

Start of two traditions – July Open Studios and the map

A Julia Ball Open Studios poster at that time circumvented the issue of advertising through the Cambridge Festival by using the phrase 'Artists Studios Open for the Festival' to attract an audience during the event, without being part of the main Festival programme. The poster also foreshadowed the use of a map to indicate where the artists were – something that would be both a benefit to members and a bane to future Open Studios organisers (figure 4).

Overall, whether viewed as part of the Cambridge Festival or as an opportunity for a wider audience interested in art, Open Studios had become an annual July event which had developed into a small group of artists who continued to open their studios into the 1980s.

Others joined this informal Open Studios and then reached a point where they moved on. One such artist is Ted Coney. He exhibited three times with Open Studios at five-year intervals, in 1984, 1989 and 1994, and is a good example of an artist who spaced his participation and also decided that Open Studios was ultimately not suitable for him, because of the way that he produced his work.

Ted Coney – tested COS and moved on

Ted originally came from Yorkshire, going to school at Hull College. He had always wanted to do art. From 1963 to 1966 he trained as an art teacher at the Bath Academy of Art and would teach art for the next 52 years, whilst still being a practising artist.

His first job was at a stuffy boys' grammar school in Warrington. For three years, he and his students brought a wicked breath of fresh air into the school, for example by painting all the furniture blue, red and yellow. The following two years he taught in Hertfordshire as a peripatetic arts teacher at eight different schools. "*I became a sort of Robin Hood for schools!*" he joked. Some of the schools had a surplus of art materials, whilst others might have three paintbrushes for the whole of

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the class. Ted equalised the distribution of material to help the less well-off students (without disadvantaging the rich ones!).

In 1971 he took the post of arts teacher at what was then the Cambridgeshire High School for Boys, but he knew that the school would soon be opening up to allow girls to join (it became Hills Road Sixth Form College in 1974). Ted taught there for 34 years. All the time he continued to produce his own art work as it helped to maintain his enthusiasm as a teaching artist and to pass on his skills to the students. It also kept the struggles artists go through fresh in his mind. He laments the fact that the burden of increased paperwork, and the recent shift to a more materialistic attitude, prevents young arts teachers from practising their own art today. It also seems that the importance of arts courses is declining in schools.

Ted first took part in Open Studios in 1984, aged 40. At that time, it was still Julia Ball's informal group. Always proactive, he made his own flyers and also tried to persuade the Cambridge Festival to accept the group's application to be a part of it. His lack of success left him cross, but undeterred, and he continued generating his own publicity, including inviting Princess Margaret to come along, as she was patron of a charity he was collecting for at his Open Studio. She politely and regretfully declined due to other commitments. Ted also approached Eastern Arts for support for the Open Studios group, saying that the proceeds would go to charity, but without success.

Ted waited five years before considering Open Studios again. This was for a very practical reason. He concentrated on completing one painting a year, supported by many individual studies created to help him compose the final work. Furthermore, Ted did not, and still does not, sell his final pieces, only selling the increasingly popular studies. He needed the five-year gap to accumulate sufficient material again.

When Ted participated in July 1989, there was a new vision for Open Studios and a growing number of participants. Ted was asked to represent Open Studios on Radio Cambridgeshire, a coup as Olive Mayo had also been interviewed the previous day, so the growing group was getting more publicity! The recording of the interview can still be heard here:

<http://www.tedconeyfamilyportraits.co.uk/content/tedconeyinterview003.mp3>

Ted exhibited again – and for the last time – with the now 'Cambridge Open Studios' in 1994. The group had expanded further. He still has one of the early flags (see below) but took an individualist's stance and balked at having a COS T-shirt.

Ted remembers COS being very good to Hills Road Sixth Form College as he was given a booklet for each of the 300 students. He encouraged students to visit three open studios and write up a report. Students were advised not to take photographs without permission, not to monopolise the artists, and to take along their parents who might want to buy some art! Ted also opened the COS exhibition at the Babylon Gallery in Ely.

One of his 1994 COS memories is of a visitor coming around and asking: "*I really like your curtains! Where did you get them from?*"

By then COS was a very sophisticated organisation but it had become too expensive for Ted, as he was exhibiting work rather than selling. He decided it wasn't worth the expense to open the following year and developed his own unique way of introducing his art to visitors. He now does paid guided tours of his house for part of the year. It is kitted out with an arts trail and accompanying film.