

Shop that became UK's only gallery of its kind

TRAVELLING through Selborne on the way back from his parents' home in Sussex, Tom Yendell spied a building which would become an important part of his life.

For Mr Yendell, of London Road in Holybourne, had been a member of The Association of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists since 1986 but had nowhere to produce his artwork.

"To start with I wasn't very switched on to do any painting," he said.

"I was told 'you have got the talent - you have got to produce the artwork'. Initially I said 'if you (the MFFA) get a gallery I can paint at the gallery and talk to the public'.

"On the way back from visiting my parents in Sussex I saw the village shop here for sale - a perfect place."

That was 10 years ago and the gallery has now become an important feature of the village - as it is the only full-time dedicated gallery for exhibiting the work of disabled artists in the UK.

And it has become a special place for Mr Yendell, who is married to Lucy and has two children, Joseph and Holly.

"I have always been interested in art," he said.

"I went to Treloars College and had two fantastic art teachers, Alan Wild and Jill Goff. They sort of encouraged me. When it came to leaving school I think art was the only thing I was relatively interested in."

Mr Yendell then went on to Hastings College to do a foundation course in art before doing his degree in expressive art at Brighton Polytechnic.

Born with no arms or hands in the early 1960s, because of the drug Thalidomide, Mr Yendell learnt to use his feet, mouth and chin to do everyday tasks from an early age.

But Mr Yendell does not consider this as a disability.

"You have only got a disability if other people say you have," he said.

"Everything I have wanted to do in life I have done."

Working at the Selborne Gallery, in High Street, six-days-a-week, Mr Yendell has seen visitors from across the country, and even the Prince of Wales has paid a visit.

For the Prince visited the village in July this year to open the Gilbert White Field Study Centre and popped in to the gallery to meet with artists from the MFFA.

Mr Yendell recalled the moment he met the Prince.

"It was really nice," he said.

"He was very interested in the art because he is an artist himself. He picked up a couple of paintings that he really liked."



Prince Charles during his visit to the Selborne Gallery in July. AD29-17-02.

Although he has painted a range of pictures over the years Mr Yendell said he does not have a favourite.

"I think it is always the one that you have just finished that is the special one," he said.

"But two or three paintings later it will be the one that you are working on."

Mr Yendell does not get his inspiration from his surroundings, but from his own imagination.

However, he does paint from his surroundings if something particularly catches his eye.

In the past he has painted St Mary's Church in Selborne and he is currently working on a winter scene of Holybourne Church.

Mr Yendell is one of around 600 members of the MFFA around the world, spread across 60 countries.

"In Britain there are 33 members at the moment, spread from the Isle of Sky all the way down to the West Country," he said.

"I am the local artist. Nearest one to me is Alison Lapper who works on the south coast."

Mr Yendell actively promotes the work and art of MFFA by giving talks at various groups, including women's institutes, schools

and art groups.

"As long as I feel that I am contributing to the association then I am happy with what I do," he said.



Tom Yendell with the picture he is currently painting of Holybourne Church. BOD46-504-02



The Selborne Gallery in High Street. BOD46-503-02

The Selborne Gallery offers visitors the chance to view a range of paintings by disabled artists across the world, and not just members of the MFFA association.

Mr Yendell is on hand to assist people who want to buy originals or prints, or just find out more about the artists.

Admission to the gallery is free, and it is open all year round, Tuesday to Sunday, apart from during January.

A free information service has been set up at the gallery, which visitors can join.

After becoming a member people will receive a regular newsletter about the organisation, and its members, and catalogues of all forthcoming exhibitions in the UK both at Selborne and other venues.

Although the association is not a charity itself it has contributed to a number of charities over the years.

It has also established an educational trust, with two artist members among the trustees, in order to make significant donations to aid the education of disabled children in the arts.

The association offers a wide range of MFFA products, produced from original paintings, for sale including Christmas cards, books, puzzles, general greetings cards, fine art prints, calendars and videos.

To find out more about the Selborne Gallery contact 01420 511233.