

A Retiring Artist

Peter Sherred

At the end of May 2014 the York Street Gallery in Ramsgate was host to a retirement exhibition of the work of well-known local artist Denys Le Fevre. After three decades engaged in the world of fine art as a professional artist Denys, 84, has decided to lay down his pens and paint brushes to focus on domestic matters such as his garden and his model railway both of which hobbies he loves greatly. Diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2010 he developed his third deep vein thrombosis in his left leg following an operation in April 2014 which curtailed his activities and confirmed his intention to retire from the artistic scene he has graced for so long to concentrate his energies on his home based hobbies.

Denys is well known in Dover and in many parts of the County and beyond for his excellent pen and ink drawings enhanced by his use of water colours. The photograph of him at his retirement exhibition shows him standing, with his wife Barbara, in front of a framed print of just one of his Dover scenes, a panoramic view of Dover Harbour from the Western Heights. A frequent visitor to Dover he was a familiar figure at the Calais Foire in association with the Dover Chamber of Commerce in the 1980s and 1990s often commuting daily to Calais with the late John Turnpenny a former Honorary Freeman of the Town. He became associated with Claude Devin and his gallery in Calais. Denys well knew René Aube, a

close contact of John Turnpenny in Calais, who with Henri Ravisce, President of Calais Chamber of Commerce, was a frequent visitor to Dover.

Denys was born an only child for his mother died just two weeks after his birth and his father, a Master Mariner, died when Denys was just nine years old. The loss of both his parents at this early age determined his early life as he was educated subsequently at the Royal Merchant Navy School near Wokingham during the Second World War years, 1939-1945, leaving at the age of sixteen to pursue a career in the Merchant Navy. However, this was unfortunately cut short by illness and following a 12 week spell in St George's Hospital in London he was enrolled as a student in the Art Department of Sir John Cass Technical Institute in London where he studied fine art which was to form a significant part of his life in later years and for which he developed a high reputation with his original creations now being highly collectable.



Denys and Barbara Le Fevre with Mary Sherred May 2014

Conscripted into the Royal Air Force at 18 for a period of two years he finished his mandatory service in 1950 at the base repair depot in Lüneburg, Germany, at the conclusion of the Berlin Air Lift. Two years later he emigrated to New Zealand as a '£10 Pom' but his expectations were not met and so a year later he returned to England via Australia departing Sydney on the P & O Liner RMS "Strathaird" on which he met Barbara, his future wife.

On his return to England he joined the electrical giant, Philips in London as a clerk but shortly after his talents in art were recognised and he was made a Lighting Design Engineer in the Lighting Design Service.

He and Barbara were married at St Luke's Church Wimbledon in June 1955 and moved to Sutton in Surrey. Over the next twenty years or so he moved on to the Atlas Lighting Overseas Department of Thorn Electrical Industries and from there to Troughton & Young Lighting Ltd. Before leaving Thorn he was elected in 1972 as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and also became a Chevalier in the modern Christian Order of the Temple of Jerusalem, better known as Knights Templar. In the Knights Templar he rose to be Grand Prior of England, a position he held for eleven years, today holding the title of Grand Prior Emeritus.

By 1970 Denys and Barbara's family profile had changed with the addition of their two sons, Simon and Graham, both of whom became choristers at St Paul's Cathedral. Denys and Barbara moved to Ramsgate to run a guest house in Southwood Road. For the next two years Denys commuted to London every day in his employment with Troughton & Young Lighting Limited before obtaining employment with a local family-run firm in Sandwich which

manufactured sports equipment.

Continuing with his art as a hobby, in 1979 Denys, with Barbara, joined the Ramsgate Twinning Association and in May 1999 he organised a joint junior art exhibition in Ramsgate for the children of the town and of Conflans Sainte Honorine which is located at the confluence of the Seine and Oise rivers in France, as part of 20th Anniversary celebrations. In 2002 Denys was elected Chairman of the Association and produced the first edition of the successful "Twinning Topics." He was also instrumental in organising an official twinning with Chimay in Belgium.

In 1984 following redundancy he became self-employed which gave him the opportunity to establish himself in the field of fine art. A field in which, over the years, he has had many interesting and varied commissions. Among other prestigious projects he was invited to design a plaque commemorating the evacuation of 338,000 British, French and Belgian service personnel from the beaches of Dunkirk in May 1940 and this work stands in Ramsgate's Pier Yard overlooking the inner basin of the Royal Harbour. He designed two memorials to the pilot and crew of a Blenheim Bomber, L8665, which was brought down over Ramsgate on 8th August 1940. One of these was placed in the entrance to the Old Ramsgate Hospital and the other is to be found in the RAF Memorial Garden at the Spitfire Museum, Manston. Denys designed a stained glass window in the church of St Laurence-in-Thamet to commemorate both the life of Lloyd Butcher, a Church Reader, and the arrival of St Augustine to Thanet in AD 597. He has also designed a stained glass lozenge in the Huguenot Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral.

Other significant commissions included

one from the Confederation of the Cinque Ports for which he designed a map of the Confederation area complete with the shields of all Confederation towns the original of which hangs in Walmer Castle. All the towns acquired original prints with one notable exception – Dover! However, the town did eventually acquire a lesser copy at some later date missing out on the originals the other towns had acquired.

Other commissions required him to produce pictures for Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, at the opening of Minster Agricultural Museum and for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to commemorate a visit to Ramsgate in 1991. Denys was commissioned to provide the Roll of Honour at Bearwood College (formerly the Royal Merchant Navy School) for those lost in action in the Second World War and this framed work hangs in the school's St Nicholas Chapel and is of significant sentimental value.

Denys has held joint and one-man exhibitions at the Barbican Arts Centre in London and also in Calais, Guines, St Quentin and Conflans in France and Chimay in Belgium. His pictures hang in public and private collections throughout the world and he has published three books of his work as well as publishing, in a limited edition of 500, a book entitled "Ramsgate Illustrated".

In 2008 he mounted a retrospective exhibition of his work dating back to his school days. This was held in the Boating Pool Gallery, Royal Esplanade, on the West Cliff sea front in Ramsgate. Over 200 of his pictures and several albums, together with some models, were on display. The



St Martin of Tours Church, Guston

exhibition was opened by award-winning actress, Brenda Blethyn, (television's "Vera"), a Ramsgate resident. At the end of the exhibition with voluntary donations of £1 given for each of his catalogues he was able to send £1,100 to the then recently formed charity, 'Help for Heroes'.

His retirement exhibition included on display seventy pictures and some albums of his work of which 50% were sold before the exhibition ended. Examples of his art work in and around Dover include several churches including (as shown with this article) those of St Mary the Virgin, Dover, St Martin of Tours, Guston and St Peter and St Paul, Charlton in Dover each of which demonstrate his meticulous eye for detail and are fine examples of his work. As he has now laid down his pen and brush, original examples of his work will be hard to find and will be a treasure to those who have obtained some already – what a pity Dover was the only Confederation town not to obtain an original print of his work commissioned by the Confederation! A good friend of Dover we offer him every good wish for his retirement with his wife Barbara as they approach their Diamond Wedding Anniversary in 2015 together with their family.