

# Wicken painter and local historian Tony Day dies at the age of 100

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Painter and local historian Anthony Walter Day has died at the age of 100 at his home in Wicken.

He lived and worked for half a century in the village and was renowned for his landscapes of fen country, exhibiting at more than 80 one-man shows and many group exhibitions.

A farmer's son, he was born in Wicken in 1922. After the death of his father when Tony was 16, the family moved to Cambridge.

Tony served in the Second World War in the Royal Army Medical Corps. When he returned, he pursued a teaching grant so he could study art between 1948-1952, first under John Hookham at Cambridge School of Art and then with J Anthony Betts at Reading University.

He worked for several years at the Cambridge Arts Theatre as a scene shifter and at one point painted a replica of Rubens Adoration of the Magi for King's College to aid the lighting installation.

Tony painted in oils and was commissioned for portraits and taught art at evening classes in Cambridge. He would also review exhibitions for art magazines and newspapers.

He met John Berger - the painter and art critic - in London, who was driving between galleries on his motorbike.

And Tony has been described as like a Cambridge version of Berger, holding an ambition to return to Wicken and live in the farmland village of his childhood.

He started to paint landscapes en plein air in oils and later acrylic, a practice he continued for decades.

He befriended the actress Eleanor Bron when she was a student and her partner, the influential architect Cedric Price, and occasionally bought and sold artworks. He bartered his own work for services to acquire Mangle cottage, overlooking the pond on the village green in the heart of Wicken

There, he began exploring local history, and was an avid collector of photographs and stories about Wicken.

He wrote and published 14 books from a range of Wicken subjects including Peat Diggers, the 1944 Railway Incident at Soham, Farming in the fens and the Times of the floods.

Until his insurance was refused when he was in his eighties, he could often be seen on his motorbike driving into fields with his painting equipment in and around Wicken.

Concentrating solely on landscapes of the fen country, poetic in spirit, he updated the English landscape tradition.

He exhibited at venues including the Royal Academy, the Heffer Gallery, Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry, the Nuffield Foundation, Oxford and Cambridge colleges and in the government art collection. He also exhibited at the Paris Salon and the English Gallery in Boston, USA.

He annually showed his work in his friend Ann Jarman's gallery, the Old Fire Engine House in Ely, and always took part in the Cambridge Open Studios.

He also loved his cottage garden and was a keen environmentalist. Until his late nineties, he grew and lived off his vegetables.

He was supported and cared for in his later years by the people of the village.

Tony never married, but had several nieces, great nieces and nephews. When persuaded away from his cottage, he enjoyed family life, had a wry and playful sense of humour and was a great player of the Newmarket card game. He loved sport and followed the fortunes of Cambridge United FC.

He leaves behind a terrific body of paintings of and words about his beloved Wicken and the Fens.

