

A documentary by artist, Tam Gilbert



Sensing Helen

Uncovering the life stories of two visually
impaired women living in
Victorian Dorset

Persuasion Arts
creating persuasive stories through drama



LOTTERY FUNDED

Welcome

*"Out of the uncharted, unthinkable dark we came,
And in a little time we shall return again
Into the vast, unanswering dark."*

"A Chant of Darkness"
by Helen Keller

Well, out of the cold. Eventually and into the albeit briefly, summer?!

Now that the warmth appears to be stabilizing, the year can blossom forth with it's creative juices flowing and the sap in many artistic veins truly rising. There's some wonderful things blossoming in issue 39.

Highlights include....A report on the changes to Write On, An update on Sensing Helen, Film Reviews of The Silent Child and The Quiet Place, News of Upcoming Events and other matters of interest.

- Guest Editor, Lorna Wilson

Sadly we say goodbye to our monthly Cafe LUA meet-ups. With the consistently low turn-out in recent months, we feel Workshops and our online presence are preferable to our members.

We will hope to offer one-off Café LUA events as opportunities to socialise and network. We are sorry for any disappointment, but please do watch this space!

- The LUA Committee

www.linkuparts.org.uk

facebook.com/LinkUpArts

@LUArtistsContents:

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WRITE ON

Write On Now

Now we are meeting at Sarum College. Although an awesome historic building, it is fully wheelchair accessible, and the room is divine: light, airy, warm, peaceful and, I'm told, the acoustics are good for those with hearing difficulties.

Now we are 8 members. In April we welcomed Anne, Geoff, Fenella, Jo and Maya who joined existing members, Sam, Gray and Gini. I have to say they are an absolute joy to work with, and are producing some interesting, often hilarious, writing. This month Sam Moran has submitted two of her poems to the newsletter for your delectation. I'm hoping we'll make regular contributions as the writing flows and grows.

We are feeling happy and welcomed by the helpful staff at Sarum College. Heartfelt thanks to Jenny, Mary and Linda for the room, your kindness and warm welcomes every Tuesday. I hope you read this!

We do have space for a few more people, so please get in touch if you'd like to find out more: angelastreet@tiscali.co.uk

We meet on Tuesday mornings, 10.30-12.30, Sarum College, 19 The Cathedral Close, Salisbury.

Angela Street

Write On Project Manager and Facilitator

For LinkUpArts

WRITE ON WORKSHOP

Poems by Sam Moran

THE ROOM

I can't watch
I can't see the room
the place where I
gave birth to the idea
that I was once flesh.
I heaved myself up
onto this plinth
I made myself stone.
here facing you
the unambiguous breath
of me, living, moving, watching
gone.
As I'm barred.
cold as January
silent as a rock
the mossy years
stretching out
like my pebbled tears.

BRIGID

This is new life
open to possibilities
this fertility goddess
blooming in sun and shade
the stretch marks
weave tales of whispered
knowing
as the years
form patterns of history
a babies breath
from yesterday

SENSING HELEN

Blog: Elizabeth's World

Our thanks to Disability Arts Online for allowing us to reproduce this blog by Tam Gilbert.

I am aware that it has been a while since my last post. Our film has its first airings this week and I am yet to tell of its journey. We have been busy completing our work with the young people and have started the second phase of the project – collecting oral histories which began with two visits to Dorset Blind Association groups in February.

Sadly, the number of Dorset women coming forward to share their stories with us has been fewer than anticipated, so we are extending this element until the end of May. (If, after reading this post you would be interested in participating, please do drop me an email!)

But to go back to where I left off – discovering Elizabeth Groves who found herself alone in Dorset County Lunatic Asylum in 1889 – how did she end up there and did she die alone? It was thrilling looking through the Census information and tracing her movements through the decades – information is all type-written, so initially accessible.



Left: The Sensing Helen Team on Location: The Union Workhouse, Weymouth. Photo by Alastair Nisbet

Clicking on each Census image gave the details in hand-written form – still hard to read, but once I knew who I was looking for, fascinating to see households listed!

The large 'B' by Elizabeth's name, classifying her as 'Blind from birth' was typically Medical Model and it made me wonder whether such records are still kept

and what description I would find next to my name?

Unfortunately there is a 100 year rule on what the public are allowed to access on Ancestry websites so I can only assume that disability is mentioned.

I discovered from the 1861 Census that at two year old, Elizabeth and her two older sisters Sarah Jane and Martha, lived with their mother, Susan Groves, a tailoress, in their own household in Hope Street, Weymouth. This suggests that Susan was doing well. Sadly, by the time Elizabeth was twelve, she and her mother were inmates at the Union Workhouse and Martha, now 15, was living away from home; possibly known as Marth and a servant for the Loder family. There was no mention of Sarah Jane.

Right: Black and white postcard showing exterior of Bristol School of Industry



By 1881, at twenty-two, Elizabeth and Susan's luck had changed; they were reunited with Martha (a domestic servant); all three living with Susan's elder sister, (also named Elizabeth), a charwoman. A strong female family unit, there has been no mention of a Mr Groves. Who was he? My team were all of the opinion that Elizabeth was the

daughter of John Groves who owned the brewery in Weymouth, I was more cynical – despite her being listed as a scholar, and the Brewery being spitting distance from Hope Street, we could find no evidence that the families were related.

Finding out that Elizabeth had had some sort of Education was a revelation; how could this have been possible and when did it take place? Was the word 'scholar' used to signify she was of school age, but didn't actually attend, or could she have been enrolled at a local school? I wanted to believe the latter!



Left: Interior of Bristol School of Industry, showing School Hall. Image from the postcard collection held at Bristol Archives

We discovered from the Herrison Records that she "had spent many years in a Blind Asylum at Bristol" which we discovered was also known Bristol School of Industry for the Blind. This must have been where she learned Braille, but how long did

she stay there – In each Census she was listed as residing in Weymouth, so she couldn't have been long out of the County.

Having kept Elizabeth with the family up until now, I wondered what had made Susan (now in her late sixties) send her daughter to the Lunatic Asylum? Could the family no longer 'cope' with her visual impairment? I desperately wanted to introduce Elizabeth to the world,

With so many unanswered questions, a heavy heart and workshops fast approaching, I took time away from Elizabeth to try to find another woman's story. We stumbled across Sophia Rideout, from Sturminster Newton, who, as luck would have it, also went to Bristol School of Industry, but ten years before Elizabeth. Would Sophia's story be any different?

#SensingHelen
@HLFSouthWest

By Tam Gilbert

Blog: Readers' Feedback

Colin Phillimore, Reader:

I've really loved seeing 'Sensing Helen' grow from it's early creativity as a 10/15 minute piece at Salisbury Arts Centre, to the HLF funding bid (many meetings!), initial finds at Dorset History Centre and now the visceral and measurable pleasure of students from Victoria Education College and Home Educated students exploring the lives of Sophia and Elizabeth.

This work is so pertinent to current discussions. We pride ourselves in 'how far we've come!' in the field of inclusion. We build up our Paralympians as Superheroes and Strictly Come Dancing pioneers (love you Johnny-really) and they are amazing. Whilst everyday, parents, children and young adults cope with the stomach churning and anxiety ridden reality of school, college, training course or.....isolation and exclusion. Where individual needs are 'too expensive', 'holding others back' or reduced to 'just bad behaviour'-all of course illegal and contrary to the aspirations of the Equality Act 2010, Children and Families Act 2014 and other legislative dictates.

The feeling that these kids should once again be 'put' into 'specialist' provision (appropriate for some maybe) just because child-focused lesson plans are time consuming iOS being heard, from parents.

Paterson, (2007) quoted in Centre for Special and Inclusive Education, University of Exeter 'Lesson planning for diversity' <http://www.soc-for-ed-studies.org.uk/documents/smallgrants/finalReports/black-a.pdf> says that "the knowledge of the pupils in context reflected a holistic sensitivity to their academic characteristics. Fundamentally he argues that teachers who think of their class in a more personal manner rather than exhibiting a 'them and us' attitude are better placed to include students with learning difficulties and students with other diverse learning needs". Paterson (2007) concludes by suggesting "that where professional learning for teachers builds on their existing knowledge of students, it is more likely that educational programmes will be developed that are designed to meet the unique needs of all students" (p. 433).

I look forward to the learning outcomes being shared from 'Sensing Helen' Tam and seeing it influence this debate from a real grass root and arts -based position. After all it's not a new concept is it? Confucius he says:

"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand". Confucius and the irony of that language-is not lost!!!!!!

Maria Gayton, Community Liaison Officer at Dorset History Centre:

I've really enjoyed the two blogs, and the whole experience of working with Tam and the SH team.

The archives at Dorset History Centre contain the stories of thousands of people, and SH has really taken the trouble to understand how to find those stories and how to research around an individual to find more of their life circumstances. Dorset History Centre loves this commitment to historical research as a basis for artistic outcomes; it is one of the best ways to discover, explore and share the past with varied audiences. Michele O'Brien and Alastair Nisbet have used this approach consistently in previous projects, and are great advocates for using archives as inspiration.

It is our intention at Dorset History Centre to remove barriers to accessing our building or records wherever we find them. Working with Tam and the students from Victoria Education Centre was an opportunity for us to 'test' how well we could meet additional access requirements around visual disability and for a group of wheelchair users. The group were a pleasure to work with, taking a great interest in the science of the building and in the process of interviewing.

We welcome all visitors to the Centre, and are always happy to hear how we could support somebody's access.

I can't wait to see Tam's performance and to receive the new oral history interviews into the Dorset Sound Archive where they will help to improve the level of representation for disabled people in the County's record.

Read more on Tam Gilbert's Blog: <http://disabilityarts.online/author/Tam-Gilbert/>

HOW TO PUT ON AN ACCESSIBLE EXHIBITION

With reference to the article in Issue 38 of the LUA Newsletter 'Where are the Disabled Curators?' by Aidan Moesby, LUA have come across this excellent guide by Shape Arts (introduction kindly reproduced by permission of Shape Arts).

Shape Arts have created this short guide for curators, programmers and exhibition organisers to give an overview of how to ensure that the exhibition you're putting on is accessible and inclusive of disabled people.

This guide forms part of our series of free resources on art, disability and access. It should be seen as an overview to support an approach that considers access and inclusion from the very beginning and at all stages of an organisation or individual's work. Almost 20% of the UK population identify as disabled; Shape's resources are designed to provide arts organisations and professionals with the knowledge and tools required to help build a more diverse, equal and inclusive cultural sector for disabled people as artists, audiences and workers.

For full guide see <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-curating>

ARTWORK IN THIS ISSUE

Cover	Graphic by The Web Booth, Cover Design Lorna Wilson
Page 5,6	Photos by Alastair Nisbet, black and white images from postcard collection held at Bristol Archives
Page 14	Self Portrait Sarah Godshill
Pages 10,11,13	Photographs reproduced courtesy of Disabled Arts Online.

DISABILITY ARTS ONLINE

FILM REVIEW:

The Silent Child. A Quiet Place. By Colin Hambrook

Our thanks to Disability Arts Online for allowing us to reproduce an extract from Colin Hambrook's review.

April 23, 2018 -

In her latest film critique Alison Wilde compares underlying messages of two films featuring deaf actors cast in lead roles – the Hollywood horror *A Quiet Place* and the award-winning short *The Silent Child* – and asks some deeper questions about the issue of disabled actors playing disabled roles.



Left to right: Emily Blunt plays Evelyn Abbott and Millicent Simmonds plays Regan Abbott in A QUIET PLACE, from Paramount Pictures. Photo Credit: Jonny Cournoyer © 2018 Paramount Pictures.

A Quiet Place is a rare film in that it ticks a lot of disability boxes, doesn't have an explicit message about disability or our attitudes to it, includes a Deaf person in a leading role, but best of all is a hugely enjoyable film (as long as you like the 'horror genre').

The week before I saw this I found myself to be one of the (unpopular) dissenters, in my disagreement with the praise given to Oscar-winning short film, *The Silent Child*. It was wonderful to see Maisie Sly cast in the central role of Libby and it was also good to see the delivery of a much-needed, and overt, message about the need to recognise Sign Language and a demonstration of the loneliness of children who are denied social connections – at school, in communities of schoolchildren, and to the Deaf community. But there are also potential dangers associated with a film such as this, where only one person, Libby's social worker Joanne (Rachel Shenton), has an

awareness of her need to communicate with BSL (perhaps reinforcing ideas that professionals know better, which so many of us have fought against).

Such a short film did not allow sufficient time for its writers to show a more nuanced picture of why Libby's parents did not support BSL, or the struggles which disabled/Deaf families face in trying to get enough support to just live. Nor were we made aware of anything beyond the individual relationship with Joanne, such as the crisis in provision for Deaf children, (described in a recent Guardian article as being in 'complete disarray').

I feel that the blatancy of *The Silent Child's* moral lesson is likely to reach an audience who do not need to be converted. It may well be useful in promoting inclusion in schools but experience tells me that children can 'do diversity' much better than adults do, and it is the policy-makers and professionals who need to watch the film.

Although Rachel Shenton wrote the film and had a parent who became Deaf, I have found the disposition for overt messages to be common in many films directed by non-disabled writers and directors (but certainly not all); think *Me Before You* and *Wonder*, for recent examples of non-disabled writers who were curious about the effects of impairments they had witnessed, both purveying ableist/ disableist stories borne of curiosity, proffering schmaltzy, inspiration porn-type messages, which prosper at the box office.

The Silent Child doesn't patronise in this way, but its status as a worthy Oscar winning film about difference is also likely to strengthen the idea that this is what films about disabled and Deaf people should look like. Given the tendency for audiences to resist explicitly message-based films, often disregarding the moral lessons (probably more so when it is focused on only one individual), I much prefer the depiction of Deafness, as an integral part of the story, in *A Quiet Place*. Here too, there was the deliberate casting of a Deaf person. It seems that the director John Krasinski met some resistance in casting Millicent Simmonds as Regan, but was determined to have a Deaf actor in the role.



Millicent Simmonds in A Quiet Place. Photo Credit: Jonny Cournoyer © 2018 Paramount Pictures. All rights reserved.

A Quiet Place is doing well at the box office, having made over \$40 million in its first weekend, but it differs a great deal from both the films noted above and also *The Silent Child*, in that it has no explicit message about Deafness or disability, nor does it place the spectator as a voyeur of a world which is symbolised as 'different' to their own.

The Deaf actor Millicent Simmonds plays a key role, as Regan Abbot, the daughter in a family of five who are living in a post-apocalyptic world of silence; they are all the prey of sound-

hunting monsters, and their survival is dependent on making no sound. Whilst Regan's Deafness is key to some aspects of the plot, in terms of their survival and the relationships between family members, her character is embedded firmly within the story and is not used as a narrative 'prosthetic' – we see elements of her life as sister, a daughter, and as an agent of her own destiny, putting pressure on her dad to develop a better hearing aid (no spoilers here so you'll have to judge for yourself).

Whilst there is certainly no suggestion that Regan's parents have ignored her needs in the way Libby's mother did in *The Silent Child* (quite the opposite given the family's use of sign language), we perhaps see a general sense of stigma played out in Millicent's doubts about her father's love and commitment to her. Another aspect of the film which excels, especially in the resonance with many disabled families' experiences, is the film's portrayal of inter-dependency as a crucial means of survival, with all the characters (including the children) acting as agents to protect themselves and the rest of their family.

This achievement of a nuanced portrayal of impairment and disablement is achieved through a number of cinematic strategies; for example, we see the family walking along on their journey together and are unaware of our position as hearing viewers, until the camera switches from the whole family to focus on Regan – the sound of the crunching gravel suddenly disappears, directly showing Regan's point of view/hearing.

Although Krasinski and his co-writer, Bryan Woods, were motivated by their love of silent films, this film often feels like a meditation on sound. Knowing that their lives depend on silence, audience members who can hear become hyper-aware of the smallest of sounds, adding to the mounting tensions and anticipated horror, increasing viewers' engagement with the story.

The biggest flaw of the film is that this is probably less true for viewers with hearing impairments, if they are viewing without subtitles. I found it incongruous that subtitles were given when the characters were using sign language to communicate, but they were not provided on the few occasions where the characters used oral communications – here the audience were dependent on hearing. However, the necessity of sign language as a means of communication is an unavoidable theme of the film, demonstrating its undisputable value to all those who depend on it for daily living and survival as a family/community...

By Colin Hambrook

[To read the full article, visit <http://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/quiet-place-silent-child-loud-questions/>](http://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/quiet-place-silent-child-loud-questions/)

EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES:

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

Our thanks to Disability Arts Online for allowing us to reproduce this review.

When 9 March 2018 - 2 June 2018

Where Touring Across the UK (see below for venues)

Description

Our Country's Good is both a comedy and a powerful drama which shows us how we can escape the chains that bind us.

In 1787, a fleet of ships carrying over 700 convicts set sail on an eight month voyage. When they arrive in Australia, their survival is by no means certain: supplies are running out, the convicts are stealing food or trying to escape and the guards are threatening mutiny.



Our Country's Good tells the extraordinary true story of a group of convicts and a young officer who rehearse and perform a play – Australia's first theatrical production. With opposition from the officers and a leading lady who may be hanged, the odds are stacked against them.

Our Country's Good is a touring production made in co-production with multi-award winning Ramps on the Moon, whose previous collaborations over the last two years include the comedy hit The Government Inspector and a critically acclaimed version of The Who's Tommy. The production features the creative use of audio description, captioning and British Sign Language interpretation. Our Country's Good will be touring across the UK, for more information visit rampsonthemoon.co.uk. Age 14+ due to strong language and nudity.

The Times awarded it 4 stars, The Stage awarded it 4 stars

The Guardian (3 stars): "Ramps on the Moon uses sign language and captioning brilliantly in a striking update of Timberlake Wertenbaker's historical humanist play"

Remaining Touring Dates:

Sheffield Theatres (sheffieldtheatres.co.uk) Saturday 12 May – Saturday 19 May.

Birmingham Repertory Theatre (www.birmingham-rep.co.uk) Wednesday 23 May – Saturday 2 June

Access:

We provide British Sign Language Interpretation, Captioning, Audio Description for all performances for this production. A relaxed performance is also available.

EVENTS AT SALISBURY ARTS CENTRE

If you're planning to come to the Salisbury Arts Centre this spring, you may be interested in the following event...

Self Portraits

When: 24 Apr - 25 May 2018

Time: 10am - 3pm, Tuesday - Saturday



Part autobiography, part history of late twentieth/early twenty-first century short-sightedness.

Sarah Godsill made her first painted self portrait at 16 after seeing Stanley Spencer's 1913 self portrait and has drawn and painted them ever since.

Why self portraits?

Lack of sitters, curiosity about the self, no need to flatter - these reasons allow the artist to scrutinise with the freedom to be honest.

Objects and clothing may give a hint of mood, time and place.

Some motifs reappear throughout; a war poet, the changing shape of eyewear and the devotion to a good pair of dungarees.

This exhibition reflects thirty five years of a quiet life with the usual highs, lows, dreams and realities

At the heart of LinkUpArts:



NEWSLETTER FORMATS

You can receive this Newsletter in print form, it is available in bigger type and an audio cassette. You can also download it from salisburyartscentre.co.uk -> Resident Companies ->LinkUpArts



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LinkUpArts and Salisbury Arts Centre work together for the benefit of both organisations. LUA advises and consults with Salisbury Arts Centre on its Disability Arts programming and helps to promote the events. Salisbury Arts Centre gives LUA its home and provides marketing and administrative support. LUA is a strategic creative partner in Salisbury Arts Centre's Creative Family.

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