Changing lives: Chris moulds new life as pottery



When Chris Morris offered his time to Middleport Pottery, Stoke on Trent's latest historic visitor attraction, it helped the 60-year-old develop creative talents and provide a route out of depression.

"This building has been a big part of my life and it was here when I needed it most," he says. " I feel a bit like Dr Who. The building's been regenerated and I feel regenerated."

The project to give the Victorian pottery a new lease of life was masterminded by the Prince's Regeneration Trust and supported by a £1.5million grant from HLF.

Chris had grown up in a two-up, two-down house just 100 yards from the factory and, although never having set foot in the building until three years ago, it had been a major part of his formative years. As a child he had played on the canal path and pottery rubbish tip next to the building. As an adolescent he had used his first camera to take snaps of the pottery. Later, as he dabbled in watercolours, he chose it as one of his subjects.

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Having worked as a baker for many years he switched to a security firm where his role was to shadow cash-in-transit vehicles by car. When advancing technology meant he was no longer required Chris, who had long suffered from arthritis and hip problems, was physically unable to take on the alternative job offered and was made redundant.

“Here I am, I’m 57, I haven’t got a job. What am I going to do?” he says, adding. “I was suffering from stress anxiety and depression.”

An article in the local press offered a lifeline. It was a call for volunteers to help run the visitor centre at the newly regenerated Pottery. “They were looking for volunteers. A door had opened for me and I fell through it!” says Chris. "The building always held a fascination for me. It’s a dream volunteering job.”

Chris meets and greets visitors and tells them about the home of the world-famous Burleigh pottery created in what was in its Victorian heyday a state of the art industrial plant alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal at Burslem.

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He has also had the chance to develop his skills in photography and watercolour painting to create an impressive range of mixed media artworks depicting scenes from pottery life. A selection of these featured in an exhibition in the site’s new display space and were on view when Prince Charles paid a visit. Chris describes his involvement in the pottery, never having volunteered for anything before, as “exciting uncertainty. You never know what’s going to happen next.”

“As a child I would have liked to work in a museum, but I didn’t have a degree,” he says. “But this isn’t just a building that has been turned into a museum and being involved has inspired me to do different things. In fact it’s all the things that I had thought about and had an idea to do but hadn’t been able to, till now!”

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