

12 February 2008

## LOOKING GOOD IN HANDS OF EXPERT



Medical craftsman John Pacey-Lowrie can empathise with his patients - he is blind in one eye.

Despite the fact his own vision is impaired, Mr. Pacey-Lowrie is one of only a handful of specialists who design, manufacture and meticulously hand-paint false eyes.

In fact the 54-year-old, who has a practice in Nottingham city centre, has created nearly every facial feature in his time.

He started off his career making dentures, before moving into maxillo-facial work on ears and noses.

He switched to eye prosthetics, training at the Moorfields Eye Hospital in London nearly 30 years ago.

"With my false eye, I used to be a patient for students at Moorfields to learn their skill," he said.

His youngest patients have been babies born without eyes. Others have lost eyes due to diseases such as cancer, retina failure, accidents at work, road crashes and sporting injuries - squash balls are just the right size to take out an eye.

As well as his routine work, Mr. Pacey-Lowrie has had to come to the aid of patients in an emergency - like an eminent businessman who accidentally flushed his eye down the toilet.

Then there was the farmer who presented him with his charred eye which had rolled into a fire during a drinking session.

"It was a black lump. It went in the bin," said Mr. Pacey-Lowrie.

A supermarket check-out assistant had a shock when a bored three-year-old took out his eye and threw it in her till.

Each eye is bespoke, made from acrylic and painstakingly hand-painted in front of the patient to match up the colour.

When a driver lost both eyes after scaffolding poles from a lorry in front went through his car windscreen, his twin brother helped Mr. Pacey-Lowrie create the colour for his artificial eyes.

Blood vessels are created from red silk thread, teased from the strand with a scalpel and delicately placed on the white of the eye.

At Mr. Pacey-Lowrie's private practice, the whole process can be done in just three working days. It costs £1,200 for an adult eye, which lasts five to seven years.

He used to see 300 to 400 NHS patients a year when he worked at the Queen's Medical Centre for ten years, until the unit was axed in 2005. The service is available on the NHS at the City Hospital, but patients face a longer wait.

The same year Mr. Pacey-Lowrie suffered a series of heart attacks and underwent a triple heart-bypass operation. The operation initially failed but, after further surgery, he bounced back, starting his practice in Regent Street 13 months ago.

He now has 130 patients from all over the UK and as far as Delhi and Australia.

Ann Evans lost an eye in a road accident in Lenton Lane 40 years ago.

Ann, who was just 18 at the time and about to get married, was devastated.

She was fitted with a "glass eye", the first of many false eyes over the last four decades. "People stared. Some of the false ones stood out," said Ann, 58, from Ruddington.

She had her latest brown eye created by Mr. Pacey-Lowrie three months ago. It was funded by the Notts Primary Care Trust after she put her case to them, outlining the problems she had previously had with poor-fitting eyes. Ann said: "It's brilliant. I have had so many people say it's the best ever. It is great to have a lovely fitting eye. It was dragging me down before. Your self-esteem goes."

Ann is set to have an operation soon which will allow the false eye to move.

