Deaf Londoners in the 1660s

Everywhere you look in history you can find deaf people and sign languages.

Kanthirava Narasaraja II
(1672-1714)
Ruler of Mysore

Laura Redden Searing
(1839-1923)
Journalist and Poet

John Goodricke
(1764-1786)
Astronomer

Joan Stewart
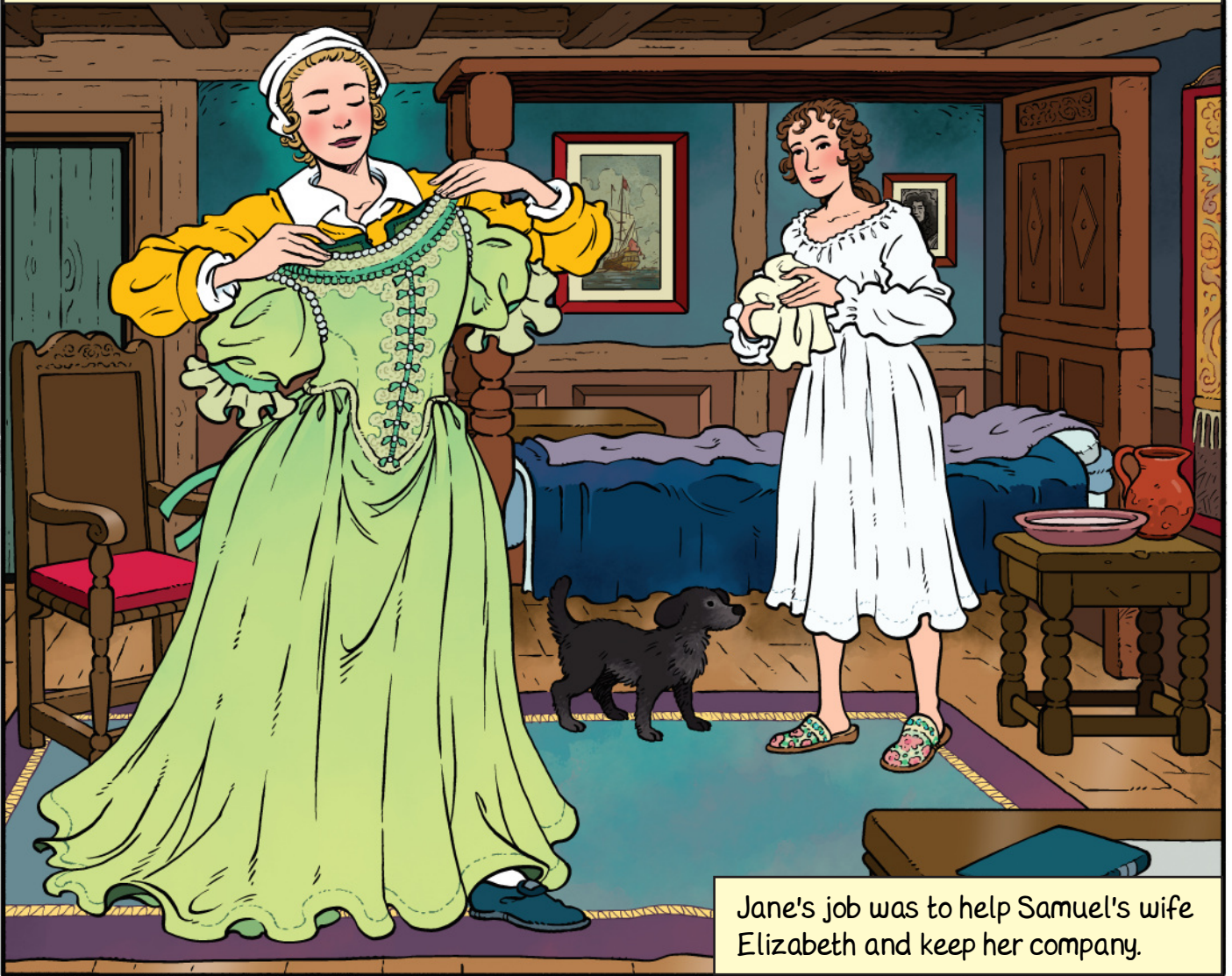(c.1428-c.1498)
Countess of Morton

In the past, many people did not learn to write. Sometimes we have to learn about their lives from other writers.

This is Samuel Pepys, writing his famous diary over 350 years ago.

Pepys's diary tells us a little about what life was like for deaf and hard of hearing people in 17th-century London.

This is Jane Gentleman. She was a chambermaid in Pepys's house. Jane was hard of hearing.

Jane's job was to help Samuel's wife Elizabeth and keep her company.

When Jane started her job, Samuel worried that Jane's hearing might make her a bad worker.

But Jane was good at her job. She made friends with another servant called Bess.

Pepys shaved his head and bought a wig to be more fashionable.

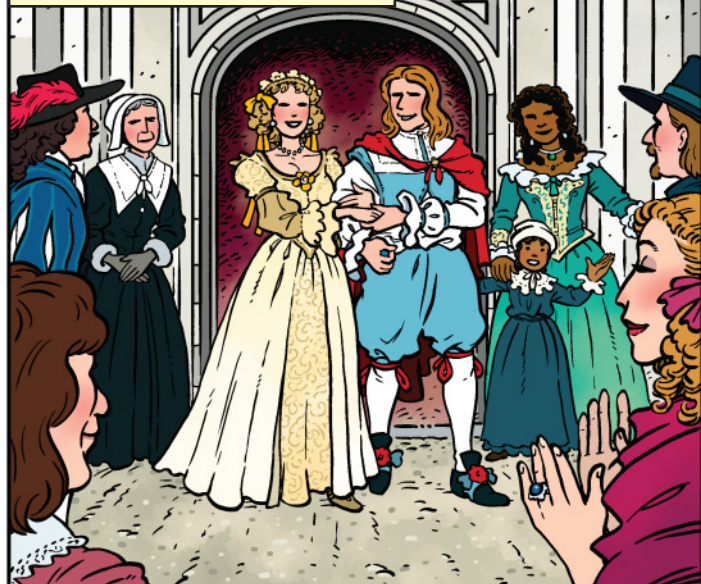He asked Jane what she thought about his new wig.

Jane was sad Pepys had to shave his hair, but told him he looked great!

After a year, Jane left her job. She stayed friends with Bess.

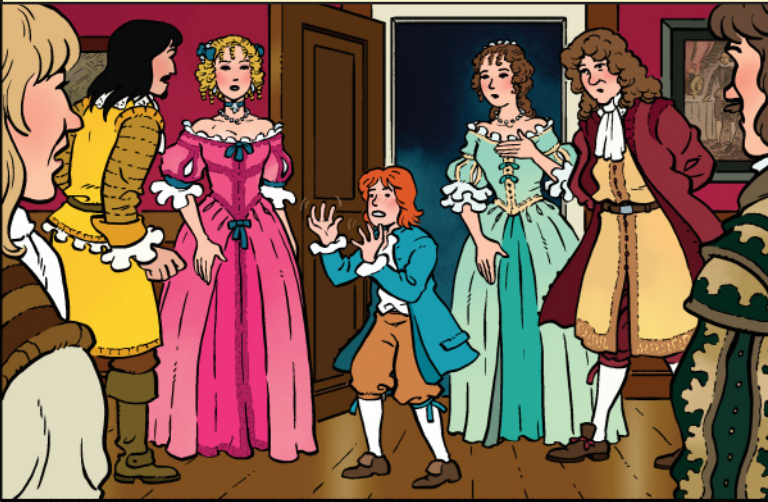In 1669 Jane was married and had her own home.

Pepys also wrote about an exciting signed conversation! One day in 1666 Pepys was at a party when a fire started near the palace.

So soon after the Great Fire, everyone was very worried.

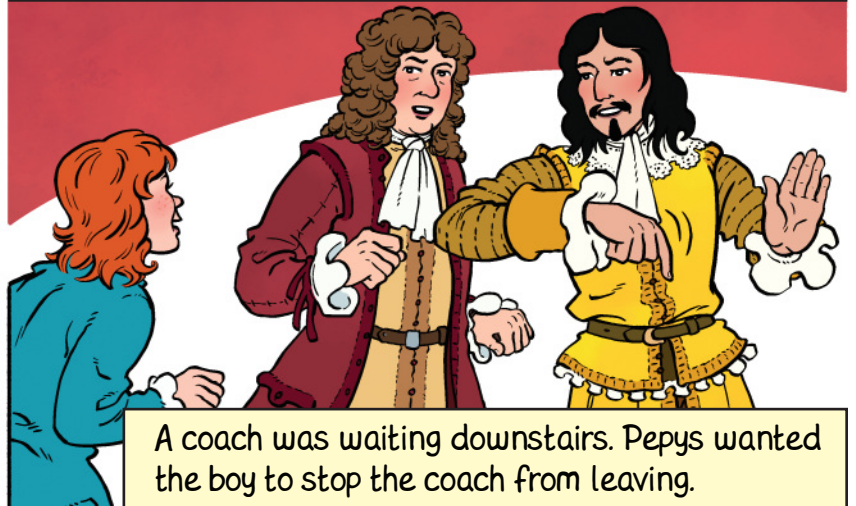A deaf boy arrived and signed to them about the fire.

Thankfully, the king was safe.

Pepys felt left out as he didn't understand, and other people did.

Pepys wanted to find out more about sign language. He wanted to see how clever the boy was. Pepys asked his friend, John Downing, to sign to the boy for him.

A coach was waiting downstairs. Pepys wanted the boy to stop the coach from leaving.

The boy went to see if he could stop the coach ...

He pretended to be sleeping in there.

Then he tried to steal the seat, but it was nailed down!

Finally, the angry coachman chased him away.

The boy came back and told everyone what he had done.

Pepys was very impressed.

This was one of the first times in English history that anyone wrote in detail about what a deaf person was signing. But Pepys never wrote down the boy's name!

Just around the corner lived another young deaf man. His name was Framlingham Gawdy. His friends called him Fram.

Fram was training to be an artist.

His teachers were called Sir Peter Lely and George Freeman. Lely was a famous artist who had painted the king.

Fram enjoyed life in London. He wanted to be fashionable. Fram signed to George Freeman that he was ashamed of his old clothes.

Fram and his brother John were both deaf. Both used sign language. John was an artist too.

Fram wrote letters to John.

Fram sent John presents from London. They both loved chocolate, which was new in England.

Fram fell ill. In 1672, he wrote his will.

Fram is the first deaf person that we know about who was born deaf and wrote his own will. He left money to his brother John.

We can read Fram's letters to John today. Perhaps one day a Deaf historian will find some of Fram's paintings!

UNKNOWN

To download this comic and find out more about deaf people's lives in the seventeenth century, visit

museumoflondon.org.uk

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