

In the Picture

Jeremy Ford

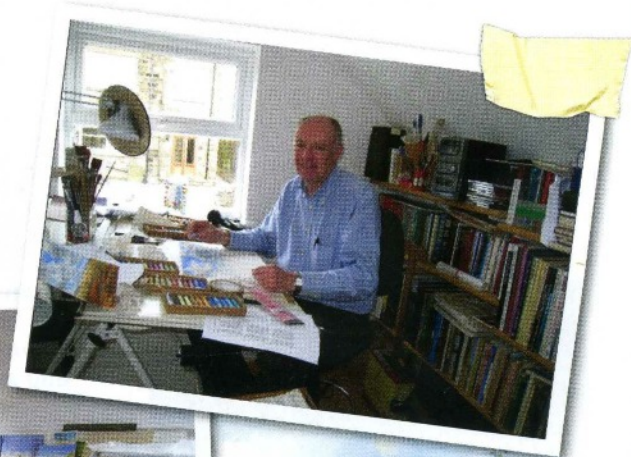


This time we take a step into the studio of SAA Past President Jeremy Ford as he talks about his journey to becoming one of the UK's best loved teaching artists

At school I was only really interested in Art, which was generally thought of as a hobby and not proper work!

After leaving school I went to the local Art College where a whole new world of possibilities opened up to me. Here I could see that someone, somewhere had to design the packets of what we buy; someone designed the visual instructions and someone printed the leaflet. It was actually someone's job to take the photograph, make the jewellery, design the dress, the wallpaper, make the pot, conceive the stage set or illustrate the book.

After a year's Foundation Course then two years' Graphic Design, I went to study Illustration at Harrow College of Art which was brilliant. Here were teachers who were

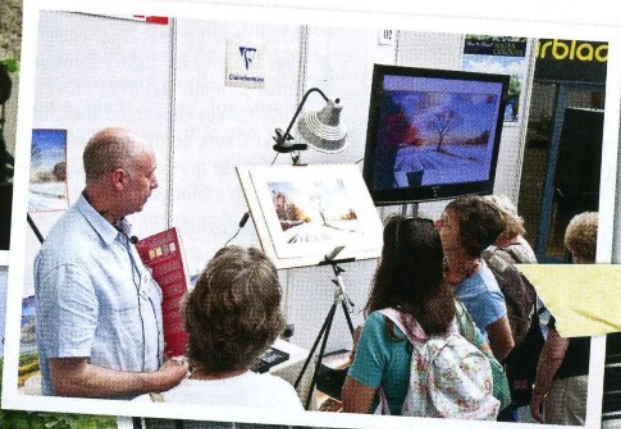


practising artists, illustrators and printmakers who really knew their stuff. The emphasis was on drawing, drawing, drawing, and we drew everything from people to animals, machinery to buildings. Drawing was the framework upon which painting then built. After gaining my diploma with distinction I illustrated books, magazines, advertisements and greetings cards as a freelance illustrator. I maintained a steady workload through agents who found me wide and varied work, in exchange for a considerable percentage!

After several years I decided to start a private painting class, and soon that class had expanded into four more classes. That was in 1984 and, although I now live in Yorkshire, I still teach those five classes in Southport in the North-West. Each class has 20 people and with my local class in Ackworth I now teach 120 people on a weekly

basis between September and Easter. In between all this I do demonstrations and workshops and teach painting holidays at home and abroad.

In the early 1990s I thought I'd better learn more about teaching as mine was fairly chaotic at times, so I took a hugely beneficial two-year part-time Certificate of Education which has made my teaching slightly less chaotic. On average half of my week is spent teaching and the rest either painting commissions, planning my teaching or doing new paintings for exhibitions and/or classes. I do very little illustration work now, preferring the way my working life has developed as a teacher and artist. Between Easter and



Coe's Mill, Cheddar, N. Somerset. 22.6.10



summer I do more workshops, demos and painting holidays, as well as trying to find some time to relax!

My favourite kind of painting is working en plein air, or "outdoor painting" which for me is the biggest challenge and the main reason why I like teaching painting holidays. When I go on my own holidays I take my sketchbooks with me as I get twitchy if I don't paint after a while. I enjoy the process of trying to capture the essence of a particular time and a place, and conveying the atmosphere and the feeling of the day. I don't find painting relaxing but I do find it totally absorbing. It's hard work as you need to concentrate for long periods which can make you physically and mentally tense as well as being tiring.

My work environment was until recently a room in the house, but now I have a purpose-built studio which I LOVE. It's only down the drive but at least I go out to work now. There's lots of space to spread out either at my desk or at my easel and it's my place of calm creation which helps separate work from home. I listen to the radio or CDs when I'm working and I like all kinds of music depending upon the mood I'm in, but if it's not music then it's Radio 4 (being an Archers fan). I usually work at my draughtsman's desk which is perfect for most of my work but for larger pieces I use an easel which enables me to stand back and view my painting. Although I work in all mediums, my work is mainly watercolour as most people I teach want to learn watercolour more than any other medium. My palette of colours is the same

whatever the medium (except pastels which require more subtle shades) and I have become familiar with the colours I use and what I can achieve with them. I'm "old-school" in this respect, disliking the overwhelmingly vast range of unnecessary colours which can easily be mixed from a carefully chosen few.

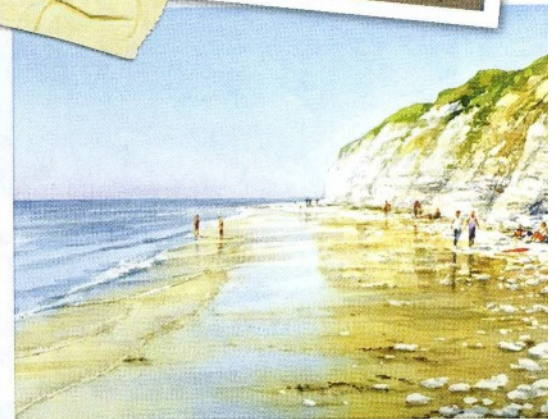
I don't exhibit paintings on my own very often but I do put work into open exhibitions from time to time. Most of my work I sell privately and every now and then I have a sale of framed and unframed work at discounted prices (get your Christmas presents early).

My one tip for everyone who paints is: Always carry a sketchbook or camera - you never know when you'll need one!

I'm no photographer but I take a lot of photographs for reference and inspiration. I then use these with sketchbooks to work out the paintings I'm going to do. I do a lot of preparatory work prior to producing a "finished" painting and when working on a watercolour painting I usually do one or two simultaneously. While one is drying I can work on another, giving me freedom to experiment with composition and colours and reinforcing my technique.

I do have good days and bad days, and sometimes I'll have spent all day trying to work out a painting which all goes wrong. I try and think of these setbacks positively in that I've learnt something, even if it's what doesn't work rather than what does work. Mistakes are learning opportunities and fortunately most of mine are done in the studio rather than in public! Demonstration paintings have usually been worked out and honed over and over again until they become very familiar, limiting the possibility of public mistakes. Having said that, people do like to see artists make mistakes so they know that they are human after all.

When I started giving demonstrations to art clubs I was relatively naive in my preparation and research for what I was supposed to be doing but each one helped me to learn more and more. I also watched others at work; picked their brains and read their books. In the 1990s I was asked to demonstrate at the Ilkley British Watercolour Shows four times a year - these were big demonstrations in front of a large crowd on a big stage under hot lights. This was a hard apprenticeship but a useful one because if you could do a good demo there, you could do one anywhere! Over time, with exposure and publicity these led to more demo requests, later being asked by art materials manufacturers to



demonstrate their products at art materials events. At one of these I met and then joined the SAA and from then on I've never looked back. I particularly enjoy teaching people and seeing new and familiar faces, all wanting to pursue their passion for painting. To be able to pursue my own artistic interests at the same time as helping people achieve this, is a most wonderfully challenging and rewarding experience.



For details of Jeremy's books and DVD titles visit SAA Home Shop at www.saa.co.uk.

For details of Jeremy's painting holidays and courses, visit: www.jeremyford.co.uk, email jeremy@jford40.freeserve.co.uk or telephone 01977 615843