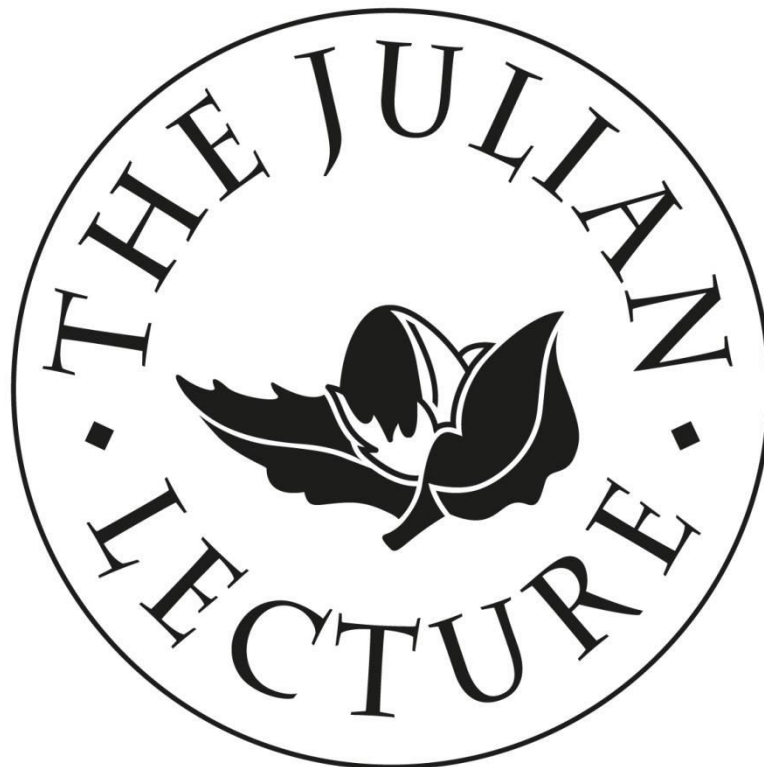


The Julian Lecture 2018

# **From Spark to Screen**

**The creative power of Julian of Norwich**



**Sally-Anne Lomas**

## <sup>[1]</sup> **Sally-Anne Lomas: Biography**

Sally-Anne is a writer and film maker. She wrote, produced, and directed *The Search for the Lost Manuscript: Julian of Norwich* for BBC 4, winner of the Royal Television Society East Best Factual Programme 2017.

Her debut novel *Live Like Your Head's On Fire* was selected for The Financial Times Best Summer Reads 2021. The sequel *Love Like Your Heart's On Fire* will be published in 2023.

She is Creative Director of The Cloth of Kindness Textile Arts Project inspired by Julian of Norwich's writing.

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## [2] **From Spark to Screen: the creative power of Julian of Norwich**

I am grateful to be given this opportunity to speak about Julian of Norwich. I have spent most of my working life as a television producer and director, so I claim no great expertise. I'm sure there are many of you in the audience who know far more about Julian's writing than I do. But I do have a great love for her book *Revelations of Divine Love* and I hope that by sharing some of the ways I've been influenced personally, I can explore the book's creative power and express why I believe Julian's theology is so important and relevant to us, today.

I want to start with a dream. On the night that the Friends of Julian asked me to give this lecture I had this dream.

I was standing on the narrow ledge of a high building in my swimming costume. On one side of me was Julian of Norwich, looking much as she looks in the statue at the front of Norwich Cathedral, only she was alive and smiling. On the other side of me was Dr Janina Ramirez, the art historian and presenter of the BBC4 Julian of Norwich documentary. Far below the ledge was the tiny blue rectangle of a swimming pool. I felt as I had as a child standing on the high diving board contemplating the long drop, when sometimes I was brave enough to jump, and sometimes I had to take the walk of shame back down the diving board steps. Up on my ledge I was scared, the swimming pool below seemed <sup>[3]</sup>tiny and far off. But both Julian and Janina were encouraging me - so I leapt.

And I missed the pool entirely. Instead I went crashing through the glass ceiling of the poolside conservatory. Not quite the way in which contemporary women are attempting to break through glass ceilings!

But in the way of dreams I was totally unhurt, merely embarrassed sitting in my swimming costume surrounded by broken glass with people staring at me. There was music playing nearby and opposite me was a ballroom with the doors flung open. A small plump man who looked a bit like Elton John beckoned me over. He wanted me to dance with him but I realised that he was a brilliant dancer and I didn't know the steps. He took me in his arms and we began dancing. I should say that dancing is my hobby - I love to dance. At first I stumbled, getting my feet in the wrong places but as I relaxed we were twirling around the ballroom and I was in heaven. The plump man held me tight and said he would never stop dancing with me.

I guess we get the visions we call for and are met where we are at. Julian tells us in the second chapter of *Revelations of Divine Love* that she called for a vision of Christ's Passion. She was then given a series of 'showings' on which she reflected for perhaps twenty years and from that gifted us her theology. I can never get over the extraordinary creative power of how a mystical vision, contemplated for many years and turned into words, can travel through six hundred years of time and transform another human being. For it was Julian of <sup>[4]</sup>Norwich who introduced me to a God I could dance with. And if I stumble today maybe you'd be kind enough to hold in your imaginations the image of the 'Lord of the Dance' guiding my steps.

It was twenty years ago that I first encountered Julian of Norwich. I had been working as a television producer for Anglia TV but after a period of depression brought on by events in my personal life, I decided to leave work and go to Art School. I wanted to learn more about the creative process. My first academic degree, in Politics, Philosophy and Literature had taught me how to be critical, how to

judge, compare, and analyse, but I wanted to know more about the work of creation. How did you make something exist where it hadn't before? How did you give life to something new and previously unknown?

One of the first projects we were given at Art School was to document a journey and turn this into a book. I decided I would make a mini-pilgrimage through medieval Norwich to Julian's cell. All I knew about Julian at this point was that she was a fourteenth-century Christian mystic and that she was the first woman known to have written a book in English. I was intrigued and wanted to find out more - here was a perfect opportunity. So I started at Norwich Cathedral, walked up Elm Hill and along King Street to St Julian's Church and sat here in the cell. I then went into the Centre to read about Julian's life and I bought this book *All shall be Well, Revelations of Divine Love*, abridged for daily reading by Sheila Upjohn.

<sup>[5]</sup>I have subsequently read both the *Short* and *Long Text* of Julian's book. I particularly love Barry Windeatt's beautiful and accessible translation, but this is how I first came to know Julian's writing and it is a book I return to again and again. Julian's words are like good whisky, best sipped in small quantities and savoured slowly. I spent a lot of time with this book while I was at Art School, meditating on Julian's words and drawing my responses. I would take a few words, something like God's promise to Julian, 'I will hold you securely' (1), and sit with the phrase, making small abstract pencil and ink sketches that I thought of as movements of the soul.

Gradually Julian introduced me to her God, a tender God, who loved me like a mother, who was not, nor ever could be, angry, who looked at me with pity not with blame and who offered me hope that -

despite all the suffering in the world - all would be well. This was a God I could believe in, in large part because I trusted to Julian's understanding. Her vision is not simply a 'there, there' comfort blanket. She looks at pain and suffering without flinching, and her thinking is tough and rigorous.

We know so little of Julian, the woman, only that she lived here in these church grounds as an anchoress for over twenty years and that she wrote her book. Yet her words are so vivid that I often feel like her contemporary, Margery Kempe, whom we know visited Julian, as if I am sitting beside the window into Julian's cell and that she is speaking just to me. There is a feeling of intimacy, of friendship. This is a particular <sup>[6]</sup>quality of Julian's writing, a result of her self-effacement and earnest desire to write for others. She says:

*In truth, love moves me to tell you about it, for I want God to be known, and my fellow Christians to be helped. (2)*

Perhaps it is also because she is a woman speaking:

*But just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe, that I should not tell you about the goodness of God. (3)*

She declares this confidently, and I am thrilled and inspired by her boldness.

But it is also the homely language that she uses: rain dripping from the eaves, washing hanging on the line, the scales of a herring. She speaks in the direct, non-hierarchical way of friend to friend.

When researching for the Julian of Norwich documentary, I interviewed many people, academics, priests, nuns, writers, Christians

and non-Christians and asked what Julian meant to them personally. For everyone, this sense of intimacy, of having a unique and personal relationship with her writing was true. For one person Julian was their support through cancer treatment, for another their solace through the grief of losing a child, for another Julian was a feminist inspiration and for someone else their encouragement as a creative writer.

Dr. Rowan Williams said, "She gives me hope that even for a spiritual dimwit like me - it's possible to know God." (4) If Rowan Williams is a spiritual dimwit I don't know where that leaves the rest of us. But the company of people who feel they have an intimate relationship with <sup>[7]</sup>Julian's writing is both wide and deep. For me, my life as Christian began the first time I walked through that door and for that I will be forever grateful.

I had grown up in an atheist family but two years after my first visit to Julian's cell I was baptised and confirmed into the Anglican Church by Bishop Graham. What I discovered inside the four walls of Julian's cell was 'the still point at the centre'(5), 'the deep quiet keeping of God.'(6) The containment of those four walls and Julian's commitment to staying still is, for me, undoubtedly part of her impact. She had taken a vow of stability as an anchoress and her theology is slow-grown and deeply rooted.

Jeremiah (6: 16) suggests that we should 'Stand at the crossroads and look and ask for ancient paths; where the good way lies; and walk in it and find rest for your souls.' I had found in Julian's Cell, a space where I could rest.

Julian invites us again and again to rest in God:

*For the reason we are not at rest in heart and soul - that here we seek rest in things that are so little there is no rest in them and we do not know our God who is all- mighty, all-wise and all-god. For he is true rest. (7)*

I felt I had returned home to the place I was always meant to be. Amidst the turbulent, suffering, struggling, always needy world - here was a place of certainty.

But inside this small, bare square of earth was also a door that opened directly into mystery, into the immensity <sup>[8]</sup>of the apophatic God, the unknown and unknowable God of divine love, beyond our comprehension and accessible only through surrender to the power of grace.

*For grace turns our fearful failing into overflowing, endless comfort. And grace turns our shameful falling into high, glorious rising. And grace turns our sorrowful dying into holy, blessed life. (8)*

I found Julian's theology simultaneously comforting and challenging. What more could I ask for? Julian's writing awoke in me the desire to know God.

I discovered at Art School that creativity grows out of deep attention. You needed to wait, to listen and look for the creative spark, the quickening of energy, the flame igniting inside. Only with patience comes an idea with something alive within it, something unique coming from who you are.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and theologian, says 'There is in us an instinct for newness, for renewal, for a liberation of creative



power. We seek to awaken in ourselves a force which really changes our lives from within... and this change is a recovery of that which is deepest, most original, most personal in ourselves.' (9)

This spark can be very small and easily missed. Like a tiny flame or a small seed, it needs tender nurture and the right conditions to blossom and grow.

While I was at Art School getting to know more about Julian I had an idea. This is a story that has got to be told <sup>[9]</sup>- I thought. There's a documentary in this. The creative spark had been lit and in the darkness flickered, waiting for its moment to come.

So we fast forward to 2015. In the intervening years I had finished my degree in Fine Art, gone back to work as a television producer and director with renewed creative confidence, moved to live in the Norfolk countryside and become actively involved with the Burning Bush Barn, a contemplative arts space funded by the Diocese of Norwich. Here I had continued the creative engagement with contemplative Christianity which I'd begun at Norwich Art School, by making artworks for Exhibitions curated around spiritual themes. As part of the Julian week celebrations in 2015 the Burning Bush Barn was hosting an exhibition entitled "Julian of Norwich: Compassion and Creativity" and I was extremely eager to participate.

I opened my well-thumbed copy of 'All shall be well' and began a process of daily prayer meditating upon Julian's words and waiting for the right idea to emerge. Reading Julian on Jesus as Mother:

*For the child by nature does not think its mother does not love it. The child by nature does not rely on itself... And I saw no higher stature in this life than childhood - in its weakness, its*

*small strength and little wit. (10)*

I remembered the certainty of love and safety I'd felt as a child in my Grandmother's arms, the softness of her body <sup>[10]</sup>and her clothes. This was a visceral experience of love that I could touch and smell.

*For as the body is clad in clothes, and the flesh in the skin and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the breast, so are we clothed, body and soul, in the goodness of God, and enfolded in it. (11)*

How to make physical that powerful image of Julian's, that we are enfolded in God's love as intimately as the bones in our flesh? Could I bring together the softness of my Grandmother's body and the comfort of Julian's words?

I remembered seeing the extraordinary, embroidered textiles sewn by Lorina Bulmer, who was incarcerated on the lunatic ward of the Great Yarmouth Workhouse at the end of the nineteenth century. Lorina had embroidered long written rants that were full of pain and anger. Visually they were stunning, powerful and unique. I thought that if I could sew Julian's compassionate words, using Lorina's style of stitching, I could create a 'Cloth of Kindness' to enfold people in love.

I asked people who had been kind to me if they would send me their thoughts and experiences of compassion. I also asked people to send me scraps of soft red material, especially fabrics with special memories or meaning attached to them. I chose red because I wanted a warm colour and because it takes us directly to Julian's vision of Christ's bleeding head.

[11] 'As it came out, it was brownish red, for the blood was very thick. As it spread, it becomes bright red.' (12) Julian sees with an artist's eye.

I mixed together the words people sent me with my own thoughts on compassion and Julian's writings and stitched them onto the pieces of red fabric.

I had been frantically busy prior to this period, filming a television series in Australia, and travelling many thousands of miles in a short period. So to sit for five weeks slowly sewing words of compassion was an amazing gift. What I hadn't expected was the presence of so much suffering:

He walked with me through the long dark valley of cancer treatment and recovery'. 'She sat with me while my father was dying'. 'She helped me to dress when the pain was unbearable.' These are just a few of the examples of compassion sent to me. People remembered kindness received in their darkest hours, when they felt most vulnerable. Compassion and suffering go hand in hand. Julian prays to be with Mary at the foot of the cross and she looks hard, with an artist's attention at Christ's suffering, at the drops of blood falling, 'as plentiful as the drops of water that fall from the eaves after a great shower of rain, that fall so thick and fast no one can count them.' (13)

It is out of that unflinching awareness of pain and suffering that Julian's understanding of God's love comes.

[12] The sewn word is a slow word. It takes time to form the stitches to make a single letter, even more time to create a word, a sentence. As I sat sewing I felt close to Julian, thinking that her words would have been slow, carefully chosen, arduously written. Perhaps she had to

learn to read and write before she could begin or perhaps she had to formulate and dictate each carefully constructed sentence to someone who could write. Her materials would have been far from the ease of biro and computer. Each letter was scratched out with a quill that she or her scribe had to cut herself and with ink she would probably need to make and mix herself. Hers were slow words, words worth writing.

Most of the experiences of kindness which people sent to me were simple acts that would be as familiar to Julian as they are to us. 'She made me soup', 'he held my hand', 'she listened.' Compassion wears a homely dress.

Hand-sewing is a soothing and stilling activity. Resting, as I did, in Julian's words amidst this gathering of people's experiences of suffering and kindness, I felt something in me become very quiet. I experienced a moment of incredible joy. I understood how Julian in her vision of Christ's bleeding head writes:

*And in this Showing suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of joy. (14)*

Julian writes a lot about joy. For me, in that moment of sitting and sewing, I felt as if a shell had broken inside and the sun had risen within me in shades of yellow, rose and peach. This feeling of joy stayed for many days. I <sup>[13]</sup>now call this the 'drop of gold' moment and I see the work of the Cloth of Kindness project and the Julian of Norwich documentary as twins that have grown out of this opening.

In my journey as a Christian, joy has been the most surprising aspect. I found rest, hoped for consolation, aspired to gain wisdom but I did not expect joy. I didn't see the joy in *Revelations of Divine Love* the

first time I read it but now I see joy in every chapter. As Dr. Sarah Salih said in her interview for the documentary: "I have been reading Julian's book for twenty years and there is always something new." (15) Our present society is obsessed with the pursuit of happiness, which is always circumstantial, but joy can occur within the deepest suffering.

The finished Cloth of Kindness was exhibited at the Burning Bush Barn in such a way that people could actually lie or sit underneath it; they were enfolded in soft textures and words of love. As an experiment we left out pieces of fabric, needles and thread and invited visitors to the exhibition to sew their own thoughts of compassion. How delighted I was to enter the gallery and find people quietly sewing. By the end of the exhibition we had a long roll of words sewn by many different hands but all speaking of compassion.

The Reverend Eleanor Langan, Chaplain at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, saw the exhibition and asked to exhibit the Cloth of Kindness in the hospital chapel. This was the beginning of a process <sup>[14]</sup>by which my initial Cloth of Kindness was transformed into a community art project.

First, we held 'Sewing with Compassion' workshops at the hospital and made up packs of fabric and thread that people could take away and use on the wards and in the waiting rooms. Staff, patients, their families, visitors and volunteers sewed their thoughts of kindness on patches, which we stitched together to make a large Cloth of Kindness for the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. Many people contributed - a patient with dementia, a homeless boy, a bereaved mother - and there are quotes from the Quran and the Dalai Lama as well as the Bible. Every patch is personal and unique, a creative act

telling its own story, but sewn together they make a much greater whole.

While we were active at the hospital the 'Big C' charity invited us to work with cancer patients and we have now made two more cloths to be used in their relaxation rooms, for people to snuggle under after treatment. We are currently working with 'Big C' charity centres in Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn and joining with the Theatre Royal to run workshops for Dementia sufferers. We are also running pilot projects with homeless people and with the charities Mind and Age Concern. So many people, too many to name, have got involved to help take Julian's words of loving kindness out to vulnerable people, wherever they are, and enfold them in love.

I see the Cloth of Kindness Project as continuing Julian's counselling work. We know that she advised and <sup>[15]</sup>comforted people who came for spiritual guidance to her window. Through the use of her loving words and the process of slow stitching, we try to take the stillness and rest of Julian's cell out into the modern world of loneliness and anxiety.

From tiny sparks a bonfire can blaze. The creative power of Julian's theology draws us into the ever unfolding enfolding Cloth of Kindness - for we are all stitched together by the acts of love and kindness we show each other. Julian tells us that not only are we enfolded in God's love but God is enfolded in each one of us:

*For we are his homeliest home, and his dwelling place forever.*  
(16)

All the while I was sitting stitching I hadn't forgotten my idea that Julian's story would make a great documentary. I noticed that, as part

of the Julian celebrations in 2015, Sheila Upjohn was giving an intriguingly titled talk: "The Sisters who saved Julian". I had read and enjoyed Sheila's books on Julian. I suspected she would make a lively speaker so with a cunning plan in mind I invited the former Controller of Factual Programmes at ITV Studios, Andrea Cornes, who had recently set up her own production company, Tin Can Island, to come with me to the talk. Sheila's lecture proved to be every bit as entertaining as I'd hoped. Afterwards Andrea and I spoke about a possible Julian of Norwich documentary and she took a bold risk and commissioned me to write a treatment which she would pitch to the BBC.

[16] This was the vital first step, the moment when the film became possible. But it was going to be challenging to persuade the BBC that a documentary about an obscure fourteenth-century century mystic would appeal to a wide audience.

At this early stage when the idea was just a hope and a long way from reality, many people involved with the Julian Centre went out of their way to help me: Father Christopher, Sister Pamela, Felicity Maton, Sarah Passingham and Sheila Upjohn. Without such early supporters no creative project would ever take off. I believe that every creative idea needs a family of nurturers, and any creative effort is always the sum of many voices.

From the start I wanted to make the documentary for people who had never heard of Julian of Norwich, not just for those who already know and love her writing. Visiting Julian's cell and reading her book had had a dramatic impact on my life and I wanted to give others the same opportunity. I felt that if just fifty people made their way to the cell, or read *Revelations of Divine Love*, then I would not have failed. Television is a blunt medium. It does not deal well with complex

ideas but if I could only point people towards Julian then I trusted that she would point them towards God.

I have always been dazzled by the power of Julian's words to speak to us six hundred years after they were written. Few writers manage that kind of time travel. In English, I think of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Donne - just a handful and all of them men - who were honoured in <sup>[17]</sup>their own time and celebrated throughout the intervening years. Not only was Julian a woman but she had been more or less unknown and unread for centuries. How had her book survived to emerge so many years later and with such potency? I felt that a kind of detective story was the way to answer this. We would track down the fate of Julian's manuscript and emphasise the extraordinary obstacles that needed to be overcome for the book to be widely read. This mystery might hook in viewers and therefore tempt the BBC.

We needed a presenter who could tell a good story. I liked Dr Janina Ramirez's work and knew she was a medieval specialist. I thought she would attract a younger audience with her passionate approach to history. I contacted her agent and set off to Oxford to meet her. And here began a set of coincidences which made me think that some greater force was at work on the project. Janina, it transpired, was a huge Julian fan and had just been commissioned to write an introduction to Julian's life and work. She was thrilled to be part of the proposal. But she did tell me later that, as we parted, she had thought, "Great idea but they'll never get that commissioned."

How wrong she was! Cassian Harrison, Head of BBC4, loved the idea. The only problem was he didn't have any money to pay for it. Enter our next heroine, Fiona Ryder, then Managing Director of Mustard TV who discovered there was a special pot of money put aside by the



BBC for regional programmes. By joining forces with Mustard TV we could access this money.

[18]And so 'Julian of Norwich - a fifty-nine-minute documentary for BBC4' - was commissioned. There is an irony to television production. Getting the go ahead to make a programme takes forever but the moment the green light is switched on then a crazy race begins.

I had been waiting to make this film for eighteen years and suddenly I had just three weeks to do the research, set up the filming, and write the shooting script. The contrast to the quiet meditation of the Cloth of Kindness experience could not have been greater.

Luckily for me film-making is a team job and there were many wonderful people helping me. In another of those 'lucky' coincidences the art historian Dr Margit Thøfner had just left her position at the University of East Anglia and was prepared to sully her hands in the messy world of TV. Her research skills and historical understanding were invaluable as she persuaded the nuns at Stanbrook Abbey to meet us, opened the doors to the British Library and Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and tracked down the living relatives of Grace Warrack, who was Julian's first twentieth-century translator.

Forces greater than we could have imagined gathered to support us. Dr Rowan Williams turned down our request for an interview but, later discovering that he was due to be in Norwich on the very day we wanted to film with him, he kindly agreed to do it.

There were some extraordinary moments of discovery. I will mention just a few. I had asked Margit if she could track down an example of the kind of crucifix <sup>[19]</sup>that the curate had held up before Julian's eyes

as she lay dying. I had never been behind the scenes at the British Museum before and to follow the curator through a labyrinth of dark secret passages into rooms stacked high with antique wooden cabinets concealing shelf after shelf of hidden treasures was thrilling. When the curator, Lloyd de Beer, pulled out a drawer and revealed a tiny fifteenth-century wooden cross, I was deeply moved. That such a humble and basic object had survived for so many years - the sort of crucifix that might have inspired Julian's death-bed visions - brought me very close to Julian. It is still one of my favourite scenes in the documentary.

Another wonderful surprise was hiding in the Stanbrook Abbey archives. The nuns turned out to be the custodians of Grace Warrack's hand-written copy of Julian's text made in 1901. To see this, written in pencil and in a hurry, across just four weeks, with all Grace's notes, brought us near to the woman whose melodious translation brought Julian to a wide, modern public.

By the end of the research period we had an abundance of material - the problem was what to leave out. How were we to tell such a rich and complex story and do justice to Julian's life and work in just nine filming days?

As a society we spend so much time rushing around, scuttling over the surface of the planet. As an anchoress Julian had made a commitment to stay still and focus on God. I believe it is this depth of stillness that gives her writing such creative power.

[20] To write this lecture I went away on a retreat and stayed in an Eco-cube in the wilds of Scotland; life was reduced to four walls and one window. Everything was simple, a bed, a chair, a desk, no internet, no telephone, no TV. I was able to concentrate on prayer and writing. I

got a sense of how Julian's life might have been, the intensity of her focus. At the end of a week I was sad to leave - I could definitely have managed another week. But a month? A year? A life time?

Julian renounced so much to give us her book. Creation takes time. 'How long shall I wait in longing?'(17) she says and perhaps sometimes her hours hung heavily. The stillness in her writing is hard-won. I watched the pond outside my Eco-cube move in response to wind, rain and small creatures. I watched the swifts that dive-bombed the water, bouncing from the surface as they swooped down on hovering flies. But remove the stimulation and the water would settle into a still, clear depth.

How much I longed for just a little of that stillness while we were filming. I felt as if I had taken a vow of instability as each day passed in a blur, rushing from one location to the next, with never enough time to accomplish all that I'd hoped for, always running late. I cannot tell you how many times we clung to Julian's mantra 'all shall be well' in desperation.

For example, there was the day which began with filming the aerial shots of the 'Lady Julian' bridge, when we couldn't get the drone to work. This, as it turned out, was because Norwich City Football Club has an invisible <sup>[21]</sup>no-fly zone around their stadium. So we had to improvise a new take-off position from a building site further down the river. Once we had the drone in the sky, a team of workmen turned up to close the bridge for its annual cleaning. By the time I'd persuaded them to take an early breakfast courtesy of the BBC, it seemed as if every school child in Norwich was crossing the bridge at once.

All this came before shooting the sensitive scenes in Julian's Cell, interviewing thirty-eight pilgrims from North Carolina, persuading Greater Anglia that we really did have official permission to film on the train, and finally conducting a major interview with Dr Rowan Williams.

That is the sort of filming day that sets my heart racing and makes me vow that I'll never make another film. That said, there were other days that sent my heart leaping with delight. By the time we'd finished our nine days of filming we had over twenty hours of footage. We now had to edit this down to just fifty-nine minutes.

Our first rough assembly was two hours long and I thought very watchable but half had to go. Many great scenes and wonderful interviews ended up on the cutting room floor. Every documentary goes through a rigorous editorial process of 'rough cuts' and 'fine cuts', with the executive producers at Tin Can Island and the commissioning editor at the BBC giving detailed notes. When everyone was finally happy, the film was sent to the Head of BBC4 to be signed off. We were relieved when he said he thought the documentary was 'delightful and very special'.

[22] Film-making is always a team effort with everyone bringing their experience and creative skills to make the best possible result. On the Julian documentary there were many young people involved. The production co-ordinator, the musical composer and the graphic artist were in their early twenties and this was their first broadcast credit. They worked with energy and dedication and their input was vital because we wanted the programme to appeal to a younger audience

One of the strange aspects of television is that, unlike a live performance, you have no direct contact with the viewers. On

broadcast night I sat at home on the sofa watching the documentary go out knowing, in theory, that thousands of people all over the country were also watching. Or maybe not!

You can imagine how thrilled we were when, that evening, Janina texted me the news that Julian of Norwich was 'trending' on Twitter. That meant that so many people were using the hashtag 'Julian of Norwich' that she had become a leading news story. Move over Kim Kardashian, make room for a woman who has something important to say! The overnight viewing figures were good, with over a quarter of a million people tuning in and, most importantly, they stayed watching to the end. With the various repeats, we estimate that at least half a million people have now watched the documentary. The very next morning two young students turned up here to visit the cell, and Waterstones in Norwich sold out of copies of *Revelations of Divine Love*. Janina Ramirez's book on Julian had so many pre-orders<sup>[23]</sup> that a reprint was put in train before the book was even published.

Not everyone liked the documentary. The nature of creative practise is always to fall short, to miss the perfection one strove for. But I felt that I had succeeded in my aim of introducing Julian of Norwich and her *Revelations of Divine Love* to a wider and younger audience.

Six months later the documentary won the Royal Television Society East Best Factual Programme Award, which came both as a surprise and an honour. But what was particularly wonderful for me was that the award ceremony was held in the Norwich Art School Building where, nearly twenty years earlier, I'd had that initial idea to go in search of Julian.

Some people fear that the phrase 'all shall be well' has become so well-known that it has become a cliché. Certainly, there is a lot more

to Julian's writing than 'all shall be well. But never underestimate the power of a good strap line.

T.S Elliot uses the phrase three times in his poem "Little Gidding". Elliot knew the power of what he called the 'auditory imagination' and the recognition of meaning when it is embodied in a sonorous cadence. (18)

*all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.*

[24] In this simple phrase is a cadence of comfort. Just repeating the words is soothing, but there is also an embodiment of two key principles of Julian's theology.

First, there is a fundamental Christian optimism or 'holy hope'. The novelist and preacher Marilyn Robinson says, 'Hope shapes intention. It leaves improbable possibilities open, which means that it influences the unfolding of future time. Hope is our capacity to predispose events to take a certain turn, by preparing for it or by recognising tendencies favourable to it.' (19)

In the phrase 'All *shall* be well', the repetition of the future tense *shall* sets this holy hope in the context of a different time. Looked at in the light of eternity, we trust in Julian's understanding of God's promise that 'you shall see for yourselves that all manner of things shall be well.' (20) In her own lifetime Julian could never have imagined that the book she was writing would find a way of reaching out to millions of people, hundreds of years later. But she trusted to the bigger picture she couldn't see.

Every creative act that is invested with some essence of its creator has something living within it, a creative spark that can reach out and touch others. This may lie within a small red patch of material bearing the words 'Keep Smiling' embroidered by a man of sixty-one with terminal cancer or, indeed, within a television documentary. We never know the full impact of our creative acts. Like ripples they spread out into the world.

[25] At Art School on the main landing was a gallery of student art that changed every week. I used to love coming in on a Monday and looking at the new work, amazed at fresh evidence of people's astonishing imaginations and abilities. But, usually, by the time a few days had passed I'd stopped looking as the work no longer drew me. Just occasionally there would be an artwork that kept my attention because it was invested with something more than shiny newness. Most creative acts, though precious, are small pebbles dropped into the pool of time, making only little local circles and fading away.

An artwork that lasts for six hundred years must be invested with an enormous amount of creative power. Julian's words are charged with such depth that their waves are being felt through great stretches of time and space. Coming from a stillness we have lost in today's hectic world, they have the power to awaken a longing for the loving God which our suffering age is crying out for. This is why I have a new cunning plan - Julian of Norwich, the feature film! I'm thinking that Helen Mirren will make a wonderful Julian. Now, this may take another twenty years and it may be someone from a generation younger than me that makes it happen but I predict that we have only just begun to see the full impact of the creative powers of Julian of Norwich.

*Sally-Anne Lomas*

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