

## Eliza Raine (1791-1860)

Eliza Raine was born in 1791 in Vepery, Madras, in India to the East India Company Surgeon William Raine and an Indian woman. She had a sister, Jane Raine, though the two were not very close. Her father died in 1800 and his friend and colleague Mr William Duffin travelled to India to bring the girls to Britain, it is unclear what happened to her mother but all we know is that she remained in India without her daughters. During this period, 'virtually all Indian women and their children went to Britain as dependants'.<sup>1</sup> Luckily, the girls had the guardianship of Mr Duffin, and large sums of money inherited from their father, to ensure their safety and security. The Duffins set up a medical practice in York where Mr Duffin grew to be a well respected member of the community. Her expensive schooling and her position in society meant Eliza experienced very little contact with her Indian heritage. The East India Trading Company, however, did have a strong impact on her life. Eliza quotes an epistle written by Lord Cornwallis, governor of India to his daughter, demonstrating the importance of the East India Company in determining her cultural and literary outlook.<sup>2</sup> It is unclear whether Eliza ever wished to return to India, however, being isolated from her mother and birth country may have contributed to her later bouts of depression and loneliness.

In 1805, Eliza Raine began attending 'The Manor House School' in York (now known as King's Manor). The school was predominantly for boarders and therefore Raine was introduced into this sphere of British wealth. It is here where Raine was introduced to her first love, Anne Lister, who has been described as 'the first modern lesbian'. Raine is assumed to have been 13 with Lister being 14 when they were assigned roommates, material such as letter correspondence and Lister's diary entries show that here their friendship became a relationship. Raine's story has never been examined in as much detail as Lister's was. The volume of Lister's available diary material led to the tv serialisation of such content in BBC's 'Gentleman Jack', featuring no explicit references towards Raine. This emphasises a more whitewashed and conservative view of history which is often perpetuated throughout histories of Britain, solidifying Eliza Raine as a woman who deserves to be brought attention to. This experience of first love can be seen as a core event which defined the rest of Raine's life, in particular how and why she became institutionalised.

In 1809 Eliza left 'The Manor House School', and moved to live with her cousin Lady Crawford in Doncaster, however this was an unhappy coupling and she moved to live with the Duffins in 1812. During this time, letters between Lister and Raine mention Miss Norcliffe, who would become Anne's next lover; it is at this point where there is a clear shift from Eliza's previous stability to

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*, (Delhi : Permanent Black, 2004), 182-188.

<sup>2</sup> *A Partial Epistle, from Lord Cornwallis to his daughter*, - copied by Eliza. Image 2301 - how to cite this? Anne Lister Collection, Calderdale Archive, Halifax.

institutional living. Eliza received an offer of engagement from Captain John Alexander, a naval officer from Halifax, however at Anne's request she turned him down. In a letter from Eliza to Anne, dated 24<sup>th</sup> July 1812 Eliza expresses how she 'shall praise God for his mercy'.<sup>3</sup> From this letter, we can infer the emotional distress that Eliza may have been going through, declaring that she wished she 'had some friend at my side to fight amidst this mortal warfare in my defence'.<sup>4</sup> An additional note at the end explicitly refers to the termination of their engagement, as she writes that 'Captain A persist[s] in refusing to take his pretence and of returning my ring?'.<sup>5</sup>

The instability of Eliza's life continues as she comes to disagreements with Miss Marsh, the later Mrs Duffin, and furthermore Anne's relations with Eliza become increasingly distanced as she also enters relations with Mariana Belcombe. Extracts from letters can help us to assess this, "Your anxiously awaited letter arrived ... from your letter you treat me with dry sarcastic reproach".<sup>6</sup> In 1814 Eliza was forced out of the Duffins home and due to the declining state of her mental health, was admitted to Dr Belcombe's asylum in Clifton numerous times. By 1816, she was there permanently.

The York City Archives hold two signed grant records summarising the legal procedures relating to Eliza's property after her removal to the Asylum. In one grant written around 1818, William Duffin and Robert Swann are identified as those taking custody of Eliza's estate<sup>7</sup>. In the following 1940 grant, John Swann is named as custodian<sup>8</sup>. That Eliza was no longer perceived fit to have responsibility over her assets reinforces the reality of her mental illness diagnosis, and her loss of autonomy - the exception, perhaps, being her diary and letter-writing. Since arriving as an immigrant in England, the focus of Eliza's identity had shifted. Although we cannot absolutely determine the reason that she was institutionalised, her sexuality and racial identity were certainly influential. From the later eighteenth century, a trend can be seen in the admittance of individuals perceived to be struggling with their mental health to asylums in order to remove them from society, with wealthier families more easily able to pay for relations to be housed<sup>9</sup>. Eliza was likely to have been given better care than other patients would have received in a public asylum, with more opportunity for privacy and dignity<sup>10</sup>. Yet however well she was treated, Eliza ultimately led a solitary life for the majority of her adulthood, sequestered from society because of her identity.

---

<sup>3</sup> Eliza Raine, 1812. SH:7/ML/A/43, *The Anne Lister Collection*, Calderdale Archive, Halifax.

<sup>4</sup> SH:7/ML/A/43

<sup>5</sup> SH:7/ML/A/43

<sup>6</sup> SH:7/ML/A, *The Anne Lister Collection*, Calderdale Archive, Halifax.

<sup>7</sup> Custody of Eliza Raine, c1818, GDC/428/1, Explore York Archive, North Yorkshire.

<sup>8</sup> Custody of Eliza Raine, 2 June 1840, GDC/428/2, Explore York Archive, North Yorkshire.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Smith, *Lunatic Hospitals in Georgian England, 1750-1830*, (New York: Routledge, 2007): 3.

<sup>10</sup> Jeanna Mankins, 'Insane Asylums in Britain During the Nineteenth Century', *History Thesis*, University of Texas (2022): 27.

Despite her situation, Eliza was not completely cut off from past relationships. Eliza stopped writing letters to Anne by the end of 1814, but it seems that they still had contact through Anne's frequent visits to the asylum. It is useful to look at Anne Lister's diaries to gain insight into what a day might have looked like for Eliza when she had visitors. In May 1828 Anne observed, for example, that Eliza was a "melancholy sight", "would not speak for a long time but would lie on the sofa", but that later they walked in the garden for around half an hour<sup>11</sup>. From this we can understand that Eliza was indeed suffering from poor mental health, and or accompanying social isolation. As it is Anne's perspective, however, we cannot make assumptions about how Eliza herself felt, but it is still very useful to understand how her behaviour was observed from the point of view of her past lover. This also reinforces the prevailing nature of Eliza's sexual identity through her life, and how tied up this was with her institutionalisation.

Ancestry holds an 1841 census record which documents a snapshot of Eliza's life in the Belcombe Asylum<sup>12</sup>. It is only next to Eliza's name in the 'place of birth' column that "F.P." is noted, meaning "Foreign Parts". This implies that Eliza may have been the only patient born outside Britain within the institution. This only adds to the isolation she must have felt as a result of her non-normative sexuality. Having been removed from her mother's culture in India, she was now isolated from her adopted community. When most of the available information focuses on heteronormative white people, Eliza's story is important in shedding light on the experience of a non-heteronormative mixed-race woman in the Nineteenth-Century. Belcombe's asylum closed in 1853. An admission register on Ancestry confirms that Eliza was moved to Terrace House, in Osbaldwick on the 10th of November<sup>13</sup>. Eliza died alone aged 69 on December 31, 1860 whilst still in care. She was buried in St Thomas' Church graveyard, in Osbaldwick.

Ultimately, this research that has been collected on Eliza Raine would provide an excellent opportunity for the York Castle Museum to dedicate an exhibition to the experiences of women and minorities in institutions in the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that the York Castle Museum is already housed in eighteenth century prison buildings, the addition of another immersive attraction focused on the lives of women in asylums would give visitors a fascinating insight into the connections that can be made between the treatment of prisoners and those who were placed into psychiatric care. Essentially, Eliza experienced a complete loss of autonomy and as potentially the only mixed-race woman in her institution, such an exhibition would be extremely relevant for a modern audience who will be aware of these themes, particularly with regards to immigration and

---

<sup>11</sup> Anne Lister, 10 May 1828, SH:7/ML/E/10/0158, *The Anne Lister Collection*, Calderdale Archive, Halifax.

<sup>12</sup> Eliza Raine, in the '1841 England Census', [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk).

<sup>13</sup> Eliza Raine, in 'UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers, 1846-1921' for 'Provincial Licensed Houses', [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk).

heritage in Britain. This should be handled with care, being mindful of those with lived experience or living with memory of similar events.

When taking into account the potential engagement activities for HERStory, telling Eliza's story would contribute to the uncovering of the stories of women with complex and multifaceted stories in York who have been largely overlooked due to their backgrounds as well as being overshadowed by more renowned individuals. In Eliza's case, she was a mixed-race woman living in a society that she was never truly accepted in due to her sexuality, her colour, and her illegitimate birth. Therefore, her individuality has been somewhat neglected, certainly when it comes to her relationship with Anne Lister. Eliza is a historical figure who brings up questions of identity and representation in the history of sexuality, and her history has always been present in the archives. Yet her story has not been given the same status as Anne's despite the fact that she also has major ties to modern day society.

## 250 Word Summary

Eliza Raine (1791-1860)

***“Oh that I had some friend at my side to fight amidst this mortal warfare in my defence, but I have not even that” - Eliza Raine, 1812***

Eliza Raine and her sister Jane were born in India in 1791 under British Imperial rule to an Indian mother and a British naval surgeon. At the age of 12, the girls were taken on the long journey to England, out of the care of her mother whom they never saw again. They were under the guardianship of William Duffin, a close friend of her fathers.

She went to school at Kings Manor boarding house in York where she met Anne Lister, who wrote detailed diary entries about her life and romantic relationships, and is thought of by some as Britain's first “modern lesbian”. Eliza and Anne lived in the same room, developed a close, loving relationship and wrote many love letters, notes and poems to each other; Eliza would stay with the Lister family during the summers. However, by 1810 their relationship had become distant; Anne was living in York and Eliza was living with Lady Crawford, who she did not like, in Doncaster.

In 1816, Eliza's mental health was considered to be in decline and she moved into a private asylum in Clifton. She died alone aged 69, having spent roughly 44 years in asylums. Her letters to Anne, writing and poems during this period often describe feelings of longing and loneliness, probably due to her mixed race and her sexual identity, making her isolated as an outcast in society. She therefore has a unique and important story to tell in the history of women in York.

## Bibliography

## **Primary**

*The Anne Lister Collection*, Calderdale Archives, Halifax, West Yorkshire.

“Diary of Anne Lister, Glossary of Names,” *West Yorkshire Catalogue*, 2003, accessed Jan 14, 2024, <https://wyascatablogue.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/glossary-of-names-1.pdf>.

Explore York Archives.

*ancestry.co.uk*.

## **Secondary**

Chauncey Jr, George. “From Sexual Inversion To Homosexuality: Medicine And The Changing Conceptualization Of Female Deviance”. *Salmagundi* no. 58/59 (1982).

Fisher, Michael H., *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*, (Delhi : Permanent Black, 2004).

Mankins, Jeanna. “Insane Asylums in Britain During the Nineteenth Century”. *History Thesis*. University of Texas (2022).

Milne-Smith, Amy. “Gender and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain”. *History Compass* 20:11 (2022).

Roulston, Chris. “Interpreting the Thin Archive: Anne Lister, Eliza Raine, and Telling School Tales”. *John Hopkins University Press* 55:2 (2022).

Smith, Leonard. “Lunatic Hospitals in Georgian England, 1750-1830” (New York: Routledge, 2007).

**Produced by Tara Chappell, India Hancox, Charlotte Knight, Isabella Phillips and Zoe Street, University of York History Students, January 2024.**