

Unquiet Women in History

Over 80 people attended the Teesdale u3a Annual General Meeting on 29 April. Following proceedings, Max Adams gave an illustrated talk on forgotten women in history, from the early medieval period to early 19th century, and who are encompassed in his book, *Unquiet Women*.

These forthright women, not often written about, are notable in different ways. Mary Astell (1696-1731) was not afraid to write and converse with religious leaders, politicians and notable thinkers such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the philosopher, John Norris, the latter publishing her work. She gained immediate and lasting fame with *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* which argued the case for girls to be educated away from men so they could emerge uncowed and self-confident.

In contrast, Max spoke of letters in 396 between sisters describing their unusual travels through Egypt, climbing 7497 feet up Mount Sinai. He outlined the importance of the woman's global role in the textile industry over centuries, handing down their assets – a bespoke weaving pattern – to daughters, or sharing tablet and back-strap weaving skills in South America. Women were also 'quiet' but significant contributors to embroidering the Bayeux Tapestry. Many women inherited estates through a dower in widowhood and used their influence as landowners.

In late medieval times, Christine de Pizan (c1405) was the first known women to make an income from writing. She wrote moral philosophy and political theory, campaigning for women's rights, and spelling out men's failure in government which led to war and misery.

Another moving example of a woman's freedom of self-expression was the *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* by Artemisia Gentileschi. It is one of the earliest surviving self-portraits of a woman and is sensual yet self-assured. She has painted herself painting herself, traditionally a male prerogative.

The vote of thanks was given by Elizabeth Long. To know more about the u3a, visit the website www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk

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