

SHEILA GRAHAM (1927-2009)

By Tracey Hebron

The only child of Kenneth and Leonora, Sheila Graham was born in 1927 in Stairfoot, Barnsley. She attended Beech Grove School near Locke Park. A creative child, she loved to draw, this passion for art may have been influenced by her father, an artist who became known for his line drawings of Barnsley and who later went on to work for Coty Perfumes in London.



Talented in her own right Sheila studied at St Martins School of Art. After completing her studies and with a love of the theatre and in particular ballet, Sheila went on to work for the Old Vic in Liverpool where she began designing costumes and sets. At the same time as working in the theatre she took up a position with the film production company Two Cities Films in 1937. Here she worked as an assistant in the art department on a salary of £4.10s per week. It was here she gained a large amount of experience working on film sets and meeting Hollywood greats including John Mills.

In 1948 Sheila was appointed costume co-ordinator and started working at Pinewood studios on films such as *Fools Rush In*. This then led to a role at Walt Disney productions as the costume designer. Most notably working on the movie *Treasure Island* (released in July 1950) the first live action Disney movie. She continued to work in film and dress stars including Gregory Peck, Dirk Bogarde and Thora Hird.

Despite great success within the film industry however, Sheila always continued to go back to her first love, the theatre. Her passion for the ballet led her to create a number of attractive sketches of famous dancers such as Margot Fonteyn, Robert Helpmann and Moira Shearer made during rehearsals of the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. She also created a number of other sketches for her portfolio included portraits of Sir Alec Guinness, Sir Laurence Olivier, and Celia Johnson.



She was greatly admired within artistic circles and her work featured in an exhibition of British design at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1950. Her career continued until 1953 when she took a step back to begin a family, marrying Hector John McLusky. Hector was a successful artist from Kensington who adapted 13 Bond novels. They had two children together. Later they dedicated their time to running a theatre company called The Elizabethans.

Sheila died in 2009. She will be remembered as a creative and ambitious woman who paved the way for women in theatre and film design. ■

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Barnsley art on your doorstep).