

# HerStory

*HerStory* is a 30-minute opera film featuring the creative talents of 85 people living with Parkinsons from across the UK. The opera is inspired by the extraordinary exploits of historical Suffolk heroine, Margaret Catchpole (1762-1819), who achieved notoriety when she stole a horse and rode it from Ipswich to London in 1797. Written by Suffolk-born composer Amy Mallett, the piece incorporates music, libretto, choreography and visual art co-created with members of the Parkinson's community.

## **1. Dear Margaret**

Letters exchanged by Margaret Catchpole and her former mistress, Elizabeth Cobbold, help piece together her remarkable life story.

## **2. Margaret Catchpole Rode to Ipswich Town**

As a young girl in service, Margaret rides from Nacton village to Ipswich town to fetch the doctor to help her mistress, who is giving birth. She also saves one of the children in her care from drowning.

## **3. The Cruel Sea I**

The sea is a recurrent theme in the opera, representing distance, separation and journeys.

## **4. The Revenue Man**

To avoid paying the high costs of taxed goods in this period, local communities rely on smugglers bringing in goods by boat. To keep the customs officer (or revenue man) occupied whilst boats are unloaded, they buy him drinks in the local pub. A 'bender' is another name for a sixpence.

## **5. The Cruel Sea II**

The sea can also bring danger and uncertainty, taking crews away from home for weeks, months and years.

## **6. Ev'ry Turn of the Tide**

Margaret's sister Sue has poor health and spends her days close to home, sewing. She questions Margaret's choice of William Laud, a local smuggler, as love interest.

## **7. Margaret Catchpole Rode to London Town**

Margaret hears of William's capture in London, steals a horse from her employer and rides it to London dressed in men's clothing. She is captured and sent to Newgate Prison, then returned to Ipswich Gaol.

## 8. Hell Above Ground

At this time, hanging is the punishment for a long list of offences, some seemingly minor by today's standards. This is known as the Bloody Code. With so many waiting for trial or execution, prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary, with one in four inmates dying of gaol fever.

## 9. Margaret Catchpole Rode to Aldeburgh Town

Margaret scales a 22-foot wall to escape prison. She travels to Aldeburgh to meet William, intending to flee with him on a boat to Holland. Instead they are met on the beach by revenue officers and William is shot and killed.

## 10. Send Her to the Gallows

Again Margaret comes before the court, and is sentenced to hang for her crimes. Her former mistress Mrs Cobbold pleads with the judge for leniency. He commutes the sentence and instead orders Margaret to be transported to Australia.

## 11. Heave Away

During this era, sailors use sea shanties to help set the rhythm of repetitive tasks and keep morale high on long sea voyages.

## 12. The Cruel Sea III - Margaret Catchpole Sailed to Sydney Town

Margaret is one of 96 convicts making the 176 day journey on prison ship *The Nile* to Botany Bay in Australia. Due to improvements in hygiene and conditions, this is the first transportation vessel of its time to arrive with all passengers alive and well.

## 13. Yours, Margaret

Margaret and Mrs Cobbold continue to write to each other years after Margaret's release, exchanging news and gifts.

### A film by Cohere Arts

[www.coherearts.org](http://www.coherearts.org)

Artistic Director & Composer - Amy Mallett

Musical Director - Nicola Wydenbach

Dramaturgy - Emma Bernard

Producer - Philippa Storey

Film-maker - John Fensom

Movement Director - Sarah Lewis

Audio Engineering - Richie Bingham

Animation - Simon Wild

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