

With ArtsFest thoroughly underway, Anthea Simmons seizes one last chance to profile an ArtsFest alumnus...Natalie Manifold, of Literary Lyme fame. You can find Natalie most of this week at the Cobb Centre where she is curating a show about Lyme's cinematic heritage...if she is not there, she'll be conducting a guided tour!

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

I was totally obsessed by painting and sculpture as a child and basically did not read at all. I went to a Catholic school - St Peter's , Solihull, and encountered an English teacher who pretty much scared the hell out of me..but she got me reading! Did she spot some latent talent? No! I think she thought I was backward and awkward! Anyway, I read lots of twentieth century classics and ended up doing 'A' level English alongside Art and , just to prove that I could , Chemistry! I went to do a foundation course in Art at Leamington but I left before completing the course for personal reasons, moved to the Staffs/Derbyshire border and applied to read English at Birmingham. I didn't want to do another art course. I felt I wasn't being taught anything. It was all woolly 'express yourself' and 'be free' stuff! I wanted to learn! I chose Birmingham because it was a lovely, green campus and because David Lodge was a lecturer there, and I liked his way of thinking. Co-Build's head of research was also based there and I was fascinated by the whole area of dictionary compilation. One of my two dissertations was on how and why certain slang words get into the dictionary. My other was an adaptation of 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' (TFLW) from novel to film script. Actually, my exposure to 'TFLW' started much, much earlier! My mum was obsessed with the book and brought us kids down to Lyme for our holidays. As soon as 'TFLW' came out on video, my mum bought it and we must have seen it every month for years; but it was only when I saw it on the shelves at University that I finally read it and fell in love with it myself. I just love that post-modern narrator, the intrusive author..and the three endings ( if you count the one in the middle!). Incidentally, John Fowles' wife, Elizabeth, was the one who decided that it should be published with the alternative endings.

Anyway, I moved down to Dorset and realised that there was nothing in Lyme that really promoted Lyme's literary heritage, apart from some items in the museum. It just came to me that that was something I could do, so I found somewhere to live got a job in the Royal Lion and set about researching and identifying locations. My first walk was during the Fossil Festival, on Jane Austen ,and I was absolutely terrified, not least because I was worried about the health and safety issues involved in taking people onto the Cobb! It was not financially successful and it was really the wrong audience, although there is a link between Jane and Mary Anning via Mary's father. Jane had him quote for the repair of a piece of furniture and found him too expensive!

I kept going, though, and developed the John Fowles' walks, too, gaining access to his house and identifying all the locations from the novel. I now do up to four walks a week covering Jane Austen; John Fowles; 'TFL'sW'; The Undercliff ( Lyme Regis to Axmouth); Burton Bradstock to Cogden Beach; and Mary Anning, of course.

I now also write for the Jane Austen Societies on America and the UK and have been doing some location work for Chicago Opera for their production of 'Persuasion'.

**What are your sources of inspiration?** The Undercliff. I don't know why. I've loved it ever since I was a kid. I feel threatened by it, too. I was working with Natural England, recently, and was walking along a path I use regularly. Tom (??) was just ahead of me and had trodden on the same patch of ground but when I put my foot down, I fell down a crevasse! I was save by my bra straps which got caught on something! Thank goodness I was not walking there alone! A chasm had opened up! That's what I mean about the threat..it's very real.

**Which museum or gallery would you like to be locked up in for a weekend and what piece of art would you like to own?**

Tate Modern. I love the Turbine Room. I used to like going there on the late opening night, when it was only Londoners who visited rather than it being full of tourists. I liked that Louise Bourgeois spider.

I'm more of a museum, person, though...and, actually, I love Lyme Regis Museum! I am always spotting something new. Only the other day I suddenly noticed a photo of a pill box on The Cobb. I must have walked past that photo a hundred times or more! Did you know that Eisenhower planned the D Day Landings in The Three Cups or that the Cobb was packed with explosives underneath it in case of enemy invasion?

I went to Chatsworth House recently and really liked Damien Hirst's unicorns. One side is perfect white, the other shows the anatomy. I love that juxtaposition of the modernity of the work against the backdrop of the house and Capability Brown's landscaping.

**How long have you been involved in ArtsFest and what would you like to see change/develop?**

I got involved three years ago. Originally, I wanted to start a separate Literary Festival but quickly realised that I'd be applying for the same funding and it would effectively cannibalise the events. Better to operate under ArtsFest's banner. The walks are now an established part of the week's programme. I'd love to see more open air theatre. I can think of a couple of magical locations to stage plays...a part of the Undercliff near Chimney Rock is just like a minute green amphitheatre. I think we could make more of these locations.

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

I am really, really, REALLY looking forward to the screening of the French Lieutenant's Woman at the cinema! I hope lots of people go!