

Versed in poet-tree

HERE'S a few things you may not know about Felix Dennis. He's commissioned 50 bronze statues for a garden of heroes and heroines. He's bought 18

Rolls and Bentleys, owns 20 kitchens, and has published more than 250 magazines and websites during his career.

While we're at it, he plants 300 acres of forest a year and sets aside three hours a day to read and write poetry.

It's clear Felix – publisher, poet, philanthropist, pioneer (and co-editor of the infamous Oz magazine) – doesn't do things by half.

"Certainly I have an addictive personality" he agrees. "And everything I've always done, I've done too much of it, until I'm bored of it and then I stop."

The 63-year-old is due at Liverpool's Contemporary Urban Centre next month reading from his book, *Tales From the Woods*, which marries two of his current obsessions - poetry and trees.

He's been writing verse voraciously for a decade, first taking up the pen while in hospital with a serious illness.

"My boredom threshold is terribly low. I'm like a 13-year-old boy," he explains. "And so the wonderful thing about poetry is that it utterly engrosses me for that period of time."

This particular addiction has gone on for a long time I suggest.

"It's getting a little bit worrying," he barks with laughter. "I mean, I was only taking class A drugs for about eight years and then I got bored with them!"

"But no, there's no sign of it wearing off, and I'm still writing or studying poetry every single day."

"It's a tyranny, but it's one I absolutely and thoroughly love."

Poems about oaks and elms are a long way from an early life that saw Felix as a defendant in the longest conspiracy trial in British legal history

(the infamous Oz obscenity case), become the first person to say the rudest word in the English language on British TV, and spend \$100m on 'wine, women, drugs and partying' during a "lost" decade.

Now the multi, multi-millionaire entrepreneur appears content living in the Warwickshire countryside, fulfilling his ambition to plant a huge broadleaved forest in the heart of England.

His love of trees goes back 30 years to when he'd escape London by train to go walking in the countryside.

Felix smiles: "I began to get very irritated because I didn't know what trees were what. I knew a horse chestnut and could just about do an oak."

"And I can remember, and how shameful this is, standing by a river and looking at what I now know to be an alder, and being completely bewildered."

"So I started to buy tree recognition

books, and then like everything else I do, I became completely manic, and it was like stamp collecting, I'd go round and find these incredibly rare trees."

He now plants thousands of saplings a year, continually buying extra land to extend his dream forest of trees, grassy rides and woodland pasture.

Still, he'll be leaving the green wood to embark on a 21-date tour entitled *Did I*

Mention the Free Wine? – bringing poetry..and claret from his own extensive cellar

"There are huge plasma screens, sound effects, music, and all kinds of lighting," he enthuses. "I really do try to give people an evening's entertainment."

◆ See Felix Dennis at the CUC in Greenland Street on October 1. Tickets £10 on 0844 815 5870 or £12 on the door.