

THE WATCH LIST

THE INSIDE TRACK ON EVERY NEW SHOW THAT MATTERS

EDITED BY BOYD HILTON



BBC1
MAY
(TBC)

FOR WEST-YORKSHIRE-born dramatist Sally Wainwright, whose vivid and singular storytelling has often centred on characters both real and fictional from that part of the world (*Happy Valley*, *To Walk Invisible*, *Last Tango In Halifax*), a character study of local 19th-century landowner, traveller and industrialist, Anne Lister, was a no-brainer. Lister is often heralded as 'the first modern lesbian' and was nicknamed Gentleman Jack for the way she defied the norms of the time with her wardrobe (choosing only to wear black) and conduct (Lister entered into 'marriage' ceremonies with women 200 years before it became legal). In particular, Lister's relationship with wealthy heiress Ann Walker, played by Sophie Rundle, scandalised Halifax society.

"Sally's been studying Anne for 20 years," says Exec Producer Faith Penhale. "She grew up with the legend of Anne Lister on her doorstep and has had a lifetime to get to know this extraordinary, multi-faceted woman." Wainwright also had the source material of Lister's own de-coded diaries to use while working on her script.

As for who to cast as a figure Wainwright had studied so closely, she decided to reunite with Suranne Jones for the fourth time. "When Sally was thinking who could play Anne Lister there really wasn't anyone else," says Penhale. "Suranne utterly inhabits the role. Sally made sure they had plenty of time in the rehearsal room, which doesn't always happen on telly, to really dig into the character and it's a bravura performance. She really knocks your socks off."

There's even scope for future series. "I feel we've only scratched the surface in eight episodes," says Penhale. "There is so much more to say about Anne."

PAUL SIMPER

GIRL POWER

GENTLEMAN JACK

Why writer/director Sally Wainwright is turning to one of British history's most extraordinary women as the subject of her new big drama