



At the Highclere Society AGM in November 2011, I proposed Living Paintings as our charity for the year. I was absolutely delighted when Living Paintings received the highest number of votes and was declared the chosen charity for 2012. Since the AGM I have been busy planning a number of events with my fellow committee members. Our fundraising events will hopefully also help to create more awareness of Living Paintings. Details of these events will be published in forthcoming newsletters.

I really wanted to go to the heart of this charity and see for myself exactly what makes Living Paintings such a special charity. For those of you who could not attend the AGM and anyone who is not familiar with Living Paintings, here is a little background information.....

Living Paintings is an award- winning charity that supports blind and partially sighted people of all ages, from small children to the elderly.

Living Paintings create 'Touch to See' books with raised pictures that come to life when fingers feel them. These tactile books include soundtracks that tell the pictures stories, guide the fingertips across the raised images, and describe what is being touched, felt and 'seen'. These soundtracks are often recorded by well known voices. The 'Touch to See' books cover a wide variety of topics: children's stories to science, history, famous works of art, nature, gardens and many more. Membership of the 'Touch to See' library is free – every book is loaned and posted out free and returned to the library free. Currently the membership is approaching 10,000, including over 500 schools.

My visit to Living Paintings

On Thursday 9th February 2012, I visited the Head Quarters of Living Paintings in Kingsclere.

I was given a very warm welcome by fundraiser Rachel Kent, and then we entered a very large library that holds an enormous number of packs, all clearly labelled and filed chronologically and neatly on racks.

Here I was introduced to two very dedicated ladies, Liz and Mary who despatch the packs and also check them when they are returned – ensuring everything is in order. Both these ladies have been volunteers for over 6 years. They also talk to members and enjoy being able help answer any questions. Royal Mail provides free postage for the library and this is very much appreciated by the members and of course Living Paintings. Alas, should Royal Mail be unable to continue with this generous help, the impact on the charity does not bear thinking about but the word '*Catastrophic*' comes to mind.

In the library I saw a large board showing many letters written from people who have raised funds, simply because they want to help. Every donation is gratefully received and acknowledged – I saw a letter from a little girl who had made some cakes and sent in £5 – all so heart warming.

How 'Touch to See' books are produced

I then met Production Manager Liz Davies, who very enthusiastically explained the main processes that are necessary to produce a pack– this can take 9 months. It was only when I listed them that I began to fully appreciate the work involved.....see below:

- a) **Brailleing** -Before funding is secured a variety of books are selected (often as a result of requests from members) and brailled to make sure they are suitable to adapt. Usually about 23 copies of each book are produced in a combination of Braille Grades 1 and 2.

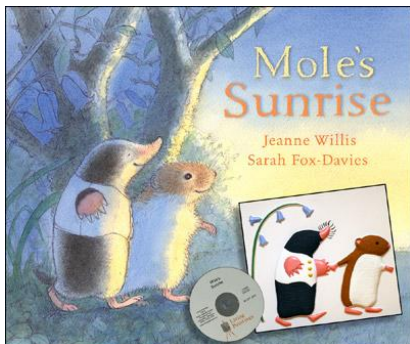


- b) **Line drawings** –3 characters and/or scenes are usually chosen to be used for the raised 'touchy' pictures. These are then drawn as simple line drawings to enable the carver to create the images.

c) **Master art work** - the line drawings are used to create a relief of the image –this is usually carved in wood.

d) **Script writing** - a volunteer script writer writes the audio descriptions of the illustrations and touchy pictures.

- e) **Colour selection** – When completed the master artworks are produced on plastic sheets and painted.
- f) **Draft recording & VI Edit** – A draft copy of the complete book is prepared and tested by one of the Visually Impaired Editors.
- g) **Post VI Edit** –any suggested changes are considered and the recording edited accordingly.
- h) **Painting** –the plastic sheets are cut and hole punched; mostly painted by postal painters who work from home.
- i) **Recording** – Readers are chosen so that their voice is right for the script. The recording may take place in Kingsclere or London. A sound engineer edits the audio recording, and adds music or sound effects.



- j) **FINAL ASSEMBLY** - When the paintings are complete, CDs ready and the books brailled the Living 'Touch and See' books are assembled.

During a quick break for a cup of tea, I was lucky to meet Chief Executive Camilla Oldland - daughter of the late Alison Oldland, who founded Living Paintings, some 23 years ago. I was interested to hear that there are only 5 full-time and 5 part-time employees but 200 volunteers, of which 52 are in-house.

Here, proudly displayed, I saw several images and comments written by many famous people e.g. Timothy West, Su Pollard, and Jim Carter (Mr Carson of Downton Abbey) to name but a few, who have given their time and their voices to narrate on the CDs in the packs.

I briefly saw the recording studio but as work was in progress, we moved swiftly into the production room where more magic was taking place.

In the production room Rachel introduced me to Ken who was carefully carving figures in wood. Then I saw how Ken's craftsmanship was put to great use: his wooden template was put in a press, with a plastic sheet on top and then 'hey presto' raised figures appeared in the plastic sheet ready for painting.

In the same room several lady volunteers were very busy painting raised figures on plastic sheets. Each paint colour is specially selected to ensure it matches the original picture book. Humbrol enamel paints are used as they work very well on plastic and are very durable. I was amazed at how precise and accurate the colour match was to the original book. This was not due to luck but the result of patience and perseverance. You may wonder why such attention is paid to the painting - I must confess it was my thought at first. Rachel then explained how sighted and partially sighted people, often siblings, can enjoy the colours whilst also looking at the books.



Rachel then showed me a complete assembled pack. So much care and consideration had been put into producing something so very special, because everyone involved knows what a huge difference it can make to the lives of so many who deserve to share our sighted world.

Throughout my visit I was struck by the determination, dedication and sincerity of everyone I met. I was at Living Paintings for over 1½ hours but it went by in a flash. I felt privileged to be part of this amazing charity.

Here is Camilla Oldland with Jodie, who is testing and enjoying 'Mole's Sunrise' (see picture to your left).

How can we make sure this amazing work carries on?

The pleasure Ling Paintings packs provide is enormous but funds are constantly needed to keep on providing this very special library service. Government cuts have intensified competition for grants from Trusts and Foundations – one of the main sources of income for Living Paintings.

Without funds from donations like our Society this incredible service would come to an end. I hope you will agree that Living Paintings is a very worthy charity and I hope you will support the events that we, as a Society, will be organising over the coming months and beyond.

Fundraising event coming up! (In association with the Highclere Society)

I hope you will join us in **Highclere Village Hall on Sunday 27th May 2012 at 7.00pm to enjoy Watership Cantabile**



Watership Cantabile is a Newbury based choir who perform at charity events in both the UK and Europe. They are delighted to make their debut in Highclere this year, bringing their selection of music and prose from around the world – A World Tour.

Tickets - £7.50 (under 16's £2.50)

Available from christine@cn-sales.co.uk and Jennifer on 01635 255395

Refreshments, tea, coffee - incl. Cash Bar & Raffle

Many thanks for taking the time to read this article but please if you can help in any way contact Rachel Kent on 01635 299771 or see www.livingpaintings.org.

Christine Leah