

VAL PETTIFER - 'Old School Studio' Whittlesford



Many Whittlesford people and art lovers from a very wide area were saddened to learn of the death in May of Val Pettifer, who with support of her husband Dave, had over seven years transformed the former 'Infants' section of the original Victorian village school off High Street Whittlesford, into 'The Old School Studio' - attractive art centre and gallery, venue for special workshops with notable experts and unique weekly "Drop in & Paint" sessions

Her own fascinating story had been enjoyed by a full house as she was the guest speaker at the Whittlesford Society AGM in May 2019. It had been just 3 years before retiring from a successful business career that she realised her true vocation, profession and passion lay in Art - and how she and husband Dave realised her dreams. She developed from a talented amateur artist with a studio at home, to increasing involvement with art education, societies and exhibitions in Cambridge, Royston and further afield. Then, as her own reputation as an artist grew nationally, the chance came to establish her own studio and an art centre in the old school. It became an asset and attraction for the village with several nostalgic events attracting former teachers and pupils from its past, as well as current professional artists and art lovers.

The old school premises were already (and continue to be) home to well-established picture framing experts, with gallery and gift shop. When the old school building emptied in the early '70s as William Westley School opened, it returned to the ownership of the Manor. For some time the far classroom wing became the studio of another notable local professional artist, the late Patricia Downes, sister of Kim Tickell, and other tenants included artists and business associated with art, until Dave and Val Pettifer transformed the 'infants' wing, on the left of the main porch, with spacious ground floor and galleried balcony area and created a delightful private garden outside.

Just weeks after the AGM Val was diagnosed with terminal cancer and since 2020 the premises (re-named The Mezzanine Studio. Old School Complex, have been the headquarters of the charity 'Toms Trust', Caring for Children with Brain Tumours. Website: <https://www.tomstrust.org.uk/>).