Wakefield Historical Society

"The Listers of Shibden Hall" presented by David Glover, President of the Halifax Antiquarian Society

On Wednesday 14 October 2026 at 7pm at the West Yorkshire History Centre

The audience this evening was treated to an insightful and engaging talk by David Glover about members of the Lister family and their connection to the Shibden Hall and Estate.

Of course, the TV series "Gentleman Jack" has brought Anne Lister to national fame – (Anne inherited in 1836 and after her death, the estate passed to Ann Walker, before returning to the Lister family in 1854)

But the lives of many of the other members of the family had rich stories to tell, including pioneering medical work, international travel, links to the slave trade in the West Indies and various times of financial woes.

The earlier story begins with James Lister and his wife, Mary Issott. James worked as an apothecary in Lightcliffe.

His younger son, Thomas Lister, decided to seek his fortune in North America and in January 1733, he sailed for Virginia and settled there, marrying an Ann Morris. In entries to her diaries, Ann Lister refers to Thomas as an importer of wood, animal skins and tobacco but sadly his business failed.

Thomas died in 1740 when his son was only aged six. William Lister, born in 1734, was sent back to England to the care of Rev. John Lister, and grew up at Shibden. His communication with his mother, still back in America was limited to the occasional letter.

William was overlooked in inheriting Shibden when Samuel died in 1766 and instead was put into the haberdashery trade in London before eventually settling in South Wales where he died in 1780 aged 46.

William's son, another John Lister, (1771 to 1836) married with a coincidence, another Ann Morris in Marylebone and they eventually settled to marriage and family life in Stockwell, South London. William was buried on his death in Kennington.

When Shibden returned to the family in 1854, it was Dr John Lister who took ownership until his death in 1867. Prior to that, he trained for the medical profession and worked for five years as a ship's doctor from 1827 onwards. His travel notes reflect a fascinating story of that part of his life – he inspected Napoleon's grave in St Helena, travelled to the Holy Land, Suez and the Indian coastal settlements. Returning to England, he was admitted to the Royal College of Physicians and in 1844, married Louisa Ann Grant and they moved to Sandown on

the Isle of Wight, where John Lister opened a medical practice and settled into life with his life and his children.

John Lister was a man of wide interests, especially geology, fossils and fauna. He was a member of various learned societies.

On inheriting Shibden, he became a part-time resident at the Hall, spending much of his winter months in London.

This stage of his life was overshadowed by the repercussions of Anne Lister's final journey to the east of the Black Sea. The expenses involved in repatriating her body became a matter of considerable legal argument and proceedings went as far as the Chancery Court before John Lister was held to be responsible. To pay for all this, John Lister had to sell the Northgate Hotel and Casino, but things can't have been too drastic as he was also able to purchase Shibden Grange and Godley.

Dr John Lister was eventually appointed as a magistrate but sadly he died very suddenly on holiday in 1867. His was the first burial in the newly acquired burying place in Southowram township, the funeral being taken by Archdeacon Charles Musgrave, Vicar of Halifax.

In a move unusual for the time, Marian (John Lister's younger sister) inherited her father's property in East Yorkshire. She lived in Scarborough and then in York, passing away aged 84 in 1882 and was also buried in Southowram. Marian left £2,252 in her will, a significant sum in her time, evidence of her prosperity in life.

Louisa Ann Grant was born in Dominica in September 1816 but grew up in St Vincent. Louisa's family were slave owners – owning thirteen slaves in 1834 after the emancipation legislation was passed, they were paid £336 in compensation.

Louisa had two sons, Charles and John. Charles joined the Navy at the age of 13 and on leaving, went to Caius College, Cambridge, and qualified as a doctor. Some of his case notes still survive. Charles travelled extensively in the 1870s, including New York, the West Indies and the Upper Amazon. He died from malaria in Bolivia, where he was buried.

A further John Lister, educated at Winchester, succeeded to Shibden Hall at the age of 20 in 1847.

John was a socialist. At Shibden, he opened extra coal mines and turned Pump Farm into an occupational school for delinquent boys. The school was run by Catholic priests. To widespread horror, John converted to Catholicism in 1871.

John served as a Liberal councillor on the West Riding County Council and then moved across to the Labour Party, becoming in 1893, the first treasurer of the Labour Party. He entertained many high profile guests at Shibden, including Keir Hardie amongst others.

John was physically attacked and hospitalised in 1900 for speaking at an anti-Boer War Peace rally.

Hit by financial trouble in 1923, he faced ruin. Shibden Hall and the estate had to be sold, but thanks to the generosity of the new owners, John Lister continued to live at the Hall for the rest of his life.

In 1926, Shibden Park was formally opened to the public.

David answered many questions amid further discussions – a sure sign of the interest which his presentation had prompted and he duly received a well-deserved Vote of Thanks.

Steve Hargrave

27 October 2026