

Father's art reminds me of prejudice he faced

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The Norwich 20 Group is 70 years old this year. Their anniversary exhibition, "The story of a unique group of artists in Norfolk", is being hosted by The Bridewell Museum from March 18 to May 24.

The original Twenty Group were a collection of radical, forward-looking local artists who, in the last months of the Second World War, got together to promote better understanding of contemporary art and to counter widespread hostility and prejudice against it. My father was one of the original members. He moved, we can say, in distinguished artistic circles.

He also came to move in elevated business circles, as the manager of Jarrold's Publication department, and mixed with all sorts of nationally-known figures.

But he'd grown up in a working-class family and originally spoken with a real Norwich accent, as his parents did all their lives. He didn't speak like that in later life, though – you could tell he came from Norwich, but he'd modified his accent considerably.

That modification came at a cost. Dad knew that some people in business circles would look down on him if he spoke in the way that came most naturally to a young man from a terraced house in New Catton, and that opportunities might be denied to him.

So throughout his adult life, on important and formal occasions, he suffered the



■ Burnham Overy Staithe, a painting by John Trudgill, one of the founder members of the Norwich 20 Group.

Picture: SUBMITTED

anxiety that goes with having to think, not only about what you're saying, but about how you're pronouncing it.

No one should have to do that. No one should have to feel, because of the bigotry of others, that they can make progress in life only if they abandon their native dialect.

We're doing our best to stamp out the scourge of sexism – we don't tell women it's their fault if they're discriminated against. Equally, if people with truly local accents are dismissed as not being worthy, we shouldn't say it's their fault, but do our

best to stamp out this linguisticism – which is even now often overtly and shamelessly expressed.

People are at their most relaxed and articulate and expressive when they're speaking in their own natural accent. In creating his paintings, Dad felt free to express himself as he wished, in spite of the prejudice that existed against modern art in the 1940s. It's a pity he couldn't do the same when he was speaking.

At the Bridewell exhibition, I shall have two reasons for thinking about combatting prejudice.