

Countdown to ArtsFest 2011 (17<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> September)

In a series of interviews, Anthea Simmons uncovers some of the fascinating 'back stories' behind a selection of artists participating in ArtsFest.

Keith Robinson may not have lived in Lyme for long, but he has already made an impact. Look out for his wonderfully graphic map of the town up on the wall at Cobb Gate and in the Tourist Information Office.

### **What is the history of your involvement in the Arts?**

I studied graphic design and illustration at Berkshire College of Art and then at Middlesex. During my time at college, I was awarded a Thames Television Design Bursary to travel to the slums of Brazil, where I ran printing workshops, enabling community workers to produce their own, relevant health information posters.

At college, I was interested in animation, graphics and illustration, but found it hard to settle on just one. In 1992, in my final year, a tutor introduced me to a company in Brighton, UCM Ltd, who were in 'multimedia'. I had no idea what multimedia was but my tutor urged me to see them. So I did. I was blown away! Here was a way of combining everything I was interested in and adding in something brand new – interactivity! And all created from an ordinary desktop computer.

Today, we take CGI (computer generated imagery) and programs like Photoshop for granted. In the early nineties, this area was the preserve of the broadcasting industry because the kit was so expensive and computer animation was a really difficult field to break into; but UCM was producing animation on a PC and creating what felt like an entirely new medium. At the time, I didn't even know how to switch on a computer, but I decided I'd better learn fast and got myself a job in the company. I nearly flunked my degree by going down to Brighton once a week to play on their computers!

These were pioneering days in digital media. Few homes had a PC and the World Wide Web was in its infancy. UCM was at the cutting edge.

In 1996, I joined the BBC Multimedia Centre. It seems odd, now, to think of the BBC without a website, but during my time there, we developed BBC online as well as interactive TV and CD-ROMs. I worked on some fascinating projects, travelling to Northern Ireland for an interactive history of The Troubles, and to Germany to develop a CD-ROM on Bach.

Working at the BBC was a fantastic opportunity in many ways. Since college, I'd wanted to produce work for television. So I used to hang around the BBC graphics department and got to know some of the designers there. Eventually I was given a title sequence to design – a documentary series called 'How

Buildings Learn' on BBC2. I still remember what a thrill it was the first time I saw my work on the telly!

In 1997, I founded cross-media design agency, Codename. We worked with the BBC, Channel 4 and Granada Media, amongst others, to produce a wide variety of work including short films, TV graphics and websites. Then the .com bubble burst and we got caught in the ripple. In 2001, I went freelance, producing animation and motion graphics for all the UK's major broadcasters. Recent work includes series with Terry Wogan and Griff Rhys Jones. I also got myself an artists' agent and began to develop a portfolio of illustration work. The last two years, however, has seen a shift in my focus. I was given the chance to illustrate a set of stamps for Guernsey Post to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Sherlock Holmes story I wrote integrates the stamps in a mystery with clues in the pictures. Its success led to a commission for a series of themed fantasy adventure stories for children - 'Penny the Postie'- which include commemorative sets of stamps. The second book is due out in July.

**So you have now evolved into a writer and illustrator of children's books...and a map-maker?** Amongst other things, yes! I still do television work and illustration commissions for books and magazines. As to the map, we had just moved down here when I heard about the competition and I thought doing it would be a great way to get to know the town. It took me nine months of wandering about, taking photographs, trying to get a 3d aerial projection from information garnered on foot...very difficult. The map is 6ft x 4ft and because of the level of detail I ended up drawing smaller sections by hand, then sticking it together on my studio wall to make sure it all matched up. Once I was happy, I scanned all the sections into the computer and assembled the final thing in Photoshop.

**What your key influences and sources of inspiration as an illustrator?** My greatest influence was my old art college tutor, George Glenny. He taught me a way of seeing and thinking which opened up the whole world of visual communication. Artistic influences are too many to list really, but I would pick out Arthur Rackham, for his line work; Herge, for his draughtsmanship and clarity; and Ernest Shepard and Helen Oxenbury, whose acute perception of body language gives their characters such life.

What really interests me about illustration is telling stories and it's the interaction between the words and the pictures which fascinates me now. And I get a lot of inspiration from my kids – their imaginations are so free.

**And if you had to be locked in a museum or gallery for a weekend?** It would have to be the British Museum. I've had a love affair with it ever since researching a college project there and I've been going back ever since. It's such an incredible, eclectic collection. Everyone makes a beeline for the Mummies but I'm mesmerised by the small things, simple, everyday things used by real people thousands of years ago. For example, a little sketch of a donkey's head by an

Egyptian scribe or the cosmetic utensils used by an Egyptian woman. I look at them and wonder about the 'back story' and feel such strong link with these people who were just like us in so many ways.

When the Lindisfarne Gospels were housed at the Museum, a carpet page in the manuscript caught my eye, and I tried to copy a small section. It was a fantastically intricate celtic pattern, incredibly difficult to reproduce. But then I suddenly cracked the code and looked at the piece with its creator's eyes. It felt as if he had spoken to me over the years.

### **How did you get involved in ArtsFest?**

Jennie Pearson introduced me. I thought it would be a great way to get to know people and to get involved in Lyme's lively art scene. I am really looking forward to it. I'll be exhibiting at the Baptist Church Hall and taking part in the Art Trail, with work in the Museum, the Tourist Information Centre and Alcove.

### **What are you looking forward to in this year's ArtsFest?**

I'm curious to find out about Christine Allison's fish rubbing! Her sunrise sketching sounds great too, although I'm not very good at early starts!

| The typography talk on the 22<sup>nd</sup> sounds fascinating, and I'm really looking forward to being part of the Literary Evening at By The Bay on the 20<sup>th</sup> .

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