambush against the emotional and romantic involvement between women as it is compromising the relationships and weakening their strength from fighting against their heterosexual male counterparts so they can appear as equal not inferior (Jeffery's 1985). Lillian Faderman justifies:

‘That women’s same-sex friendships came to be seen as a threat in the late 19th century as the women’s movement developed to challenge men’s dominance and new social and economic forces presented middle-class women with the new possibility of choosing not to marry and be dependent on men.’ (Jefferys 1985).

In the early 1890s there was an increase in single women living together in houses away from their parents without supervision this followed the 1870 Education Act in Britain which allowed further employment for women (Jefferys 1985). These women had escaped the structure of the heterosexual society where they were partially forced into marrying male suitors no matter their sexuality and the idea of single women living together became a threat toward the development of the ongoing female movement that sexologists such as Edward Carpenter were afraid of affecting.

Moreover, with the expectation of more single women moving out their family homes to live with other female ‘friends’ in 1870s England had given other lesbians a minor form of reassurance that they were not exclusively living as female companions. Just like the Ladies of Llangollen, who a decade earlier in 1778 left their hometown in Ireland to live independently together maintaining and renovating Plas Newydd, Anne Lister had the confidence a decade later be to outspoken about her sexuality and manipulate that to form a respectable status in society despite the obvious criticism amongst fellow business competitors and families who disagreed with Anne’s lifestyle and sexuality.

Sheila Jeffreys also quotes Edward Carpenter in her book *Women’s Friendships and Lesbianism*:

‘The pseudosexual was characterized as a woman who did not necessarily fit the masculine stereotype, had been seduced by a ‘real homosexual’ and led away from a natural heterosexuality, to which it was hoped that she would return.’ (Jefferys 1985)

Anne Lister and the Ladies of Llangollen appeared to present themselves very similarly to one another in the non-traditional but 'feminine' style which sexologists were discussing in literature with the pseudo-homosexual as the major model representing their idea of 'lesbianism and their belief that feminists were removing the typical feminine sex role for their lives through lesbianism.

'As a counterpart to the 'butch' masculine stereotypes of the lesbian which sexologists were creating, they provided a model for the pseudo-homosexual; they made it clear that their concern about the pseudo-homosexual stemmed from what they saw as the spread of homosexuality within the feminist movement.' (Jefferys 1985)

In 1897 Edward Carpenter expressed his feelings of alarm at the phenomenon of lesbianism, which he claimed was manifesting and evolving at speed within the female movement. According to Carpenter this would result in the abandonment of the typical feminine sex role (Jeffreys 1985). This strips away how these women have chosen to present themselves and like Judith Butler who discusses gender performativity, these women are performing their gender as how they choose and by suggesting that there is a fear of women not appearing more feminine, this then effectively destroys the whole aspect of their personalities.

The Ladies Llangollen were criticized for refusing offers of marriage from suitors which their families had chosen for them. Anne had no criticism from her family about her sexuality, they were more than supportive as it would allow her to focus fully on the maintenance of the Shibden Hall estate rather than marrying and moving elsewhere and neglecting the estate due to a man's demands. However, Anne Lister's long-term partner and companion, Ann Walker, suffered immensely from the relationship with Anne Lister. Not just her family but those who lived amongst them felt that the closeness of their relationship was morally incorrect, and they would criticize Ann Walker whenever they could. Ann Walker had many male suitors, throughout the duration of the relationship, who she refused. This caused great uproar with her family, with one suitor making her feel so

pressured into marriage with him that she became ill, impacting on her relationship with Anne.

During the Victorian period the Victorian lady was not supposed to have sexual desires or seek sexual relationships. Women were being primarily used as a sexual object for a man's own sexual satisfaction and to bear children (Oakley, 1972). Most relationships between women were unheard of, or talked about in low voices like something to be ashamed of, and hence lesbianism was in effect policed and erased, including through the destruction of letters and ephemera. Even though it was never made illegal to be lesbian, it was due to be criminalized under Section 11 in 1885 until Queen Victoria declared female homosexuality to be impossible, and for that reason the legislation was rejected again in 1921 (Dryden, 2009). The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and both the House of Commons and the House of Lords rejected Section 11 in fear that it could cause more attention drawn to this aspect of female sexuality. Another assumption was that if lesbianism did exist, it was confined to a tiny proportion of the population or like Queen Victoria who deemed lesbianism 'impossible' many other people during the 19th century may have thought the same. Despite this lack of legality, in 1834 Anne Lister married Ann Walker in a secret service in church, in the eyes of God (Dryden, 2009). It was only in 2004 that same-sex couples could legally enter into binding civil partnerships through the Civil Partnership Act 2004. It had taken 170 years from 1834 for the legal binding between same couples, although it took an additional 9 years until it was legal for same sex couples to actually marry (Dryden, 2009).

Queer histories were suppressed, and the interests of gay and lesbian visitors wanting to view LGBTQ+ history on display were largely ignored until the 1990s because of the fear of creating offense within the more conservative sector of the heritage market. The notorious Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act also prohibited local authorities from spending money on or 'promoting homosexuality' (Aram 2012).

However, biographical accounts, and lesbian and gay histories, had started to become publicly and commercially available during the 1970s and 1980s, but these sexual histories

were not overtly discussed in mainstream public history, such as museums and historic houses. The National Trust 1978 guidebook for Sissinghurst provides an intense description of the history of Sissinghurst, and the representation of Harold and Vita's garden. This was described in the context of a traditional heteronormative relationship "like their own marriage, the garden represents the perfect fusion between the classical and romantic temperaments" with no mention of Vita and Harold's sexualities and non-traditional relationship. This guide has since been rewritten, with a more authentic and accurate representation of the couple's relationship (Aram 2012).

The reassessment of these houses through an LGBTQ+ gaze has been prompted by a cultural shift driven by the LGBTQ+ community, with heritage institutions themselves somewhat slower to catch up. 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the 1967 sexual offences act and led to the National Trust reappraising LGBTQ+ heritage in their properties. Other institutions however, such as Historic England who claim that the Ladies of Llangollen 'shared a romantic friendship' thus dismissing that these women were in fact lesbians and not 'just' friends (Historic England, 2019), is one of many examples of the dominance of Heteronormative Heritage which has directly and negatively misrepresented women like the Ladies and Anne Lister. The emergence of Queer Theory during the 1990s has now allowed Lister's gender transitivity to be celebrated, and has led to a re-evaluation of the Ladies' sense of dress and self-presentation, with their self-fashioning now being perceived as highly performative (Brideoake 2005).

However, the presentation of the authenticity of the LGBTQ+ heritage of all three houses has not been determined by the LGBTQ+ community, but rather remained in the hands of 'experts'. Whether the present ongoing redesign of Shibden to incorporate and reflect Anne Lister's sexuality, and the work at Sissinghurst to re-imagine and create the unfinished garden (which unfortunately does not appear to represent Harold or Vita's original creation with the changing of the style of the garden, originally the designs of the delos gardens was to have a Mediterranean style garden is now presented with woodland planting as a replacement) will be able to present 'authentic voicefulness' for these

properties without evidence of consultation with LGBTQ+ communities or academics, will remain to be seen.

Plas Newydd represents the development of the queer domesticity of the Ladies of Llangollen over the years that they lived together in the house. The presentation of the rooms has been redesigned from the original layout of the house, for example one of the rooms which was the Dressing Room is now presented as an exhibition room highlighting the Ladies' lives rather than original, more intimate, origin of the room (Denbighshire County Council, 2020).

The couple's lives have almost been erased from the public view and replaced with information in booklets, rather than the authentic items that visitors enjoy seeing as these items are rare and are only accessible through museums or historic houses as removing them would not be representing the objects as the real authentic state that encourages networks between objects and people.

The National Trust opened Sissinghurst's South Cottage to the public in 2017 after restoration and refurbishment, it was the first building that was used by the Vita and Harold as it was Harold who spent most of the time in the cottage. There were discussions about the extension of the north side of the cottage in 1932 and adding Harold's bedroom and the flower room (National Trust 2020).

In 1962, the year of Vita's death, the castle and gardens were placed into the hands of her youngest son Nigel Nicolson until 1967, when the estate and surrounding gardens was passed into the care of the National Trust. In 1997 the National Trust has partially converted the range of farm buildings into a restaurant and shop to be used by the public (Historic England 2020).

Anne Lister is a remarkable figure, and the most culturally significant member of her family and other inhabitants of Shibden Hall, but in some respects she appears to have been erased from her own heritage. In 1890 John Lister decoded and hid away her diaries behind

wood paneling at Shibden until his death in 1933 (BBC NEWS, 2015). The current layout of the exterior of the house is the same as Anne's redesigned exterior however Anne's bedroom is presented as an identity-less Edwardian bedroom, with no correlation with the original. It is as if there is no real Anne, and no connection to the idea that Anne's most intimate relationships, as recounted in her hidden diaries, happened at Shibden Hall, in that bedroom.

Promotional material of Shibden Hall on the museum's social media sites is however frequently refreshed with aspects of Anne's life told with references from her detailed journals, and Anne's sexuality is celebrated with for example the connection of Pride Month in June 2020, where images of a Lego Anne Lister waving a Pride flag appeared on their Twitter feed(*Figure 20*).



Figure 21 Anne Lister, Shibden Hall Twitter 2020

Another example of this is on 3rd April 2020 the Shibden Hall Twitter (Shibden Hall 2020) posted images of Anne and shared some of Anne's diary entries to celebrate her 229th birthday.

Further evidence of civic discomfort with Anne Lister's identity was evidenced in the wording of the original Blue Plaque commemorating the non-lawful marriage sacrament that Anne took with Ann Walker in Holy Trinity Church in Halifax, which stated "Gender-non conforming entrepreneur, celebrated marriage without legal recognition to Ann Walker at this church." Protests from lesbian groups led to a consultation following which the plaque was updated to overtly state that Anne Lister was lesbian (*Figure 22*).



Figure 22, Anne Lister's blue plaque, Holy Trinity Church, Halifax BBC 2019

Conclusion

In Alison Oram's work, *Sexuality of Heterotopia: time, space and love between women in the historic house (2012)*, Oram challenges the reader and the heritage industry with the question 'Does the heritage industry construct normatively gendered and heterosexualised space in presenting the historic house to the visitor?' It is a question that will produce different responses due to the openness of the question, and is dependent on whether the heritage institutions have begun presenting the space without heterosexualised assumptions and pressures. Heritage institutions such as The National Trust, Calderdale Museums and Denbighshire City Council all have attempted to state, in various forms, that these women were in romantic relationships, but some are more confident in this discourse than others. The National Trust have raised awareness and educated visitors in the importance of expressing the Queer history of their properties. Their webpages, for example, address previous mistakes in not representing the sexualities of previous owners and masking their sexual identities. Anne Lister's impact, not only Shibden but on the town of Halifax as a well-known businesswoman of the early 19th century (Calderdale Museums 2020) is clear, as is her increasing significance as a culturally iconic lesbian figure. Calderdale Museums have acknowledged that Anne Lister's sexuality is not to be hidden, and have attempted to celebrate it on social media, however in the presentation of the house itself the dissonance in presentation is evident, as in the 'neutering' of Anne's bedroom at Shibden Hall.

With properties such as Shibden Hall there are clear connections between Anne, her sexuality and her remodeling and recreation of the Shibden landscape, which provided a clear sense of feminization and softening under her direction and design. The remodeling of the Plas Newydd is another direct connection between people and place, with the Gothic interpretation and religious items that signify their personalities. This is not as distinct when viewing Sissinghurst, and this may be because Vita's impact on Sissinghurst is filtered through her husband and family. The enclosed gardens allow privacy, and the separation of

the living arrangements allow discretion in aspects of their marriage but there is no clear feminisation or intimacy of spaces as is apparent when reflecting on Shibden Hall or Plas Newydd.

It is clear that further research into the erasure of LGBTQ+ people from their heritage does need to be conducted. The National Trust have begun to identify the LGBTQ+ owners of properties who created a sense of place in which they felt secure, and are respectfully presenting that sense of place to the LGBTQ+ community and the wider public. Due to unforeseen circumstances viewing the properties first-hand was difficult, and limited the scope of this dissertation. Further research is needed, especially in order to gain a deeper understanding of whether Sissinghurst reveals more than the glimpse of Virginia Woolf on Vita's desk, and what other hidden aspects of Vita's personality and sexuality might be seen in the interior of Sissinghurst.

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