



ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Contemporary North

A Subgroup of the RPS Contemporary
Group

September 2021



**Report of the RPS Contemporary North
Zoom meetings. Saturday 18th
September 2021, 1:30-4:00 PM (UK).**

**Hosted by Jim Souper and chaired by
Patricia Ruddle**

Text: Gary Morgan

Coordination and editing: Patricia Ruddle

Layout and design: Wendy North

This was our first meeting after the Summer break. So we were all pleased to see each other again, in the UK and in Europe.

Eighteen people joined us for the meeting, including a couple of new members. Sadly we missed seeing the fifteen who sent apologies.



New faces

Simon Lawrence recently joined the Contemporary Group. He is looking for inspiration and guidance, especially as he is currently working towards his Licentiate. He has realised that putting together a body of work is more than just taking photos – he also needs to consider how to make a cohesive body of work for the panel. He lives in Matlock, in Derbyshire

Some time ago, **David Leighton**, who lives in Shipley, came to a live meeting in Clements Hall. He is active in Shipley's Little Theatre and has many pictures of plays, and portraits of actors, which we hope to see in the future.

Announcements

Prabir Mitra's photos from care homes are available as the 40th blog entitled *Life and Death in Care Homes During the Pandemic*:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/september/life-and-death-in-care-homes-during-the-pandemic/>

Since the summer break, there have been other new blogs.

Kolkata Migrant Workers in the Pandemic by **Shubhodeep Roy**:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/july/kolkata-migrant-workers-in-the-pandemic/>

A Cambridge COVID-19 Diary by **Martin Bond and Lottie Limb**:

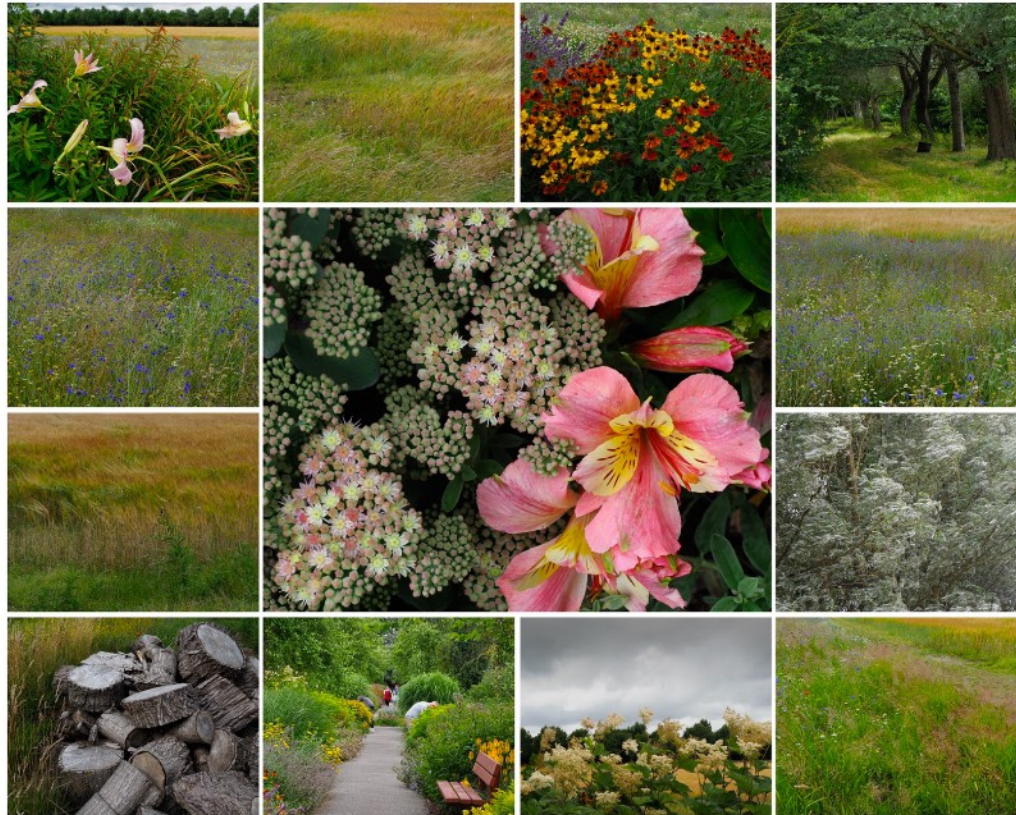
<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/june/a-cambridge-covid-19-diary/>

Photobook Distinctions

The RPS has a new mode of obtaining distinctions – via a photobook. There will be an online talk *Why is the new Photo book Distinction Genre Different* about this new pathway on 27th Sept. at 19:00 by **Stewart Wall**. However, now that we're publishing our *Newsletter* after the event, you will be able to see the talk on You Tube.

Resignations and opportunities

It was noted that the Editor and Secretary of the Contemporary Group have resigned. Applications for these posts are welcome. Also, **Ken Holland**, who does the layout and design for *Concept* has ended his tenure. Volunteers are needed for this position as well.



Sadly, Contemporary North member **Graham Low** will no longer be able to attend meetings due to progression of his illness. Graham has been a keen member and supporter for many years, always ready to help whether with report writing or the delicious biscuits that he brought to Clements Hall. We will miss him greatly and his quirky and ironic photos, yet insightful comments on our society.

We asked Graham to participate in this Newsletter to remember him and celebrate his photography. He chose photos that he took at the Breezy Knees Gardens, near York. He wrote about these photos:

It was a sunny July afternoon but there were storm clouds approaching (a metaphor for much of life?) I was particularly interested in portraying the combination of wind through the trees and plants and the curious fuzzy borderline between formal plantings, wildflower meadow and agricultural crops.



Prabir Mitra

Prabir showed *The Story of Silk*, a series of monochrome photographs depicting the story of the manufacture of silk sarees, using traditional methods, from start to finish. The art of making silk sarees is slowly dying due to changes in manufacturing technology and to lowering demand for this beautiful but increasingly expensive product. His photographs covered the long chain from selecting the leaves to feed the silkworms up to a completed saree being worn by a customer.

The images were shot over period of three years during journeys to various parts of India. This caused a problem because the colour palettes in the different locations were very different, and it was difficult to arrive at a harmonious balance of colours across stages in the story. So Prabir took the ingenious step of converting all the photographs to monochrome.

The story started in the Karnataka region of India. The silkworms are fed on selected mulberry leaves and produce cocoons. The full-grown cocoons are sold at market. The cocoons are sorted by colour and then placed into bamboo spirals and dried in the sun before boiling, which is used to extract the threads.

The threads are spun by hand, which is another dying tradition gradually being replaced by more modern techniques. Spinning often takes place in private houses and strangers are usually not allowed in. However, Prabir, due to his background was able to gain access and photograph the process.

The spun threads are then dyed, again with traditional methods, using organic colours, and the dyed threads are spread out on wooden frames in fields to dry. The silk is woven using machines based upon Jacquard looms. These use punched cards to weave the pattern into the material.









The method used to produce the Jacquard cards is similar to how a digital camera works. The pattern is hand drawn onto squared paper, in the same way that a camera lens projects the image onto the squared sensor array. Then the colour of each square is transferred to the punched cards as a series of holes.

Once the material has been woven additional decoration is applied using hand embroidery, again using silk threads, and decorative jewels are added. These two processes are very skilled and labour-intensive.

Starch is then applied to woven and decorated sarees, which are then transported to the wholesale market, although it is difficult for sellers to get good prices from buyers. The final product is bought and worn by the end customer.

The panel was to be used in an RPS Fellowship panel but was criticised for being monochrome. The consensus within the group was that using colour for these photos would have been a distraction from documenting the process, and that monochrome was exactly the right way to present this body of work.

Some of his “Benarasi Silk-Sarees” photographs are included here, but all of them can be seen on his website:

<https://www.prabirmitra.co.uk/handmade-silk>

Surprisingly, Macclesfield used to be a centre of silk weaving in the UK and still has a museum explaining the process in more detail.

<https://macclesfieldmuseums.co.uk/venues/the-silk-museum>



Morris Gregory

In July this year, Morris attended photo workshop in Bexhill with Iain McGowan. He had hoped to come back with a coherent set of images on Bexhill and surrounding places. However, he fears that he has just produced a random set of things that he saw. However, he showed us a fascinating cross-section of the different genres that you can find if you look with a photographic eye.

There was a mixture of colour and monochrome images some being exercises in texture, some experimental.

They also visited Dungeness and found plenty of rust and paint on metal shipping containers and exploited the theme of urban decay to great effect.

Derek Jarman's house was also visited, but they were not able to gain access. However, it was possible to construct an interesting image contrasting the lines of Jarman's house with some decorative loops nearby. Fairfield church, which was made famous by **Fay Godwin** was also visited.

<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/2007.340/>

In Hastings a surreal image was found in a shop window of stuffed material fish and plates each with face painted onto it.

An exhibition of art was taking place at the same time leading to some images of people attending it. Although Morris claimed that he had little skill in photographing people, he caught the essence of "the art crowd" well.

The Seven Sisters chalk cliffs, as seen from Birling Gap, were also photographed with misty and atmospheric lighting. There was a very well-observed collection of leading lines that terminated in a lone figure on the beach.







Adrian James

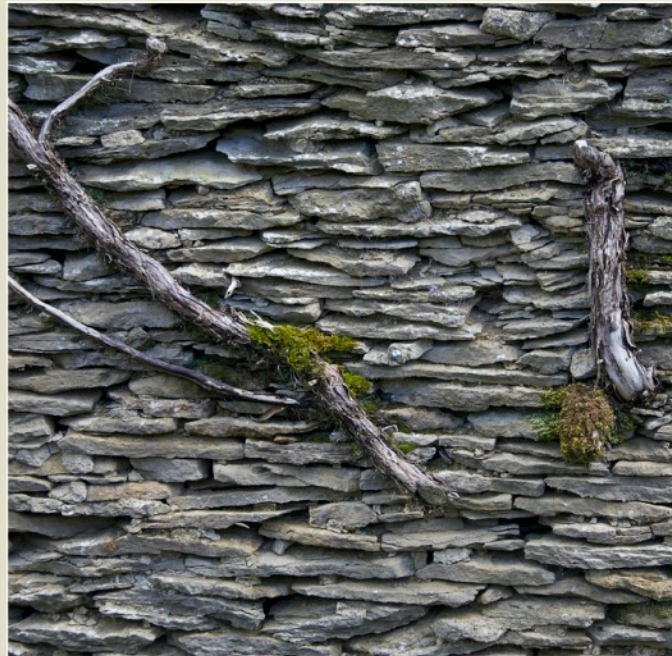
Adrian showed us a small project, that he's been working on in lockdown, although not about lockdown, called *Life in the Cracks*. He was thinking about the way that people look but don't see. He took images, close to home, often when walking his dog, of drystone walls and their inhabitants.

Drystone walls have lots of gaps that suitably tenacious life can get into and inhabit. He found lots of different plant life, and some animals, living in the gaps in the walls. The arrangements of plants that he photographed were as they appeared when he encountered them. He kept processing to a minimum.

He also saw beauty in an abandoned mill in Holmfirth that is gradually being reclaimed by nature.

The final image he showed was a composite using the idea of bricks (the photos) being used to make a wall (the composite image).

André Bergmans observed – *It has been discovered in the Netherlands that a lot of rare plants are growing on quay walls and lichens are growing on tombstones. So now they are actually spending money to keep the quay walls green and it is forbidden to remove lichens from tombstones.*





Bunshri Chandaria

Bunshri enlightened us about her photographic journey during Covid 19.

When Bunshri's mother-in-law, Ramaben, with whom she has been living with for 43 years, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, close family and friends brought her flowers. Ramaben always believed that flowers have a life too. She strongly believed in preserving them as long as possible.



Bunshri set out to explore. Are flowers ephemeral like life? She dried some, froze others and started to photograph them. To her, the beauty of the slow melting ice mirrored her mother-in-law's intrinsic beauty. Could the melting ice be a metaphor for her life? Initially, Bunshri thought of displaying Ramaben's transient feelings of joy, despair or frustration through metaphors of flowers.



As a backdrop, Bunshri used a table - one that Ramaben treasures. The unexpected happened. This particular table evoked memories from her past. A realization dawned on Bunshri that the symbolic objects and the metaphors of nature in Ramaben's surroundings triggered her fractured memories. The immersive, meditative images mirrored her intrinsic beauty.



*Silent
Voice*
Bunshri Chandaria

Namaste – the soul in me recognizes the soul in you.

When my mother-in-law was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, close family and friends brought her flowers. She always believed that flowers have a life too. She wanted to preserve them as long as possible.

I set out to explore. Are flowers ephemeral like life? I froze them and started to photograph them. To me, the beauty of the slow melting ice mirrored my mother-in-law's intrinsic beauty. Could the melting ice be a metaphor for her life? What if I showed her transient feelings of joy, despair or frustration through metaphors of flowers?

Initially I used, as a backdrop, her table – one that she treasures. That is how our conversations started. This table evoked memories about her past. A realisation dawned on me that the symbolic objects and the metaphors of nature in her surroundings triggered her memories, even if fragmented. I believe that these objects echoed love.

The unexpected happened. She went into a zone, if only for a fleeting moment. It was exciting for me. During the process of photographing and having conversations, I have been witness to so many of her random untold stories. And her stories triggered mine, which had been deep rooted. I cannot believe that we have had so many similar experiences. I close my eyes and smile. Who is teaching whom? This project has been immersive and cathartic for me. It has given me the essence of who this beautiful woman is.





Bunshri described her journey as follows:

Applying for a Fellowship gave me a deadline to work towards during the covid. The journey of the project was my solace, a collaboration between my mother-in-law and me. I was privileged to spend one-to-one time with her amongst a house full of family members and carers coming and going. It was 'our time', together. Upon recalling her sporadic memories, we giggled, laughed and also shed a few tears. Some of her memories triggered a few of my deep-rooted ones. I cannot stress how invaluable the experience was, of being witness to her untold stories - histories, which may have been forgotten or never known; legacies to be left for future generations: stories to tell her children and their children. I began to get the essence of the woman she was/is: to get a sense of this beautiful woman's world. This project has been immersive and cathartic for me.

In our meeting last May, Bunshri gave us a short presentation about her recent Fellowship for her book, *Silent Voice*. You can read her Statement of Intent in our May Newsletter.

<https://rps.org/media/kwrem5bv/finalcontemporary-north-may-2021.pdf>

Copies of the Collector's Edition of 200 boxed-books with a signed print will be sold at £125. Through the sale of these books, Bunshri hopes to raise a substantial amount for Alzheimer's Charities. To pre-order, please email her on bunshri@bunshri.com. Watch the space on her website www.bunshri.com for a video of the boxed publication.

Mick Yates told us of an exhibition that he's curating. It's called *Closing Down and Opening Up* and is an exhibition of photographs from 21 photographers from Frome Camera Club in Wessex. They will be showing photographs depicting their often highly personal interpretations of what the pandemic has meant to them. The photographers will also be there to talk about their work and to answer questions.

The exhibition takes place in the Corsley Reading Room in Corsley Heath, BA12 7PR and runs from October 22nd to the 25th, 10AM to 5PM. You can find out more:

[https://
www.fromewessexcameraclub.com/](https://www.fromewessexcameraclub.com/)

Richard Hall wasn't able to attend our meeting, but we wanted to include the conclusion of his project with the



Nottingham Police. As you know from previous *Newsletters*, Richard had a commission to provide photos for use in police cells, an innovative idea that hadn't been tried before in the custody cell environment.

Richard's BA dissertation explored the effect that art can have on mental health. Now, as he begins his Masters degree at Leeds University he plans to further research this concept.

The next Contemporary North meeting will be a live one (hooray!) at Clements Hall in York on 16 October starting at 13:30. We look forward to seeing everyone in person again.

However, not forgetting our lovely North members around the country and beyond, we're back on Zoom on November 20.

18 December back at Clements Hall.