

Jottings



Welcome to the Sheffield Photographic Society Jottings

At the AGM on May 5th 2009 it was reluctantly decided to end the practice of providing a hard copy Newsletter for members. The cost of providing the newsletters has escalated over recent years to the extent that each copy is now costing well over £1. Rather than make an additional increase of £3+ to the annual subscription it was decided to move the newsletter on to the society's web site. Expenses for visiting lecturers and judges have also increased and it is planned that any savings will be used to help maintain and improve the visiting lecture programme. It was felt that the move to an electronic newsletter was now possible because the vast majority of members now had some sort of access to the internet – even if it was only through a relation, friend or the public library.

A number of people expressed the view that they were sad to see the traditional Sheffield PS newsletter go.

It is hoped that the new Jottings will take on a very different roll to the old traditional newsletter. We hope that members will contribute to it in a far less formal – more intuitive way than they did to the newsletter. We would like members to comment on lectures and judgings and be prepared to share their views and opinions. While it is important that everyone understands that anything published on the internet is a public document available for all to read, we hope this will not inhibit debate. Please remember that our lecturers and judges attend SPS because we have invited them and that most only claim expenses. (Unlike MP's they do not claim for moats and duck houses.) They therefore are our guests and deserve our courtesy even if they have savaged your favourite print.

You are therefore invited to contribute to Jottings by sending your articles, ideas, opinions and comments. See below for e mail addresses.

In the future it is further hoped to expand Jottings by making a link with Flickr. This will enable members to post images and invite comments about their photographs. We are investigating the possibility of making this a members' only site. When we have more information about this opportunity we will post "an idiot's guide" (I will certainly need one) on how to join in and get involved. We think that this will give very different feed back to that received from visiting judges in the monthly competitions.

The whole purpose of the SPS Jottings is to help members enjoy a more active (less passive) membership.

02.09.2009 Colin New Editor

Contributions for Jottings should be sent to either;

Editor Colin New colin.new@btopenworld.com or **Web Master** Peter Mason p.mason@sheffield.ac.uk

Non Quo Sed Quomodo

Roughly translated, Not what (you do) but how (you do it).

I thought I'd think about how my old school motto might apply to my approach to photography and I am coming to the conclusion that it simply doesn't point me in the right direction. If pursued, it would suggest that the 'technical know-how', (is it in focus, do I have the correct f stop and speed, is it on the third...?), was far more important than how the subject was interpreted. My suspicion is that the majority of club judges rigorously support the 'technical how' argument, an attitude that has a huge influence on members output. I do remember hearing one judge say..."I don't know anything about art but..." and I think that was a terrible thing to hear.

The fact that your President has yet to get right all those technical requirements, (simultaneously) has nothing to do with the fact that he thinks, on balance, that it's the 'what' which is, by far, the more critical attribute. How many times have you heard a judge say "We've all seen other, better, versions of this..." about some tired old cliché, only to dismiss something new and exciting with the words "...but not tonight, in this company...".

Nevertheless, I joined SPS, five or so years ago, in the hope that I might improve my "technical skills". My intention was to sit at the back and not get involved, (some hope) but to learn. What I have learned is that the two approaches to club photography are alive and well, 'technical club' more so than 'salon art' however. My conclusion is that's a healthy state of affairs. I can still strive for that (what will be first time in my case) image that has it all 'right'; but I nevertheless remain thrilled, staggered and inspired by some the more art-house, less obvious images that gladden my life from time to time, produced by some of our more thoughtful members. I hope more members might, with me, aspire to emulate such work.

There are a couple of issues I'd like everybody to think seriously about.

Firstly, the **coffee 'help rota'**. We desperately need helpers. All you would have to do is pour water into cups and pass those cups through the hatch, that's all there is to it. We have however reached the state where if there are no volunteers, we will have no option but to cease "trading". **There will no more coffee.** Please come forward and add your name to the rota.

Next, for our own sustenance, if nothing else, we need to exhibit our work. To do that we need boards to hold the images since walls aren't usually available to us. We own a splendid set of boards but we have to rent space to store them. Currently that space costs us £800.00 PA in round figures. That's 18 subscriptions or 15% of our total income— gone before we start to think about meetings and speakers.

So — we would like to offer you a FREE membership if you have a (say) 10 foot square, DRY space to spare and you wouldn't mind taking on the storage of the screens. They are all in bags, so would be reasonably tidy to store.

The other thing on my mind is the AV Group. You may be aware of how much money the groups' shows contribute to local charities and to the main society. But the AV group needs the support of a few more members.

You may be concerned that because you know nothing about AV's, you wouldn't be able to contribute. Don't worry. In the first place you'll find that everyone will be happy to help you and secondly, this year most of the meetings are going to be of the 'workshop/how to do it' kind.

Nor should you be put off by thoughts of great expense. If you have a PC, the best AV software (Pictures to Exe) is available for just 39 US Dollars and that includes all future updates, it's a steal. On the sound side, it's even cheaper... Audacity is free. You will only need a bit more kit if you decide to add voice over dialogue to your work... and let's not run before we can walk.

The AV group is great fun and you'll get a lot more of your pictures seen, so give it a try. Meetings have now been moved to Thursday evenings and are held at Greenhill Methodist Church Hall. Please ring Keith Brown on 01433 621072 for any additional information.

So, off we go, Adrian Richardson and Keith Brown have produced what I think is a programme to keep everyone happy (although I remain a bit worried about the first night) and no doubt you've all been out acquiring some fine images with which to scoop up some of this year's silverware and amaze the rest of us. I do hope so.

02.09.2009 Ron Walker President

Coming Soon! Coming Soon! Coming Soon!

TUESDAY 15th September. President's Night.

An evening of photography by Ron Walker – President of SPS.

TUESDAY 22ND September. Going South



Digital images and prints from the Antarctic, S. Georgia and The Falklands by Colin New.

Sponsored by Fotospeed.



Insert your choice of comedy title here

EBOOKS – IS PUBLISHING FOR YOU ?

The publishers of conventional bound photography books are tending to limit themselves to well known authors with titles that will sell in large volumes. This makes it increasingly difficult for new authors with short-run titles to see their work in print.

When one door closes another tends to open. In this case it takes the form of eBook publishing.

The idea is that your book is made available through the web, but does not need to be prepared in large volumes. The initial work of writing and compiling still needs time and care. However, there is no large capital outlay in printing costs. Copies are made available 'on demand'.

One of our members, **John Doornkamp**, has developed just such a web site exclusively for authors of photography books – **www.originalebookshop.com**. A look at this site will illustrate how the process works.

The great advantage for the reader is that it makes the task of book purchase fast, low cost, efficient in the use of time, and can be stored on their computer for rapid access (including through word searches). They can also print off a copy if that is how they prefer to work.

For the author the advantages include rapid publication, ease of revision, and a good source of publicity for their work that can be viewed by anyone around the world. It may even lead to a significant income.

With any such web-based publication it is necessary for systems to be in place to safeguard the work from pirating, the images from being 'stolen' and for the sales process to work efficiently. These are tasks that the publisher has to perform. The author need not be concerned about any of these things.

If you feel there is a book within you why not send an email to **john@doornkamp.co.uk** with a short summary of the proposed book contents? Success would give your work a web presence. The income might well pay for the next piece of kit.

John C Doornkamp

Response to “One for the Family Album”

In our last newsletter **Rebecca Nex** wrote an intriguing article about her “progress” as a member of Sheffield Photographic Society. She said that during the 3 years of her membership she felt that her work had developed as a result of comments from judges and members. She had become more self critical about her work and had become more aware of the technicalities of pictures making. She had become increasingly concerned to make “good pictures” rather than “bad ones.” She expressed the view that as her work had become more selective it had also become less spontaneous. “When I look back I can detect big holes in the family record for the year – holiday moments missed because the midday sun was too harsh; family pictures avoided because the available light indoors was not good enough.”

Is this a dilemma we all have?

My wife and I now have a second grandson and my daughter and wife had been urging me (no nagging me) to get cracking and make some pictures of grandson number 2. I kept putting it off. The light was not good enough, the background was too busy. I had nothing fresh and new to say about a baby. My family just wanted a good likeness, a record of the newest family member. Just do it – get on with it! No excuses or the moment will be gone. They change so quickly!

In the end family pressure won. I made some pictures and friends and relations liked them but I found it difficult to get excited about the images because they were not “good photographs.”

And yet – if we go back to Janet Thorpe’s talk “these are the pictures we’ll still be looking at in years to come.”

The issue that Rebecca raises is not just one about family photos and family history it is much wider. Camera Clubs and Photographic Societies tend to encourage a very conventional type of picture. They like to take all their members down the same road and get nervous if someone strays off the straight and narrow.

Camera Club judges talk continuously about sharpness, about colour balance, about composition, about backgrounds – they rarely talk about the emotive response that pictures can give. (Our President Ron Walker hints at this in his opening piece.) Of course it is much easier to talk about these technical issues. Also there is rarely too much consideration or concern that images might be intensely personal and have great and complex private meaning. A judge has a duty to be objective about an image. When you put an image up on the display board you are putting up something of yourself for all to see. You are up there - pinned up - with your work. If your work is not personal – if it is just an objective record – it will lack soul and be of little worth to you or anyone else.

So why do we allow these judges and club gurus to lead us down the road to camera club technical perfection? I often feel that our judges are unsettled by the unusual – concerned by images that break “the rules.” It seems to me that many do not have an open mind. Decisions are often made on the sort of work they have seen before and what is “generally acknowledged” to be “good.” They rarely have the self confidence to go out on a limb. Many of our judges do not go to exhibitions – apart from those that show camera club work.

Much of the work in **Don McCullin’s exhibition at the Bradford Media Centre** would not do well in our monthly and annual exhibition. His work is the work of a master – it is work that is full of power, meaning and emotion. Some of it is even beautiful. How many camera clubs or photographic societies would have the courage to put these images on their walls and award their cups and gold medals for these pictures?

Don McCullin worked with speed and spontaneity when making his pictures. Often he worked in the white heat of battle without the chance to consider and compose. He just did. Often it was only after a shoot that he had the opportunity to evaluate what he had been photographing.

And yet his pictures are most often beautifully composed. His backgrounds are rarely cluttered – they usually contribute to what he wanted to say. His pictures are as sharp as they need to be – and sometimes that is not very sharp at all.

What I am getting round to saying is that he has the technical expertise of a master. It is at his fingertips but he no longer has to think about it – it is spontaneous and unconsidered. He can forget about technical matters and get on with making pictures.

This expertise comes from years of practise. Technique like this was not always second nature to him but it is no longer allowed to get in the way of his picture making. Rebecca has started her way down the journey and been made aware of many of the techniques that the photographer can use. For many photographers this technical journey can be like a journey down a tunnel – one from which they never emerge.

We all need to learn enough technique for our needs and then we have to put it at the back of our minds - take it for granted and just get on with the business making pictures that express what we want to say. For that we need to use our eyes and our emotions.

What do you think?

02.09.2009 *Colin New*

London Salon 2009

This year we had another large entry of photographs from the club in the London Salon. Selected pictures were shown at the Cotton's Centre London and at Smethwick Photographic Society. It was an excellent exhibition.

Steve Dorey, Keith Lord and Adrian Richardson were all successful and had prints "on the wall." Jim Edmundson from Bakewell also had a print selected. Well done to all who entered – a number of whom had near misses.



Keep Out by Steve Dorey



The Outsiders by Keith Lord



Quiet Chaos by Adrian Richardson

HDR photography and painting — Peter Mason

High Dynamic Range (or HDR) photography has become very popular over the last couple of years and several members of SPS have had a go at using the technique. HDR is a way of solving one of the basic problems of photography, namely getting a quart into a pint pot. Photographic prints and projected images can only display a quite restricted range of brightness, but the real world has a huge range of brightness - the problem is how to reduce the brightness range of the real world down to what can be represented in a photograph.

If you want to be convinced that this is a real problem you can do a simple experiment with any digital camera. Take a photograph of a scene that includes some bright areas, usually the sky, and some dark areas such as shadows. Display the photo you have just taken on the screen of your camera, and compare it critically to what you can still see in front of you with your own two eyes. If the original scene was quite contrasty you will probably find that the picture on the camera has shadows which are nearly black and show little detail, and sky that is washed out, but when you look at the original scene your eyes can pick out detail in the shadows and the sky that is not captured by the camera.

I saw this problem clearly when I was taking a picture of Haddon Hall recently, and it set me thinking about what painters do in this situation. I am talking here about painting in a 'realistic' style, which has a long tradition going back to Dutch masters of the seventeenth century right through to the present day, including a large school of Victorian artists painting genre scenes (I learn these words by watching the Antiques Roadshow).

A common theme for genre painters in Victorian times was a cottage interior with a view to the outside. An example is *Here's Granny* by George Smith:



The original scene would have had very great contrast between the dark interior, lit only by one or two small windows, and the bright exterior. You know that if you tried to photograph that scene you would not

be able to choose an exposure that would show detail in the interior and yet not burn out the trees outdoors. If you exposed for the highlights you would get something like this:



but if you exposed for the shadows you would get something like this:



The painter George Smith has looked at the original scene and painted what he saw. His eyes can make out detail in the highlights and shadows, so he has put paint on canvas to try to represent what he sees. In doing so he was doing something very similar to what we can do now with our digital cameras using HDR techniques.

For those who are not familiar with HDR, it involves taking several photos from the same position using different exposures, and then blending these images together in some way to produce an image that preserves detail in both highlights and shadows. This process of blending can be done manually or by using special software, and the results produced can vary in the hands of different photographers over a spectrum from 'realistic' at one end of the scale to 'bizarre' at the other. My personal interest is in producing HDR images that represent as nearly as possible what I saw in the original scene, but some photographers seem to delight in the 'bizarre' end of the spectrum and produce some very strange looking images.

I find it interesting that we are now trying to do with our cameras what artists have done almost unconsciously over the years. We have got used to photographs giving a very contrasty representation of the scene before our eyes, and many photographers would say that this high contrast (especially in monochrome) is the essence of photographic quality, but we now have the ability to take a different view of the world as well. We can choose to produce a contrasty image or use something like HDR to compress the subject range into our image, but we have to remember that we are making choices all the time about how we represent the scene, and no choice is intrinsically more correct than any other.

Nothing is new under the sun, and painters too have sometimes gone down the route of painting very high contrast scenes and leaving the shadows to go as black as they may. They even came up with a name for this technique: chiaroscuro, which is Italian for light-dark. This is an example of such a painting, *The Matchmaker* by Gerrit van Honthorst:



The scene is illuminated by a single candle on the table, carefully shaded from the artist or the camera. It makes a very dramatic painting and would make a superb photograph!