

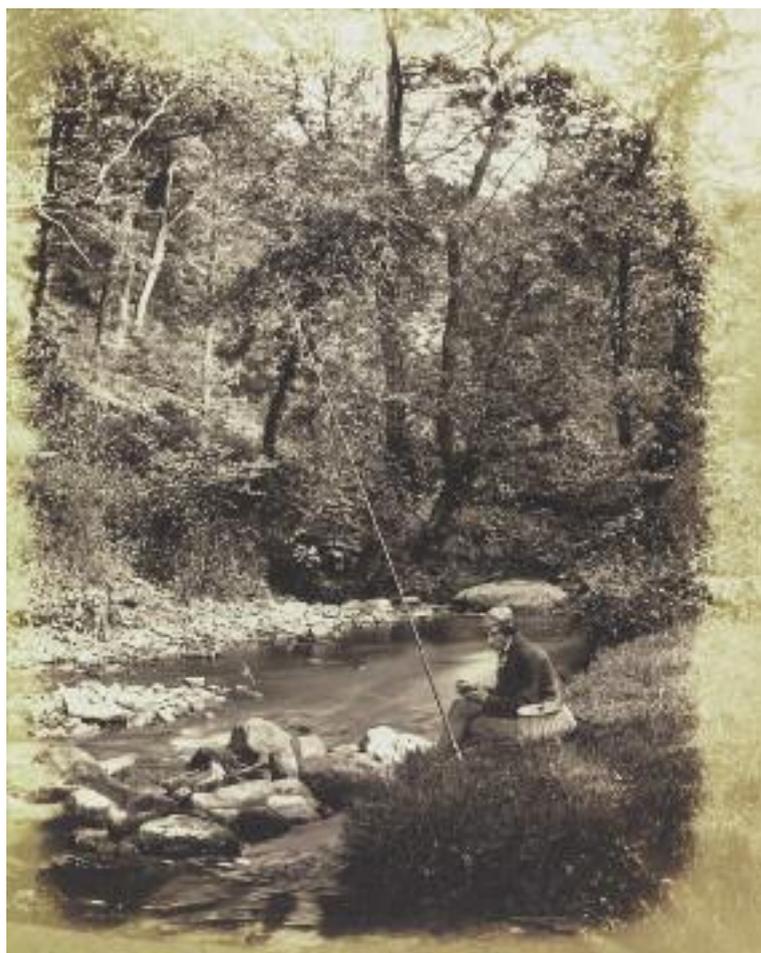
## HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY DISTINCTIONS

On 20th January 1853, soon after the dawn of photography, The Photographic Society of London held its inaugural meeting. Originally founded as a scientific society, its aims were summarised as 'the advancement of photography'. In 1894 by Her Majesty's command, the Society became 'The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain' and in 2004 was granted a Royal Charter.

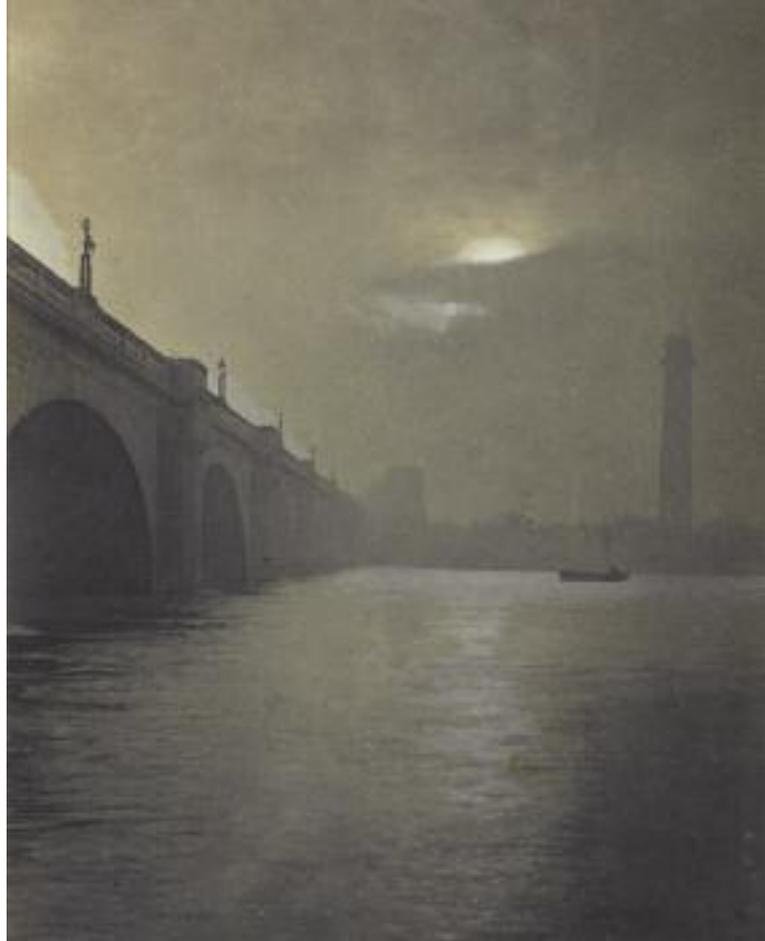
### The Fellowship: the beginning

Membership of The Society has always been open to anyone interested in photography. By the 1890s it was felt that competence in the practice and development of photography should be recognised; consequently, in 1895, the Fellowship (FRPS) was introduced. During the first year, members of The Society were able to claim admission as Fellows without the submission of evidence; of 549 members, 156 applied and were made Fellows. Subsequently members had to submit their qualifications to Council.

By the turn of the century an Admissions Committee had been appointed comprising eighteen Fellows of The Society, half to consider qualifications relating to science, and half to consider pictorial qualifications.



John Dilwyn Llewelyn FRPS Piscator (Albumen Print) c1855



Frederick Hollyer FRPS Waterloo Bridge (Platinum Print) 1877

Candidates had to be recommended by two Fellows of The Society, who would confirm their 'personal or social eligibility'; consideration of technical or pictorial qualifications being left to the committee who reported to Council. Council discussed these reports at one meeting, but only voted at the following meeting; (not until 1940 did discussion and voting take place at the same meeting); two-thirds of the vote was required in order to be successful.

By 1909 membership of The Society was just over 1,000 of which 188 were Fellows. Applications for the Fellowship had become more formalised requiring a statement of qualifications under one or more of the following:

- a) *Original investigations, improvements or inventions adding to photographic knowledge in either theory or practice*
- b) *Educational work*
- c) *Technical work, e.g. the application of photography in the various arts and sciences, and in record work of all kinds*
- d) *Pictorial work*
- e) *Professional portraiture*
- f) *Other qualifications*

Applicants were asked to submit as much evidence as possible including details of any examinations or awards achieved relating to photography, published papers, examples of work, etc.



**Edward Steichan FRPS** Torso, Paris (Photogravure) 1902

### The Associateship: the early years

The Associateship (ARPS) was introduced in 1924. The President, J. Dudley Johnston, wrote:

*“There are a great many able photographers who, by the very nature of their work, would never be likely to receive the Fellowship, but for whom the Associateship will be very appropriate, and something in the nature of a certificate of proficiency.”*

Only members could apply for the Associateship, and only Associates for the Fellowship.

By 1940 the number of Associateship applications had risen from 55 to around 140 a year and were submitted under the following headings:

- A. Pictorial Photography, including Portraiture
- B. Commercial, Advertising, Press and Record Photography and Photo-Engraving
- C. Colour Photography
- D. Natural History Photography (Animal, Botanical, Entomological, etc.)
- E. Kinematography
- F. Scientific Photography, including Photomicrography, Aerial survey, Astronomical, Meteorological, Medicine, X-Ray work, etc.
- G. Scientific Research on Photographic subjects
- H. Work on Photography of a definitely educational character

Assessors with appropriate expertise were appointed and each Section voted separately; their recommendations were reported to Council and three quarters of Council's vote was required to be successful.

### Requirements

Until the end of the 1930s there were no regulations regarding the quantity of work to be submitted for the Distinctions and there was no application fee until the 1950s: initially 10s 6d, which covered entries in any number of categories made at the same time.

In 1939, in Sections (later known as 'Categories') where evidence was principally in the form of images (i.e. Pictorial, Commercial, Colour, Nature)

applicants had to submit “not less than six and not more than twelve” images; this was changed the following year to: “not less than twelve”. The requirement for a *fixed* number of images – twelve for both Associateship and Fellowship – was introduced in 1950 and successful prints were franked: ‘Accepted for the Associateship (or Fellowship) of The Royal Photographic Society’ (this practice was discontinued in 1960). Twelve years later, in 1962, the number of images required to apply for the Fellowship was increased to eighteen. Submissions of colour transparencies had additionally, until 1985, to include six prints as supporting evidence. The final change in the quantity of work required came 30 years later, in 1992, when it was increased to fifteen and twenty respectively for Associateship and Fellowship.

Applicants for the Associateship had to demonstrate that they were ‘thoroughly competent’ and ‘well above average in their photography’; for the Fellowship, exceptional work was expected as well as evidence of a sound judgement in self-appraisal.

In his Presidential Address, 1967, G W G Maclennan FRPS stated:

*“For the Fellowship, exceptionally, when the photographic reputation and work of a photographer are known to be above reproach, Council has the right to waive submission of evidence.”*

This was later formalised into the Direct Application for Fellowship which, instead of the submission of work, is based on the applicant's established reputation, requiring support from a sponsor and referees.

While the majority of Distinction applications were individual, until 1989 joint applications for Fellowship were permissible where “the circumstances of work performance are such that none of the applicants could have completed it alone.”



**Alvin Langdon Coburn FRPS** Forging Steel (Platinum Print) 1905



**Charles Job FRPS** Morning mist on Sussex Downs (Carbon Print) 1905

### Initial Advice and Guidance

Only in the 1940s was consideration given to providing guidance for applicants. Panel Chairmen were asked to prepare general reports on their own meetings for publication in the Journal. It was soon evident that these reports were of limited value since the same faults kept occurring. As an interim measure it was decided to give advice only to a) overseas applicants; b) those who had failed on more than one previous occasion and c) applicants who were very close to the required standard. In an attempt to assist applicants, exhibitions of successful work were held at The Society's Headquarters and later in the regions.

Concern that written comments could be misleading led to Council's decision after four years, to stop commentaries altogether. However, demand for feedback prevailed and one of the first proposals of the Distinctions Co-ordinating Committee (appointed in 1958) was that unsuccessful Associateship applicants should receive a form listing the most common faults with ticks indicating where the submission failed as well as indicating which images were not up to the required standard.

### Introduction of the Licentiateship

The ten years to 1947 saw a huge increase in the membership of The Society, from 2,500 to over 6,000 then remaining fairly static until the mid 1970s. During the same period the number of Distinction applications averaged around 480 a year; the Pictorial category attracting the largest number of applications.

The 1970s proved to be momentous years for The Society. In 1970, in response to growing criticisms, a Commission (comprising senior members of The Society) was set up to consider all aspects of membership; to discover what members wanted from The Society and how they thought it should develop. A major outcome was the establishment of the Licentiateship (LRPS) in 1972:

*"The Associateship is awarded for a high degree of competence in one of twelve different fields of photography and is primarily a*



**Alvin Langdon Coburn FRPS** St Paul's from river 1905

*Distinction for the specialist; the Licentiateship will be awarded on the basis of practical photographic ability in either still or motion picture work and will therefore provide recognition for the good all-rounder."*

From the start ten images were required for the Licentiateship in stills photography, 'entirely the work of the applicant'. A major innovation, was the opening of these assessments to an audience and from 1974 'Towards the Distinctions' Photographic Advisory Evenings were also organised – the forerunners of today's Distinctions Advisory Days.

For the first time a Society Distinction was open to those who did not take photographs but could display alternative specialised skills, e.g. colour printers, film editors, etc. An exemption scheme was also introduced: applicants were exempt from submitting practical work if they could provide evidence of passing an appropriate photographic examination.

In 1978 trade-processed colour prints were accepted, but applicants were advised that other aspects of their photography, e.g. lighting, composition, would be more critically assessed.

Despite the success of the public Licentiateship assessments, it was not until 1978 in Coventry that an audience watched an Associateship and Fellowship Slide-Sound Sequences Panel – the first public meeting outside London. Again it was enthusiastically received, but a further five years elapsed before the next occasion – an Associateship Nature Panel chaired by Heather Angel FRPS (subsequently awarded the Honorary Fellowship following her two years as President of The Society (1984-1986); only the second woman to hold this office, the first being Professor Margaret Harker Hon.FRPS in 1958.) Audiences were gradually accepted at all assessments.



**Charles Job FRPS** Morning mist on Sussex Downs (Carbon Print) 1905

### **National Centre**

The mid 1970s were difficult years for the UK – 25% inflation, regular strikes and power cuts – and for The Society, a deficit in 1974 more than doubled the following year to over £13,000 facing it with an acute cash-flow crisis and the possibility of closure. Radical steps were taken – principally reducing publication of the Journal from twelve to six issues a year and increasing subscriptions.

Since its formation The Society's headquarters had always been in London. While in Princes Gate, a prestigious property overlooking Hyde Park, the local authority ruled that the building should be converted to residential use so The Society was forced to move. Temporary offices were found in Maddox Street until it could move to its new home at 14 South Audley Street in Mayfair, officially opened in November 1970 by HRH Princess Margaret, accompanied by her husband, the professional photographer, Lord Snowdon.

After ten years it became obvious that The Society could no longer afford to remain in London. An appeal to the photographic community throughout the world was launched, raising over £400,000 towards the establishment of The RPS National Centre of Photography which was eventually located in The Octagon, an 18th century Grade 1 listed building in the centre of the World Heritage City of Bath. At her own request, the official opening ceremony in April 1981 was performed by HRH Princess Margaret.

### **The Growth of the Distinctions**

The number of Distinctions applications gradually increased through the 1980s to a peak in 1991, of 1,547 (730 of which were for the Licentiatehip) – a 15% increase. A major contribution to these record figures was the acceptance of the City & Guilds 9231 scheme for Licentiatehip exemption; a modular scheme, it was aimed at the recreational as well as the serious amateur photographer and as many as 38% of Licentiatehip applications came via this scheme. Following this



**Marcus Adams FRPS** Charm of childhood (Cloro-Bromide Print) 1930

success, an equivalent exemption scheme for the Associateship was introduced in 1994, a degree in photography being the benchmark.

In order further to encourage membership of The Society, in 1986 non-members were allowed to apply for the Licentiatehip on the understanding that if they were successful, the Distinction would be awarded only when they joined The Society. This was later applied to the Associateship.

The popularity of the Licentiatehip led to an increase in the number of assessments held each year both in Bath and throughout the UK. A particularly exciting venture in 1993 was a Panel and workshop held in Hong Kong at the instigation of the Hong Kong Tourist Board which was enthusiastically received.

Recognising the importance of the Distinctions to The Society, successive Councils have endeavoured to improve the assessment process, aiming for fairness and consistency for all applicants while maintaining standards across a wide range of subject matter and format. There have been many changes in the scope and nature of the Associateship and Fellowship categories; some have been disbanded through lack of interest, e.g. Graphic Art Processes, while others have been renamed in order to clarify their scope, e.g. the History of Photography. Originally part of the Education category, its title changed to: 'History of Photography & Critical Writing'; later merging into an 'Academic' Panel which has now developed into the 'Research, Education & Application of Photography' Panel.



**G L A Blair FRPS** The 'Verve' (Bromide Print) 1930

From the start, the Pictorial category attracted the largest number of submissions and briefly in 1990 it was renamed 'Pictorial and General' in order to accommodate photographers who enjoyed a wide variety of work. The Panel's range was so diverse, it divided into 'Visual Art: Pictorial' and 'Visual Art: Contemporary' with the intention of reverting eventually to form one Visual Art Panel. It was soon recognised that the differences in philosophy were too great and they remained as separate categories: 'Contemporary' and 'Visual Art'.

Imaging Scientist Qualifications were introduced in 1993. They provide a structure leading to professional qualifications for engineers, scientists and technologists whose professional activities are concerned with quantitative or mechanic aspects of imaging systems or their applications. Successful applicants also receive an equivalent Society Distinction.

It has always been important for The Society to keep abreast of current developments. For the Distinctions, the Contemporary Panel encourages diverse forms of submission and was the first to accept installations as applications. In 2002, the first digital submissions on CD were accepted for the Licentiate'ship; and two years later for the Associateship. Increasingly the internet is used to disseminate information and provide advice and guidance; a comprehensive document covering all aspects of

the Distinctions process is available to download from the RPS website as well as several interactive CDs.

### Committees

The Distinctions Co-ordinating Committee (DCC) comprising the Chairmen of all the Panels, was appointed in 1958 to meet once a year to discuss any matters of concern. However, a need was identified for a body responsible for the overall monitoring of standards of the Distinctions, independent of the Chairmen. In 1993 the Distinctions Moderating Board (DMB) was formed.

The Distinctions Moderating Board comprised five suitably experienced Fellows, plus two non-members of The Society (appointed principally to ensure that The Society kept abreast with developments in the educational/photographic world). Its primary role was to maintain equalisation of standards across the Distinctions and it incorporated the Validations Committee which had advised on educational matters, particularly with regard to the exemption schemes.

The Distinctions Advisory Board (DAB) later replaced the DMB and extended its role to advise and monitor all aspects of the Distinctions and make recommendations to Council. It first met in 1996 to discuss Quality Management and all documentation relating to the Distinctions was revised. In line with this process, a proposal was mooted to adopt a criteria-based marking system for the Distinctions in order to ensure a more consistent method of assessment and provide a more accurate system of feedback to applicants. Using the existing criteria, a marking sheet was produced which each assessor would complete for every applicant. Following a pilot in April 1997, this form of assessment has continued ever since.



**John Ahern FRPS** The Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford upon Avon 1930



**Rosalind Maingot FRPS** The Palmist (Bromide Print) 1942



**John Bertram Eaton FRPS** Farm in the valley (Bromide Print) 1938

Although not adopted by the Associateship and Fellowship Panels, this system helped them to produce their own criteria-based Feedback sheets which would be completed for all unsuccessful applicants. In the interests of standardising procedures, Panels were encouraged to adapt to the 'best practice'; similarly the requirement for all Associateship and Fellowship applicants to submit a brief statement of intent with their applications was introduced, while submissions of transparencies no longer had to submit more images than print submissions.

The assessment of Associateship and Fellowship Panels is by a majority vote, following discussion amongst the Panel members. It was felt that some of the more vocal members could influence the outcome so a system was introduced whereby Panel members indicate their vote, on an



**Larry Burrows FRPS** Churchill awaits Mendes – France's arrival at RAF filed outside of London (Gelatin Print) 1942

initial viewing and prior to any discussion, by means of a red or green card which only the Chairman sees. Following closer scrutiny and discussion a final vote is taken.

One of the most contentious recommendations made by the DAB was that from spring 1996, no audience should be present at Fellowship Assessments. This was to ensure that Panel members could be as frank and open as possible in their discussions. Initially the recommended submissions from the Panels were reviewed by the DAB and DCC meeting together in order to encourage a greater awareness and understanding between the Panels. This process gradually evolved until in 2009 the Review Board was replaced by the Fellowship Board.

#### **The Fellowship Board and Recent Developments**

Close monitoring of the Fellowship assessments by the DAB clearly showed a significant degree of variation in standards between the categories which eventually led to the formation of the Fellowship Board.



**Dr G MacLennan FRPS** Rue de Cardinal, Polignac, Le Puy (Bromide Print) 1958

It comprises five Fellows of The Society, experienced in both photography and the Distinctions. Applications became a two-part process: the individual Panels make recommendations to the Fellowship Board, and the Board makes the final recommendations to Council. Panel Chairmen attend as observers and are expected to give a succinct presentation on any recommendations from their Panels as well as feed back any relevant information to their members.

Distinctions requirements continually develop, reflecting technological progress or social change. A recent subtle but important change in the requirements for Fellowship was that it would be awarded for 'excellence and distinguished ability, combined with evidence of originality or freshness of approach, or showing the very best practice in a given area.' This was an acknowledgement that 'originality' is not always possible and 'freshness of approach' or 'best practice' are equally demanding requirements.

Recognising the fact that Distinctions Advisory Days were heavily biased towards the Licentiate and Associateship, in 2010 the Board recommended that there should be separate Advisory Days for those working towards the Fellowship, with a limited number of attendees and no audience other than the participants. Attendees would be expected to bring a substantial body of work and have a clear idea of the concept of their submission.

A major new category was launched in 2011 – Multimedia and Narrative – encompassing audio-visual, moving image and time-based media. Due to



**Larry Burrows FRPS** London minicab (Gelatin Silver Print) 1961

the nature of this category flexibility in the requirements is necessary and a wide spectrum of interpretation will be considered.

In 2004, The Society moved its headquarters again since the terms of its lease for the Octagon proved to be financially crippling. A substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabled it to transfer its priceless collection of photographs, equipment, books, etc. to the National Media Museum at Bradford, in Yorkshire, leaving it in a position to buy its current freehold premises – Fenton House in Bath.

At the time of writing, despite severe global economic problems, the RPS Distinctions continue to be held in high regard worldwide, with over 1,000 applications a year. Successful applicants at all levels are justifiably proud of their achievements and The Society is pleased to showcase a selection of their work at the 'Celebration of the Distinctions' events.

**Carol Mikellides, 2012**