

Elsie Inglis – sculpture to become part of permanent collection at Surgeons Hall Museum

One of the artists who had hoped to enter the competition to create a sculpture for the Royal Mile has been invited to have one of the busts of Elsie Inglis, which she has made, displayed at the Surgeons Hall Museum in their permanent collection.

A gathering of supporters convened in a pub on the Southside so that everyone could see the bust in real life, and to hear from artist Natasha Phoenix about why she is so passionate about [Dr Elsie Inglis](#).

The competition set up by A Statue for Elsie Inglis, a registered charity, was suspended when the trustees suddenly announced the appointment of the King's Sculptor in Ordinary, Alexander Stoddart, before applications were to be submitted.

The charity holds around £60,000 – paid to OneCity Trust as the organisation did not have charitable status until earlier this year – to pay a fee to the sculptor and to pay Powderhall Bronze to mould the statue. [A Statue for Elsie Inglis](#) is still raising funds as it requires around £30,000 more to pay for

the first statue of a woman on the Royal Mile.

Artist Natasha Phoenix created a bust of Elsie Inglis which the Surgeons Hall Museum is accepting into their permanent collection This was Natasha + supporter [@sarasheridan](#) talking to us about the recent cancellation of the call to artists by the charity which has raised £60K pic.twitter.com/1InIrlnITW

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [November 16, 2022](#)

Natasha said: “I first came across Elsie when I walked past the Elsie Inglis Memorial Hospital. I used to teach and catch the bus up that way.

“I tried to find out about her and couldn’t. Eventually I asked in the staff room at Royston where I worked. Let me tell you there is nothing like a room full of teachers to give you a romantic story about a woman, a feminist.

“I was immediately so impressed with this woman, and could not believe that she wasn’t represented in our history books and being taught in our schools.

“I was in Stockbridge at the time when I thought of making an Elsie Inglis curriculum box. But when I offered to make it the school said it would not be used. And I couldn’t find any children’s books to put in it.

“I contacted Edinburgh Council about 20 years ago to get Elsie put on the curriculum – at least the Edinburgh curriculum – but they stopped taking my calls.

“Over the years she has meant so much to me, not because I am in the medical field, but because she had the spirit that didn’t give up.”

Natasha explained that she could be at her wits’ end when teaching and would stop to think ‘What would Elsie do?’

She explained: "Then I would think 'I am here for this child it is not about me'. I think that is how she lived and responded to people.

"I have always wanted to see her represented, and couldn't believe it when this sculpture was mentioned. I am so glad that regardless of whatever has happened, that I put in my time and spread the knowledge of Elsie Inglis with this head – because she has been across Europe, she has been far and wide. Now so many people know who she is, and are starting to say 'How have we missed Elsie Inglis from history?'

"She raised the equivalent of £50 million in ten days for the war hospitals. That was her again using her privilege and she went round and asked her very rich friends for the money.

"They saved countless lives, and not just that, they changed the role of women in World War One. They changed the role of women for ever. She was a feminist. She is about women's rights and she was about fairness and human rights. She is not exclusive and she is not elitist.

"One last thing I want to say about Elsie is that when she came back her to Edinburgh she was very ill – she had bowel cancer She knew and she stayed on in the Balkans helping people. She was told loads of times to go home, but she didn't.

"She planned her return so that her sisters could give her one last hug. She came back and the next day she died.

"I think that says everything about Elsie Inglis. So this is for Elsie Inglis."



Author Sara Sheridan with Dr Elsie Inglis as created by artist Natasha Phoenix

Author Sara Sheridan is a supporter of Phoenix, and was at the event which she dubbed a “Salon des Refusées” (an exhibition of rejects).

Sheridan told The Edinburgh Reporter: “I think the decision the Elsie Inglis Trustees made was wrong. I think it was an unfair decision.

“I think they have been unfair to the creatives who were going to go on to enter the competition – like Natasha – and I think that the decision they’ve made isn’t really in the spirit of Elsie Inglis.

“My view is that Alexander Stoddart – who said he didn’t think it was important that Elsie was a woman – for me that was just heartbreaking. It shows that he doesn’t understand why Elsie is so important in our history, not only to other women, but within our history in Scotland. She was somebody who stood up for diversity, and she stood up for talent. She stood up for

action, and if he doesn't understand that, he is the wrong person to make this statue."

Sheridan wrote the [book](#) **Where are the women?: A Guide to an Imagined Scotland**.

She explained the premise of her fictional work: "It is real Scotland with real history, but very few of the statues and monuments that I put up in the book to the memory of our amazing foremothers, is based on real life. I have also used some statues based on real life, but we have very few women statues.

"My view is that we require more that our history did not happen in male, it did not happen in white, it did not in heteronormativity and it did not happen in English. We have a very diverse history, and we need to honour where we come from in the round

"That is one reason why Elsie is really important to so many people – she is an obvious example of a fantastically successful high achiever.

"If Elsie was a man there would be a statue to her – at least one – in Edinburgh already. We don't have a statue to Elsie because she was a woman."



Artist Natasha Phoenix with her bust of Dr Elsie Inglis PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter