

The famous legend that Queen Victoria denied the existence of lesbianism may not be true, but for hundreds of years love and sex between women in Britain has been largely downplayed or invisible. Now, for the first time, the stories of women who desired other women are told in a revealing narrative sweep of 500 years, from the cross-dressers of Tudor England to the Lesbian Avengers of twenty-first century activism.

Over those years, British attitudes towards women's same-sex desire underwent many transformations and women found many different ways to express their love for each other. Negotiating historical events (such as the outbreak of wars or changes in property law), the 'female husbands' of the eighteenth century, the 'Romantic Friends' of the nineteenth and the 'New Women' of the twentieth all forged new lesbian identities. Their shared history is made up of individual voices. Some are famous, such as Radclyffe Hall, whose novel *The Well of Loneliness* was banned for obscenity, or Virginia Woolf, whose love affair with Vita Sackville-West produced *Orlando*. Others are little-known, but equally eloquent. The recent discovery of the sexually explicit diaries of the Yorkshirewoman Anne Lister has thrown a totally new light on early Victorian lesbian lives.

Illustrated with a fascinating selection of images, impeccably researched and brilliantly readable, *A Lesbian History of Britain* is a ground-breaking achievement: the new standard history of lesbian desire in Britain.