

# Minutes of the Contemporary Group

(A video conference via Webex)

Saturday 8th July 2020

**Present:** Alan Cameron, Aidrian Hough, Brian Steptoe, David Grimshaw, Duncan Unsworth, Ken Holland, Patricia Ruddle, Paul Ashley, Sean Goodhart, Tom Owens, Avijit Datta, Romney Tansley (minute-taker).

## Minutes of the last meeting (circulated):

AD said that he had sent his apologies for the previous meeting and asked that the minutes be amended accordingly. **Agreed: RT**

Proposal that the Minutes be made available on the RPS website. **Agreed: RT/SG**

## Chair's Report by AC (circulated):

At a Zoom based meeting of the SIGs and Regional Organisers on 6th June AC agreed to take part in a joint initiative with the Chair of the Documentary Group with the aim of creating a Covid-19 archive. It's a major project and any help would be much appreciated. He will keep the Committee informed on progress.

Proposed by AD that membership be a standing item on every agenda. **Agreed:**  
AC and RT have not received embership lists since last year and AC has written to Mike Taylor, COO about this. DG mentioned that he has been continuing to receive them and that membership currently stands at 349.

## Treasurer's Report by DG (circulated):

No discussion.

## Regional Organisers Reports by PR, AH, TO & AC (circulated):

No discussion.

## Group Wide Activities:

Concept reports by KH & RT (circulated):

Proposal by AD and PR that there be a subcommittee. Not agreed.

Contemporary Photography report by PA (circulated):

Portfolio Box report by DU (circulated):

DU to work with SG to publicise the scheme.

Webmaster report by SG (circulated):

Vice Chair report by AD (circulated):

Photobooks RPS Criteria (BS) (circulated):

## Events:

AC proposed that we launch a series of online talks/ interviews which would be largely free of charge. These to start in September. **Agreed: AC**

DG pointed out that our constitution isn't in line with other SIGs and the latest RPS common model. It made it difficult for him if the AGM was in the autumns as that was a long time after the end of the financial year.

Proposed to bring the constitution into line with the RPS model and to move our AGM to a date that is closer to the end of the financial year.

Agreed that DG and AC to review the constitution in order to align ourselves better with other SIGs and the Society. **Agreed AC, DG**

## Future Meetings:

DG proposed that the AGM be held next March. **Agreed:**

## AOB

Proposed by PR that Concept not be produced in a low res edition anymore but only as a high res issue that will be available as a PDF on our webpage. Notification of each new issue to be conveyed to members via a link on HQ Broadcast. It should then be placed additionally on Issuu. **Agreed KH, SG**

DG proposed that we stage an exhibition, in the form of small panels of pictures. **Agreed:**  
**DG???**

After our last committee meeting I have been working on how best to organise an exhibition. Sean and I have discussed the technical aspects and he has consulted the relevant RPS technical staff. We envisage using the RPS website, so it will look similar to this:  
<https://rps.org/international/international-exhibition/>

## Next meeting

AC will circulate an availability chart to agree a date.

The meeting concluded.

# RPS Contemporary SIG Chairman's Report Report

Since our last meeting, despite appearances I have been doing some work.

## **Death of Richard Sadler**

I was notified by Avril of Richard's death and she also presented me with an appreciation by Paul Hill plus a document and photo by Mike Hallett (an extract from Portfolio 2). I also found obituaries by Mike Pritchard and BBC East Midlands. Pulling stuff together and with Romney's help and Mike Hallett's permission we created an obituary in Concept at the end of which I asked for input from other SIG members to include in the next Contemporary Journal - I have had only contribution so far.

Subsequent to the publication in Concept, my update of Mike Hallett's text was taken for use in the RPS Journal and will be published in the next edition along with the famous Wedge image and one of his more local images from the Coventry area. Thanks to Paul and Brian for their input to this

## **SIGs Chairs and Regional Organisers meeting**

I attended a Zoom based meeting of the SIGs and Regional Organisers on 6th June. There's not a lot to report except that I have volunteered to take part in a joint initiative with the Chair of the Documentary Group with the aim of creating a Covid-19 archive.

This is at an early stage and came out of an earnest, if somewhat naive conversation during the meeting. It's a major project and I want us to be involved - through me, but any help much appreciated.

## **Events**

Sean has been suggesting that we run free events. I very much agree and through Paul I have been pointed at a volunteers who may be able to help us. His name is Michael Turner. He seemed to be enthusiastic and I have set him a task of identifying possible speakers from the wider photographic community.

Sean suggests that we use our FRPSs as a starting point and I think that's a good idea. To start the ball rolling I need an up to date list of members and that is proving difficult to get. David has a list from 2018, and I have written and tried phoning for an up-to-date list from Bristol. I will keep you posted.

## **Contemporary Journal**

Paul and I discussed the need for a proof reader. My wife Ann is happy to do this. She has some experience in the field.

Alan Cameron LRPS

## Photography, Engagement and Learning during a Pandemic

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it has had massive health, financial, social and psychological ramifications; ten million infections and half a million deaths. Until last week, the UK had registered 59,537 excess deaths since the week ending March 20, indicating that the virus has directly or indirectly killed 891 people per million – the highest per capita death rate in the world. The GDP has dropped by 20% with tens of thousands job losses. Consequent proscription of freedom of assembly (imposed social isolation, lockdown) under Regulation 6 Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 and enhanced surveillance has had major social and psychological effects.

Given these major contemporary events, it is unsurprising that many members have given feedback of disappointment that our SIG, particularly the newsletter *Concept*, does not appear to have covered these momentous changes adequately or at all. Another stream of disaffection, disengagement and apparent alienation has come from the Contemporary Facebook page – it is problematic that the disaffection has led to the establishment of an alternative page, initially named “ NOT the RPS contemporary group “ which has 33 members. Such disaffection ought not to be discounted and/or brushed off; two Fellows have expressed disaffection and/or left the Contemporary Group.

The Contemporary Journal editor kindly invited me to write a “ View From “ article, which was published in Vol 79. That article discussed engagement, participation in the society and how it may be promoted by teaching photography to young people, particularly those from a deprived or disadvantaged background. To follow this up and to address some of the concerns listed earlier, I have interviewed two photographers who have covered lockdown for the purpose of an illustrated article(s) on the process involved and the multiple benefits accrued. The projects have outputs as a published book, social media and a future exhibition. They have been covered by the BBC, Huffington Post and regional newspapers. I’ve encouraged one interviewee to join Contemporary North. The photographers have been involved in learning with young people, with one teaching refugee students and those with Down’s syndrome.

Furthermore, Contemporary North has a project to produce a joint photobook on lockdown. The group zoom meetings establish a community of (mutual) learning as described by McMillan and Chavis (1986). As such they fulfil the four key factors that defined a sense of community, namely (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) fulfillment of individuals needs and (4) shared events and emotional connections. I will be writing about this too.

Finally the committee needs to be able to track engagement. I propose that a prerequisite is to review membership regularly as a standing item on the committee agenda.

Avijit Datta, Deputy Chair

2.7.20



## **Treasurer's Report, July 2020**

*For: Committee Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

### **Context**

Soon after the AGM in March 2020 the UK went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then all committee meetings have been held online and for the foreseeable future large gatherings of people will not be possible. The economy is contracting and we are entering a period of uncertainty. Given that membership fees are our largest form of income we must be aware that membership numbers may decline, and we may need to put additional effort into making the group an attractive one to retain members.

### **Summary of Current Finances**

As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 there was a total of £11032 in our bank account. At the end of April 2020 there was a bank balance of £11299. This is the most recent Bank statement that I have received, and I would like to note that this is an unsatisfactory delay in information needed for the role of Treasurer. The most recent list of member contributions that I have received is for March 2020, showing 117 payments amounting to £595.06

The costs of the AGM were much lower this year because we had no charges for room hire.

### **Future Opportunities**

There is, in the current climate, an opportunity to involve a wider membership in online events. Some suggestions are made in the following section relating to climate change initiatives.

### **Climate Change Working Party**

As a member of this working party I would like to solicit views from the committee that I could then feedback. One of the ways that we can contribute to carbon reduction is by reducing travel and our online meetings are a good step in that direction. I invite the committee to also consider online events such as workshops, image critiques, and discussion/interviews with experts.

Dr David J. Grimshaw MA, ARPS

**RPS Contemporary Group Treasurer**

03/07/20

E: [contemporarytreasurer@rps.org](mailto:contemporarytreasurer@rps.org)

## Concept - report to the CG Committee 8th, July 2020

First I want to express my thanks to all who've helped me as I've taken on the job of editor. To Ken without whose wise advice I'd have floundered much more than I have. Also to Patricia who has made herself available for discussion, and to various others too.

My main aim as editor, in collaboration with Ken, is to produce a really attractive epublication, for a wide readership extending beyond the Contemporary Group, showcasing the life and activities as well as the photography of the Group and that of the RPS.

For this I'm reliant on those of you who regularly submit your reports which make up the core of each issue. In addition there are the submitted articles which I enjoy getting, and would welcome more of. Finally there are the articles that I solicit from photographers and writers I admire.

As editor I try to make each page or feature look as good it can. The aim is to draw the reader in both by the quality and interest of what's there and also by the way it's presented and laid out. The text of articles must be well written. You the contributors already do a really good job on this, but I can help too in my editing. Articles shouldn't be in the form of minutes: that can never be of interest to anyone except the attendees.

And then there are the pictures. Generally there is a good selection so I can choose what I think are the best. That will usually mean selecting the strongest ones from each photographer and avoiding repetition. It's helpful if there is a name and optionally a title with each picture. The selection is also determined by how good they work together on the page. I almost always decide against diptychs and triptyches, but a panel of images that work powerfully together is always difficult to resist.

The quality of Concept is ultimately dependent on the ideas and quality of content of submitted material. For this I need your help and input, so please keep it coming - submitted articles of course, but also ideas for features, picture projects, and links to material that could be included.

Romney Tansley ARPS

## **RPS CG Concept Layout Report June 2020**

After 2 years: time to take stock.

In August 2018 I originally offered to “help out”, but within a few days I was given the full job of doing the layout for Concept. I said I would do it for 3 years, so 1 year left to go.

During these 2 years I have worked with 4 different editors. This would normally be a huge challenge for any publication, but, by and large it has worked well. Recently I welcomed Romney as editor, and I thank him for his help and support, especially during these troubled times of lockdown.

I have tried to update the cover layout to make it more attractive (i.e. with a photo rather than text). RPS HQ have a restriction of 500Kb for file sizes for broadcast. Clearly this is a huge restraint on image quality. I have, for the last 12 months, overcome this by saving a high resolution version (often up to 7 or 8 Mb) on the CG RPS web site (thanks to Sean Goodhart for doing this) and uploading it to *Issuu*. Links to both of these are always included in the lo-res emailed version.

Occasionally I (and the editors) receive appreciative comments, which are always welcome. Each issue takes many hours of work to produce, and it’s always good to know that members are enjoying what they receive.

My remit does not include content (I always leave that to the editor) but may I remind members to please stick to the submission requirements (to the editor please and not to me) and don’t forget: it’s your newsletter, so please do send in your work for inclusion.



## Report from Contemporary SIG Webmaster, July 2020

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/>

Our site is not so pretty as some of the other groups' work. Emily (Web Content Manager) is running regular help/advice sessions – I'm not able to join in these because they run week-days day-time. Doing what I can whilst still very busy at work.

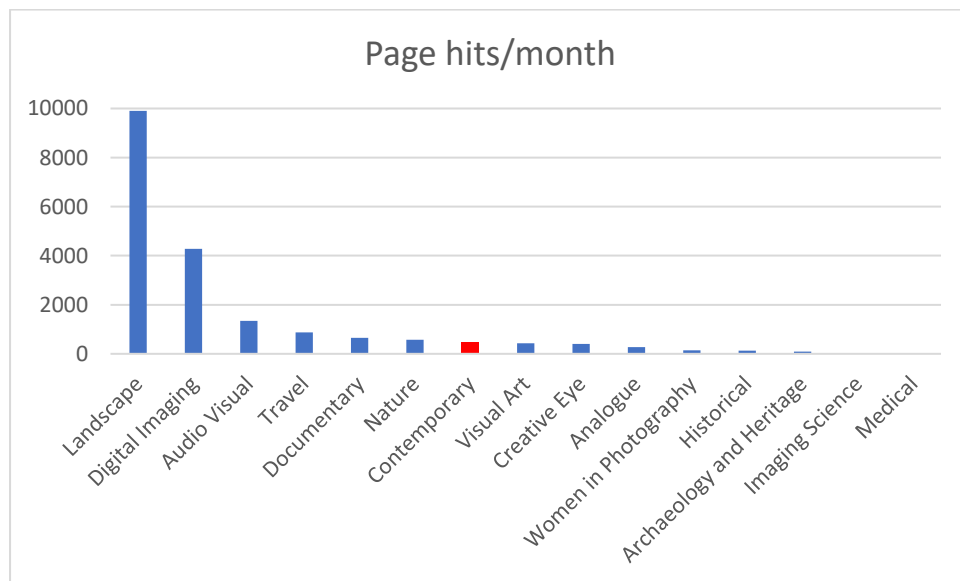
Brian has done a great job in providing blogs. We do need more regular input in order to create engagement via the website.

The Showcase Gallery construction is making progress slowly, we've now got 9 photographers on display, more to come – I'm still migrating the materials we had on the old site.

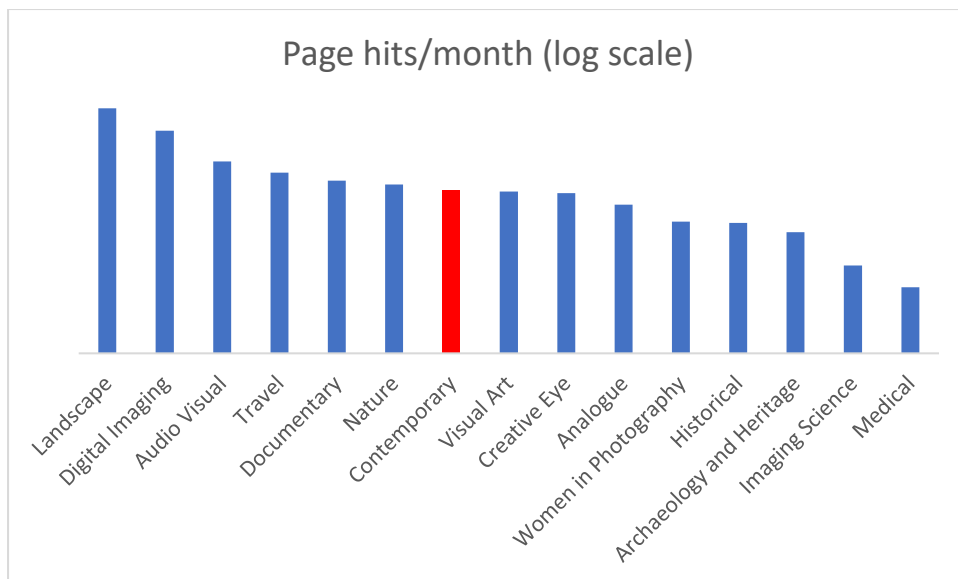
Based on statistics provided for May (not yet received June's figures) we can see that the Contemporary group website is in the middle of our cohort. The graphs below show the page visits for the SIG's microsites on rps.org. We're middle of the range but should be so much better.

Looking at what is it that is driving visits to the most popular sites I can summarise them as:

- Landscape – Tips and tricks, Event descriptions
- Digital Imaging – Event descriptions
- Audio Visual – Tips and tricks, news
- Travel – Monthly Competitions, Annual competition
- Documentary – Bi-monthly competition
- Nature - News



Showing the same data on a log scale we can compress the vertical scale, lets us understand the relative frequencies of page visits more clearly.



CGR RPS stats May  
2020.pdf

<https://www.instagram.com/rpscontemporary/>

Growth continues, these are the figures as of today 4<sup>th</sup> July.

	images posted	followers
October 2018	14	80
March 2019	22	638
March 2020	41	1142
July 2020	50	1183

If anyone spots a great contemporary photographer on Instagram please let me know and I can link to one of their images.

## Feedback on other points

### Recommendations

- Journal/Concept high quality PDFs always distributed primarily by sharing links to our microsite on rps.org; we need to drive visits to the site.
- Publish first on our rps.org site then link on Facebook/Instagram. Be consistent and drive traffic to our website.
- Plan for webinars being the new normal. Even when we are clear of COVID-19 we should run a majority of virtual events and one face to face event per year.
  - Set up free webinar events with any Contemporary F's (and A's) who are willing to talk about their work.
  - Set up paid webinars. Invite jobbing professional contemporary photographers to give artist talks, talk about their books etc. Charge a nominal fee <£5 for non-group members to take part but free for contemporary group members.
- We must engage membership
  - Concept newsletter must publish all member submitted content (that is a proper representation of the genre) and regularly invite contribution.
  - Hold a competition. Dress it up as a bursary.
- Cadence of committee meetings, need regular working sessions in order to drive actions.

### Journal/Newsletter high quality distribution

Recognising that the RPS have invested heavily in their new website we should be driving traffic in its direction. Distribution high quality PDFs of Contemporary Journal or for Concept has been a problem but I think we have fixed that. We have a website with no limitation on size. The respective editors have already recognised this and we are uploading files on rps.org.

I believe the use of Issuu should not be the Contemporary SIG's method of distribution for high quality PDFs of Contemporary Journal or for Concept. Personally I would suggest stopping using Issuu (because it competes with rps.org for traffic) but I know many groups/chapters use it so "being there" is probably seen as another way of creating awareness of RPS. I'd welcome feedback from RPS HQ on that.

### Facebook and Instagram

Facebook and Instagram should be our way of driving engagement. Any articles that folk on the committee wish to publish on Facebook should first be used as blog posts on rps.org then we can post comments and links on Facebook rather than put the material there directly.

Instagram is a great way of reaching a younger audience (Facebook is for parents – as they say!). When we have events I can link them on Instagram and reach a big audience.

### Lack of presence during this COVID-19 lockdown and the future of engagement with RPS membership

If I was preparing our mid-year performance report it would be "must try harder". As a group member I should be wondering what my group membership fee is getting. (Yes, the journal is fantastic, but they need more.)

I think we have missed an opportunity in engaging with membership in new ways during a time when people are thirsty for contact. Virtual meetings/webinars have proven themselves incredibly popular; the distinctions team have ran many free events but so have other special interest groups. Some of the meetings have been pay to join; I took part in a Digital Imaging Group webinar “Chloe Dewe Mathews: Artist Talk” for the princely sum of £2. We should have been hosting that.

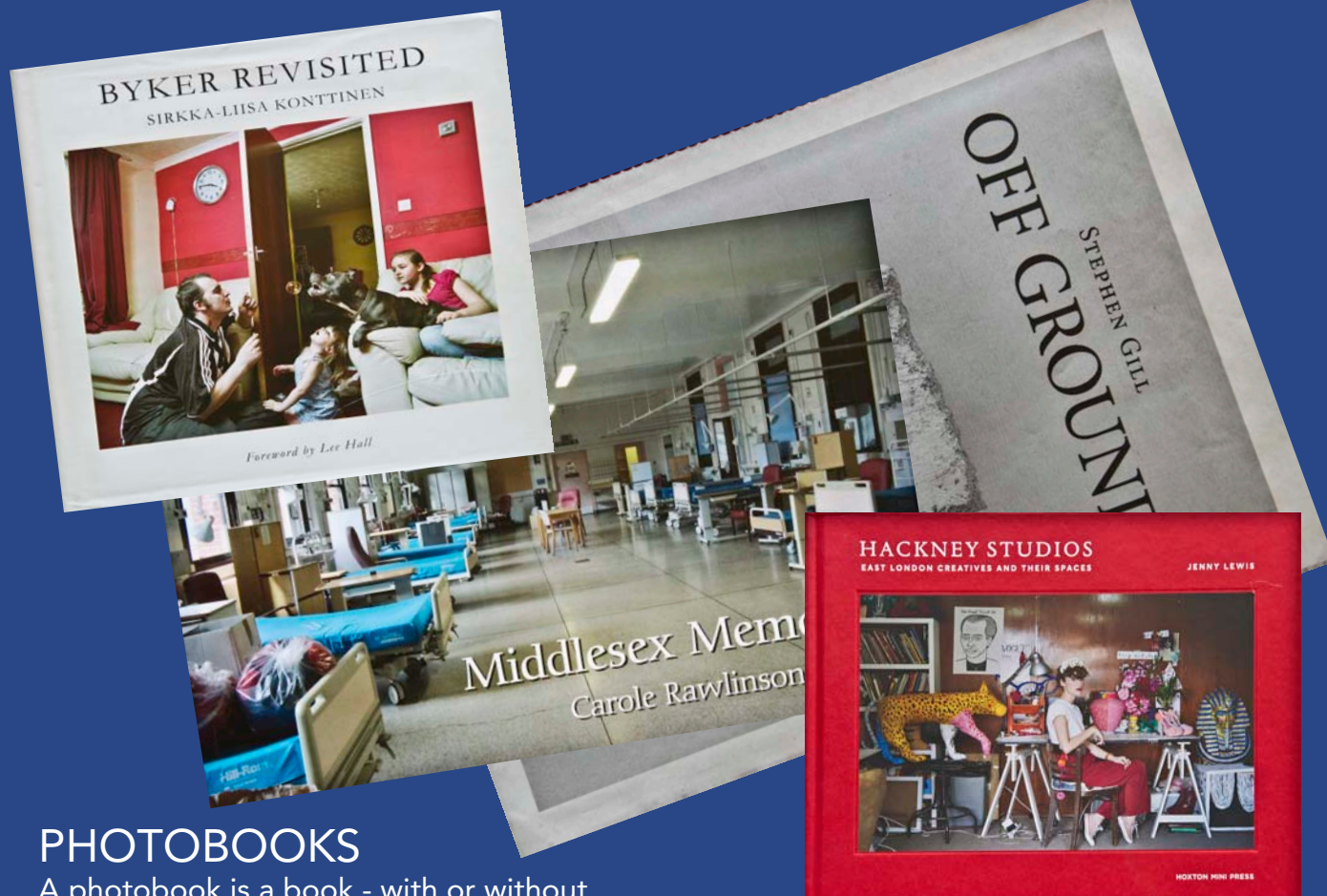
### Competitions drive participation

I’ve suggested such things before. Contemporary don’t do *competitive* photography. The thing is many other RPS groups do because it drives participation, helps members feel they’re getting some value. Existing RPS Bursaries and Awards range from £1,000 to £3,500. Could we blow some cash on a mini-bursary? Could we get sponsorship from somewhere?

### Working meetings

We are starting to get together via WebEx for full committee meetings, this is much easier than face to face meetings. Choosing the best day/time is of course a challenge.

We should have quarterly full meetings (via WebEx) of ~1 hour duration but I think there may be value in brief 20-30 minute sessions on the months in-between so that we can tackle issues arising and drive actions to completion. We will never get all committee members available and should just live with that fact.



Three books and a zine. CREDITS: Jenny Lewis, Carole Rawlinson, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Stephen Gill

## PHOTOBOOKS

A photobook is a book - with or without text - where the work's primary message is carried by photographs

### ADDITIONAL CATEGORY CRITERIA

*No additional criteria*

### ADDITIONAL CATEGORY REQUIREMENTS

For practical handling reasons, books should be no heavier than 3Kg

### PHOTOBOOK GUIDELINES

- Books must be based on a specific theme or project
- Books must be the author's own creation, although collaboration with a designer is allowable
- Books may be produced by digital print services, by artist printing or any other process
- Self-published, book dummies, zines, handmade and artist books are accepted
- Books containing found images are acceptable, provided their source is stated
- Any text should normally be in English. Where another language is used, a translation into English should be provided, either in the book or separately
- Books should have a minimum of 20 pages, although a range of 50-100 pages would be normal
- Photographs may be of any size or placement on the pages. These aspects will be part of the assessment
- Assessments will be based on how the following relate to the concept or theme of the book: the characteristics of the photographs, the book design, layout and image sequencing and its overall characteristics as a physical object
- Only one copy of the book is required

## Postal Portfolio Group

After an initial hiatus at the beginning of lockdown the postal portfolio boxes have continued to circulate. Indeed, as members have had increased spare time, they are currently circulating a bit faster.

During this period, we have also been meeting regularly via Zoom. This has proved very popular among the group. Apart from seeing each other, which does not usually happen with the postal nature of the group, it has allowed members to share current work taken under lockdown. It has also led to discussions about photographic online resources ('Seeing through Photography' run by MoMA has been completed by a few) and books (particularly Hold Still by Sally Mann). It is the intention these meetings will continue in the future.

The group is also exploring how to bring together and show the various images made by the members during Covid-19.

Despite the publicity of the Postal Portfolio in both the journal and Concept there has sadly been no inquiries from Contemporary Group members about joining.

Duncan Unsworth

## **Contemporary Group North**

Patricia A Ruddle

Committee meeting 8 July 2020

All is going well with our group, meeting bi-monthly on the third Saturday of the month. I've booked with Clements Hall for the rest of 2020, but of course that has changed with lockdown.

We had our first meeting during lockdown on 16 May via Zoom, and it was a huge success with 13 members attending, fewer than our normal 'live' attendance. The report of our May meeting in *Concept*, with its lack of several submitted photos and wrong captions, provoked disappointment and considerable feedback about the purpose, content and layout of *Concept*.

This in turn led to what we think could be an exciting idea for the future. I've chatted with Romney about it, and offer it for your opinion in the separate *Concept* report to the committee for the July meeting.

Next CN meeting 18 July via Zoom. Two prospective members plan to attend.

Subsequent meetings: 19 September and 21 November.

## **Concept**

Patricia A Ruddle

Committee Meeting 8 July 2020

When I edited our *Contemporary Photography* Journal, I thought that its purpose was to bring the wider world of contemporary photography to our members. Our other group publication, now the *Concept* newsletter, served to give our members a platform for their photography, encompassing all sorts of activities, everything from Distinctions to members' photos, thoughts, opinions, events, etc.

Our North subgroup was disappointed in the June issue, not a patch on previous issues. We believe that the coverage of lockdown was missed when there exists such a scope for photographs, and the many links to online resources which we can tap into. (Like Brian's Blog "Isolation and Quarantine" with a wealth of information.)

This led us to the problem of the "500 Kb" size limit imposed by HQ. In our subgroup discussions we talked about an alternative method of producing *Concept*, which I discussed subsequently with Romney.

One of our subgroup members, Lyn Newton, and former editor of *Concept*, is now producing the excellent newsletter for the Northern Region – by herself! It goes straight onto *Issuu*. Instead of HQ sending out the publication, it sends the *Issuu* link to all Region members. In addition it's available on the Region webpage. Also, the Landscape Group publication is on *Issuu*, 20 pages with lots of photos. I think that this is their only publication, unlike us with *Contemporary Photography* – in my opinion the best SIG publication.

However, after speaking with Romney, one of our North subgroup members investigated the size limit problem with HQ, Emily Mathison, and she identified other options used by other SIGs. More importantly, we have learned that the size limit is not 500 Kb, but 10 Mb – 20 times greater! (It was exciting to learn that the RPS Journal on the RPS webpage is within the 10 Mb limit!)

My suggestion is that we continue to have both CG publications, which will provide the needs of our members with *Contemporary Photography* and *Concept* without the 500 Kb limit. No other SIG, to my knowledge, has two publications with different remits as I wrote above.

As a closing note, we would like to suggest that the committee discuss the future of *Concept*, and also help Romney with the newsletter and its direction, so that he is able to solicit and obtain more contributions, especially since he is new to the position.

What do you think?



# Contemporary NW Report

## Meetings

Since the last Contemporary Group committee meeting we have held two on-line meetings using Webex as the medium.

Attendance was better at the first meeting where 6 people attended while on the second 4 were on the call. One new member joined the call in May and is showing continued interest. The use of on-line applications for meetings means that there is greater scope for far flung members to join in. The result is the welcome return of Keith Launchbury FRPS who is based on the NW coast of Cumbria. Sadly one of our regular attendees will not join on-line and I am trying to persuade him to come along.

Discussions have been lively and even our non-attending member has contributed to email exchanges.

In pre-lockdown we met bi-monthly, but now the consensus among those who have attended on-line is that we should meet monthly. Our next meeting is 11th July with a further meeting scheduled for August. I am hopeful that our new attendee will continue to participate and I have another person who is interested and I'm hoping to see them both on 11th July.

I am glad that the membership discount scheme is still available and I will be offering that on the July call.

Like many of the committee I am continuing to try to encourage participation, but the lack of an up to date membership list is frustrating. I have asked Bristol for an up to date list but have had no reply, so I am continuing to chase this.