

# Sarah Roberts: SICK TOO

## Large Print Exhibition Guide

The exhibition in these central cases is co-curated by the artist Sarah Roberts. Her new installation, *SICK (a note from 40 Sandilands Road and other stories)*, is on display at The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery between 2 April and 19 July 2025. This work was informed by her research residency with Cultural Collections at the University of Leeds in 2024. With a primary interest in caring practices, her research led to encounters with materials related to global conflict, domestic and family life, the history and philosophy of science, public health initiatives and the development of medical tourism. A selection of these materials is presented here, alongside Roberts' thoughts on their significance to her creative process.

# The colour of care

1 György Gordon, *Alone III, Dr Z.M.*, oil on canvas, 1988

“The green seems to seep into and out of the painting and all within it. It’s neither sad nor hopeful. His paintings don’t shy away from trauma but also offer a stunning aesthetic presence, allowing us to look at intimate distance. I drew my palette from memory and its collision with prescriptive colours for hospitals, schools and industry. Gordon’s green is a unisex hue, which is a colour of care for those who know.” – *Sarah Roberts*

György Gordon (1924–2005) was a Hungarian-born artist known for his evocative exploration of human emotion. Educated at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, Gordon’s early work was influenced by European Expressionism. Following the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, he sought refuge in England, eventually settling in Wakefield in 1964. There, he worked as a lecturer and later led the

painting department at Wakefield College of Art. Gordon's art often explored themes of isolation and dislocation, distorting the human figure through a characteristic palette of muted colours.

**University of Leeds Art Collection LEEUA  
2017.034**

# The domestic made strange

2 Books related to domestic care, 1883–1959

*“Notes from Sick Rooms* was written by Julia Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s mother. The compact manual focused on an empathic care and a recognition of the simple human needs of “the sick” that remain unchanged. It maintains the idea of the sick as humans experiencing illness, rather than a people unto themselves.

These volumes informed a lot of the setup of the installation [*SICK (a note from 40 Sandilands Road and other stories)*], and the objects within it and really helped me to find a relatable space that was more than just mine.” - *Sarah Roberts*

Before hospitals became widely accessible, domestic care was the primary option for the sick. Family members, often women, took on the role of caregivers, using home remedies, medicines and

basic nursing practices. Advice manuals provided guidance on sanitation, nutrition and convalescence. The sickroom was arranged for comfort, with essentials like bedpans, thermometers and adapted furniture. With the rise of modern medicine and the National Health Service, home care gradually declined, shifting serious illnesses to hospitals. However, home nursing remained crucial for chronic conditions and recovery, preserving the tradition of compassionate domestic care.

### **Books on display:**

Lucy J. Ottley, *A preliminary manual of home nursing*, London, 1959. Cookery Collection Camden A/OTT

G. Gordon Samson, *Houses planned for comfort with special conveniences for invalids and the aged*, London, 1928. Cookery Collection Camden A/SAM

Leslie Stephen, *Notes from sick rooms*, London, 1883. Cookery Collection A/STE

### 3 Sarah Roberts, ceramic plaster, 2025

“The oversized plasters are almost mechanisms to heal and almost wounds, glitching, with a beauty in banality and sense of the abject wrapped within them. This felt befitting for a project that would open old wounds. It resulted in a joyous processing of grief and shame that would pinpoint a key driver in my wider artistic practice, rooted in my formative experiences of hybridised space and care.” – *Sarah Roberts*

Self-adhesive plasters date back to the early twentieth century. In 1920, American inventor Earle Dickson created the first adhesive bandage for his wife, who frequently cut herself while cooking. His invention, which included a small gauze pad attached to a strip of cloth with adhesive, was the precursor to the modern plaster. Johnson & Johnson commercialised the product under the brand name BAND-AID®, offering a convenient, sterile product. Over the last century, medical adhesives have evolved, incorporating new materials for better comfort, effectiveness and flexibility in treating a wide range of injuries.

#### **Collection of the artist**

## 4 The Surgical Manufacturing Co. Ltd., *Comfortable Furniture for Invalids*, London, c.1930

“These velvet-lined wooden cabinets, pewter vessels, glass receptacles and wheeled chairs were all designed out of functionality at the time, but they also make illness more of a human thing. I find modern hospitals fascinating, the way they attempt to make their screens softer, homely, with additions of a fake floral or a primary polka dot print.

In the same way, when a respirator or an IV drip enters a living room, it becomes somehow alien - clashing with the three-piece-suite.” – *Sarah Roberts*

In the early twentieth century, furniture for the sick was designed with hygiene, comfort and functionality in mind. Hospital beds featured adjustable metal frames for patient positioning, while reclining chairs and wheeled tables aided convalescence. Materials like steel and enamel started to replace wood to prevent the spread of disease. Domestic sickroom furniture included



lightweight, movable pieces for caregivers' ease. These innovations reflected a growing medical understanding of disease and a shift toward patient-centred care in both hospitals and homes.

**John Evan Bedford Library of Furniture History  
MS 2241/7/3/16/15**

## 5 China feeding cup, c.1914–1918

“There’s something here about the attempt to make something “look” to its new purpose. A cup has been long discussed in terms of its “cupness”. The addition of the red cross delineates some new purpose in this semiotic strike against the dainty china. It upends the whole thing.” – *Sarah Roberts*

During the First World War, the Red Cross distributed porcelain feeding cups to support wounded soldiers. These cups were designed with spouts, allowing caregivers to provide nourishment without causing spills. Originally designed in the late nineteenth century, their practical yet elegant form reflected both compassion and innovation in wartime medical care. Decorated with the Red Cross emblem, these cups symbolised hope and

recovery. Today, they serve as poignant reminders of the humanitarian efforts that eased soldiers' suffering and contributed to advances in patient care.

**Liddle Collection LIDDLE/MUS/M/4**

# Consuming care

6 Books related to cooking for the sick,  
1878–1953

“My sister had diabetes, and I found myself in the thick of her diet. She would eat sugars that would result in us visiting Aberystwyth Hospital most weekends. These self-assured, prescriptive books are a reminder of the rhythms of care. They present foods to attract the palate and distract from the loss of something like normalcy.” – *Sarah Roberts*

Cookbooks for the sick reflected evolving medical and nutritional knowledge. These books, often written by nurses, doctors or home economists, provided recipes for easily digestible, restorative meals. They recommended bland, soft foods believed to aid recovery. As scientific understanding of vitamins and calories grew, so did the sophistication of these guides. By the mid-twentieth century, cookbooks incorporated dietary recommendations for specific illnesses, bridging

home cooking and medical care. These texts highlight changing perceptions of food as both comfort and cure in times of illness.

### **Books on display:**

Ellen Delamere and Edmund S. Delamere, *Wholesome fare: a sanitary cook-book, containing the laws of food and the practice of cookery, and embodying the best British and continental receipts; with hints and useful suggestions for the sedentary, the sick, and the convalescent*, London, 1878. Cookery Collection Camden A/DEL

Winniefred Margaret Gray, *Emergencies and sickness in the home: a guide for mothers and others*, Aberdeen, 1957. Cookery Collection Camden A/GRA

Marguerite Patten, *Invalid cookery book: with a section of feeding children*, London, 1953. Cookery Collection Camden A/PAT

Charles Herman Senn, *Cookery for invalids and the convalescent*, London, 1909. Cookery Collection Camden A/SEN

Mrs Arthur Webb, *Invalid cookery: the doctor in the kitchen*, London, 1935. Cookery Collection  
Camden A/WEB

Maude Earle and Frank C. Madden, *Sickroom cookery and hospital diet: with special recipes for convalescent and diabetic patients*, London, 1897. Cookery Collection A/EAR

Florence B. Jack, *Good Housekeeping invalid cookery book*, London, 1926. Cookery Collection A/JAC

## 7 Photograph of a Volunteer Aid Detachment Nurse at Crathorne Hall, c.1916

“Looking at these once grand homes, morphing into makeshift hospitals, the thing that stood out was the sense of the house clinging on, striving beyond the sick. Because some days it’s a bedpan by the vanity and others, games on the lawn or visits from the cat. In the same way sickness comes in uninvited, so does life.” – *Sarah Roberts*

During the First World War, Crathorne Hall served as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers, staffed by Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses. These women, often from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, provided essential medical care to wounded soldiers. Though many had little formal training, they worked alongside professional nurses and doctors, assisting with dressings, physiotherapy and patient care. Their dedication helped thousands of soldiers recover in the relative peace of rural estates. The experience also reshaped societal expectations of women's roles, paving the way for greater participation in nursing and other professions after the war.

**Liddle Collection LIDDLE/WW1/DF/GA/HOS/27**

## 8 Sarah Roberts, ceramic Complan nutritional drink, 2025

“My sister and my Dad were both given Complan meal replacement drinks. Despite all efforts to make palatable, pretty food we were “failing” the battle against illness. The shakes were a homogenous pink with little taste and less

variation. The ceramics hint at these discarded attempts at nourishment.

They are daft and seductive with their blancmange colouring. It's easy to look back on for the aesthetic, but harder underneath.” – *Sarah Roberts*

Nutritional drinks are high in energy and nutrients, used in medical settings to support patients with dietary deficiencies, illness-related weight loss, or difficulty swallowing. Originally developed as meal replacements, they provide vitamins, minerals and protein to aid recovery and maintain strength. Generally prescribed for elderly patients, those undergoing surgery, or individuals with chronic illnesses, nutritional drinks help prevent malnutrition and support healing in hospitals, care homes and domestic healthcare.

## **Collection of the artist**

# The body inside out

9 William Cheselden, *Osteographia*, or the anatomy of the bones, London, 1733

“The imagery of bodies flattened into parts gives an interesting view on their misbehaviour and programmed natures. We grow, we decay, and now we interrupt the continuum with treatment to change the pattern, to rebuild bones and connectors, to keep moving. The sinew and the tissues are all presented so we can digest them easily. We reconcile them with the madness of our own bodies that are viscous, far from flat and pumping rhythmically. I represent this tension through collage, making rooms and instruments and bodies into surfaces, to be examined as forms and colours and connected things. By turning organs into static objects in glass and ceramic, I think about their fragility and value.” – *Sarah Roberts*

William Cheselden’s *Osteographia* was a landmark anatomical work illustrated with highly



detailed engravings of human and animal skeletons. A renowned English surgeon and anatomist, Cheselden aimed for both scientific accuracy and artistic elegance. The book provides lifelike skeletal figures in dynamic, often naturalistic poses, alongside comparative anatomy illustrations of various species. This approach built on the advancements made by Andreas Vesalius' *De corporis humani fabrica libri septem*, published in 1543. *Osteographia* served as an educational resource for medical students and artists, influencing anatomical study and artistic representation. Despite its beauty and accuracy, *Osteographia* was not a commercial success due to its high production costs, but it remains a significant contribution to medical illustration and anatomical knowledge.

## **Health Sciences Historical Collection SC.4**

# Healing spaces

10 Kathleen Raven, watercolour sketch, c. 1929–1960

“I was attracted by these sketches because they offer an alternative view to what’s happening inside the sickroom. The vantage point of “the sick adjacent”. I was a young carer, but I also grew up by the sea, constantly roaming cliffs, mountains and arcades. Escaping. Living.

A coming of age set against a backdrop of care and a hedonistic tourist trap in the 1990s creates a strange multifaceted long-limbed nurse aware of their own edges.” – *Sarah Roberts*

Dame Kathleen Annie Raven (1883 - 1965) was a pioneering British nurse and healthcare leader. She played a vital role in the professionalisation of nursing during the early twentieth century. A committed advocate for nursing education, Raven improved standards and elevated the role of nurses. Her significant contributions included serving as President of the Royal College of

Nursing and supporting the establishment of nursing as an integral part of healthcare practice.

**Kathleen Raven Archive MS 1721/11/4**

## 11 Books related to medical tourism and health spas, 1825–1974

“I love the idea of the seaside as a rest cure. The wealth of older people flocking to my small tourist-trap village as a kid. The spa has become so embedded in normal life, hen dos and birthdays, and further away from healing the infirm.” - *Sarah Roberts*

Spa towns emerged in the eighteenth century, based on the popularity of mineral-rich waters believed to cure ailments. By the nineteenth century, rest cures focused on a period of enforced rest, isolation and quiet to treat conditions such as nervous disorders. These treatments, which combined nature’s healing qualities with medical expertise, shaped British wellness culture and medical tourism. Scarborough became known for its mineral-rich springs and therapeutic sea baths. The town's

picturesque coastline, combined with growing Victorian interest in seaside health retreats, solidified its status as a spa destination.

### **Books on display:**

Solomon Wilkinson Theakston, *Theakston's Guide to Scarborough : comprising a brief sketch of the antiquities, natural productions, and romantic scenery, of the town and neighbourhood*, Scarborough, 1843. Yorkshire Archaeological Society YAS 0880

John Cole, *Cole's Scarborough guide*, Scarborough, 1825. Yorkshire Archaeological Society YAS 0717

Raye Yaller and Robert Yaller, *The health spas: a world guidebook to health spas and nature-cure centers*, Santa Barbara, 1974. Cookery Collections Bateman A/YAL

John Kelk, *The Scarborough Spa, its new chemical analysis and medicinal uses: to which is added on the utility of the bath*, London, 1843. Yorkshire H-Sca-3.6/KEL

## 12 Photographs of the Volunteer Aid Detachment at Crathorne Hall and photograph album from Thorney Hall War Hospital, c.1914–1918

“There’s something about the nurse holding the cat. It’s just against all the rules. Cats have always run through the households of my life. These makeshift military hospitals and their screens adorned with photos and sketches, flowers and felines and croquet on the lawn suggest something that bridges the gap between the well and the sick. In the same sense I’m interested in my own experience as a “sick adjacent” person and how easily by proximity and emotional attachment our own worlds become hybrid, strange and somehow weirdly shamed.” – *Sarah Roberts*

*Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.*

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 1978

**Liddle Collection LIDDLE/WW1/DF/GA/HOS/27  
and LIDDLE/WW1/DF/GA/NUR/43**

13 Sarah Roberts, *Asclepius and Ladders*,  
2025

“The snakes reference the rod of Asclepius wielded by the Greek God associated with healing and medicine. They can also be read through the game of snakes and ladders and the role of chance in chronic illness and who it affects. When toys reference this, it seems illogical to feel shame for that which we cannot control, and yet we do.” –  
*Sarah Roberts*

In Greek mythology, Asclepius was often depicted with a serpent-entwined staff, now a symbol of medicine. A son of Apollo, he possessed

miraculous healing abilities. Worshippers sought cures at his sanctuaries, known as Asclepieia, where dreams and rituals played a role in divine healing.

Snakes and Ladders is a classic board game symbolising the ups and downs of life. Ladders represent virtues leading to success, while snakes signify vices causing setbacks. Introduced to Britain in the nineteenth century, it remains a well-known game of chance across the world.

### **Collection of the artist**