

April 2021

The Newsletter of the Royal Photographic Society Contemporary Group



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Concept:

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The editor welcomes the submission of articles and features.

Please send to Romney Tansley by 31st May 2021 at concepteditor@rps.org

Text in Word format

Images in jpg format at or near to a 2Mb maximum (no watermarks or virtual frames please)

[Guidance for Contributors to Concept](#)

Front cover: Nigel Richards MA ARPS



Editorial

We feature the work of two terrific photographers in this issue. In both their subject matter and the tone and style of their work they could not be more different. Nigel Richards ARPS homes in on the cautionary tale of a recent city-centre development. He is following up an ambitious scheme to restore the city centre section of a once bustling and important canal in Manchester, part of the network established here over the nineteenth century. Coming to it after an interval of a decade or more, he sees how things have turned out, and is shocked at his discovery.

The centre piece of a new smart high-rise residential area, the re-excavated deep water locks and gates, turning circle and tow paths are captured by Nigel's wide angle lens with searing honesty.

The work of our other featured photographer depicts a different world entirely. Tim Hancock ARPS is a member of the RPS Documentary group and it's with great pleasure that we publish his work in Concept. It's the first time I think that we've featured work by a member of our sister group. Tim has made a long term project of the life of one of the many local hill farms close to his home in the Yorkshire Dales. He carefully documents the life and daily rhythms of this remote place. The pictures are beautifully composed and have a meditative quality to them. They evoke a kind of classic form - the eighteenth century tableau painting, from which modern approaches to the depiction of landscape mostly derive. Largely people-free his images exuding harmony and balance as we explore the farm and take in the machinery and clutter. The sense of mild disorder reveals also the frugality of this life in which all effort is directed to just keeping things going.

Looking at first one then the other of these sets of pictures, you feel drawn into their two different worlds. Their style and tone too couldn't be more different. But crucially each is perfect for their choice of subject matter. In both cases this is exciting photography.

We feature much else besides in this issue. We have the reports by Alan and Adrian of recent meetings of the North West and South West groups as well as Alan's View from the Chair with his pictures chronicling the bleak result of a year of lockdown on his home town.

Romney Tansley ARPS
Editor

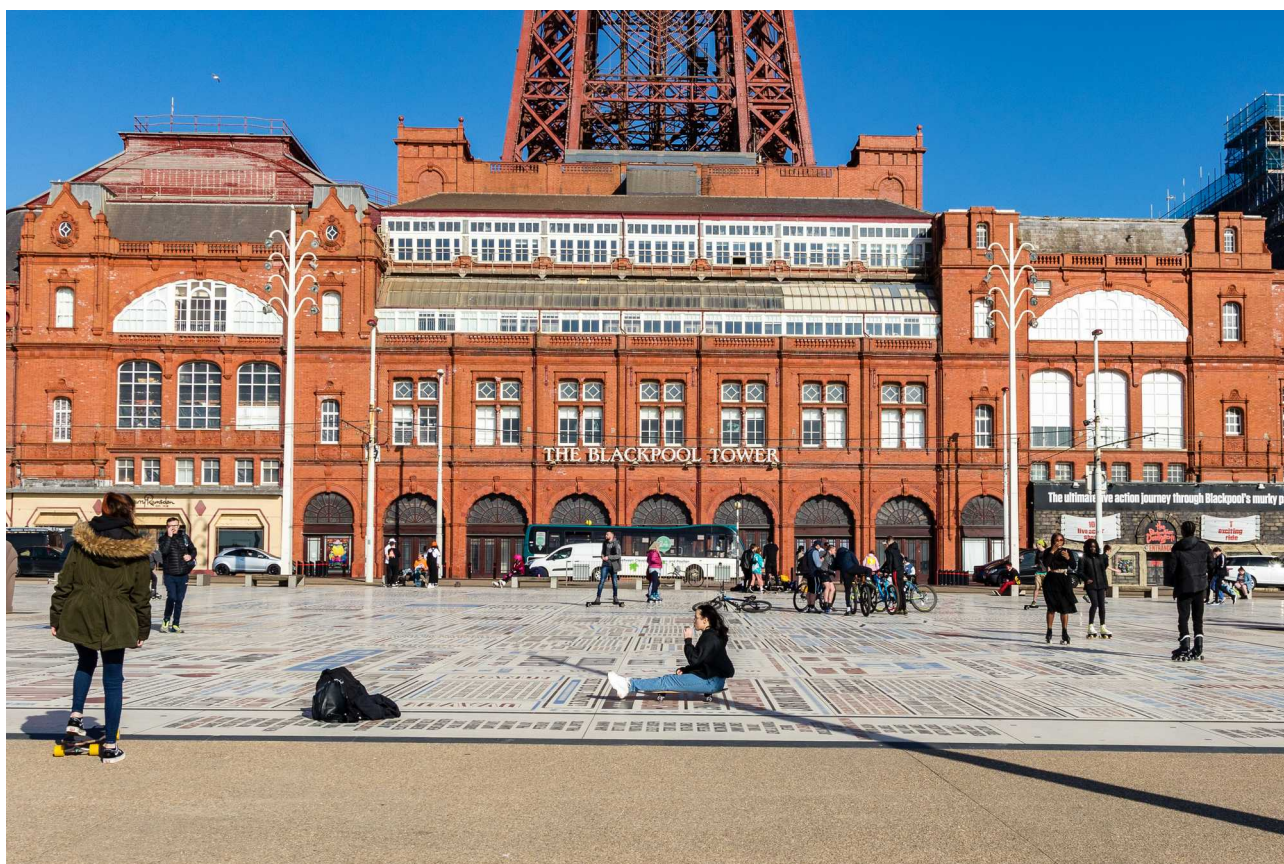


View from the Chair

Just over a year ago we met at RPS House in Bristol for our AGM, and last month saw our first such meeting online, a choice forced upon us, but in some ways not a bad thing.

First of all can I thank all of you who attended the AGM online. We had more people sign up and attend than recent years. Thank you to those of you who re-elected me (unopposed so it's just as well I wasn't rejected!). Thank you to everyone who stood for the committee. Your volunteering is so important to the Group and to the RPS. Without our volunteers we wouldn't be able to function.

I think it is fair to say that the committee and I were looking for ways to make the Group more successful and so we have instituted the blogs and the monthly talks as well as maintaining the quality of Concept and Contemporary Photography. We now have 372 members compared with 343 this time last year which is heartening. I'd like to thank Sean Goodhart ARPS, Avijit Datta, our blog contributors and speakers for making what might have been a year without events into something vibrant.





On the subject of Avijit Datta, many of you will know that he has now been appointed a Trustee of the Society. I shall miss his input to the Group but I know that he will bring his customary whirlwind energy to the Board.

I sincerely hope that we are now seeing maybe not the end of the pandemic, but to quote Churchill perhaps, "It is the end of the beginning." I hope another year will see us close to a stable position with this terrible virus and we'll enter a "new normal," whatever that cliché may mean.

My images this month capture what it has felt like in my home in Blackpool. Many small business will have gone out of business and though my comparison photos of Easter 2020 and Easter 2021 show more people this year, our economy needs to be able to be much busier, and that can happen if we take the opportunities provided by the vaccine programme.

Stay safe and get vaccinated.
 Alan Cameron LRPS
 Chair

Southwest Contemporary Group

The Southwest Contemporary Group met by Zoom on the afternoon of Sunday 21st March with ten members in attendance together with Muriel's cat.

In the short business session we noted the forthcoming AGM of the Contemporary Group and EGM of the Society. Several members had attended the AGM of the Southwest Region where Simon Hill had tried out his presentation on the proposed changes to the Society's By-Laws.

As usual most of the meeting was taken up with consideration of a range of images and ideas. Inevitably, any new material was restricted to images taken within walking distance due to the Covid-19 restrictions and legislation obliging members to stay at home.

Vivian Howse had undertaken a photographic study of Gweek, comparing present day images with those taken at various times in the past. These included the creek and boatyard, the local shops and the village pump.

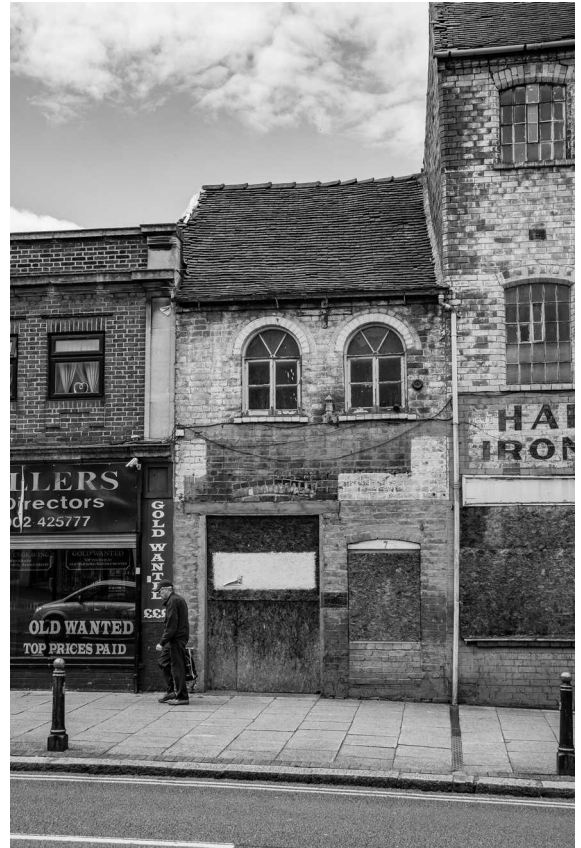


John Evans-Jones



Rod Fry showed a presentation one of his favourite subjects, namely the history of Seaside Photography, illustrated by a wide range of images and publications which he had collected over the years. He voiced the view that whilst the Americans were responsible for the recent growth in Street Photography, Martin Parr was responsible for the recent interest in British Beach Photography.

However, the history of seaside photography goes back to the late 1800s and a large number of books have appeared on the subject over the years. Back in the late 1800s, photography grew in popularity in parallel with the growth in paid holidays and the ability of the population to travel to the seaside by train. As a result commercial photography grew rapidly to cope with the demand for seaside portraits with up to fifty photographers being found on the same beach. The old photographs which Rod used to illustrate his talk included a number of items which could be classified as candid photography as well as images of people engaged in the process of taking photographs and images by a range of well-known photographers.





Carol Ballenger provided us with a retrospective of earlier visits to Venice, with a range of images which paid particular attention to angles, composition and colours, as well as the effect of the light as reflected from the water. As in many other well-known places, the challenge is how to photograph in a way which is original rather than simply repeating the work of other people.

She then contrasted these photographs with a walk through Venice on Google Streetview. In particular, the hunt for people who notice the backpack mounted camera of the Google photographer. An interesting consequence was that one particular and distinctive lady appeared to be being stalked by the camera which then overtook her so that it was necessary to look back to see her. However, she seemed to show no indication that she knew that she was being photographed.

Carol has also been working on a project to combine poetry, music, readings and images and decided to produce a series of postcards which were important to her musically. The first of these was an old postcard of Spartanbury South Carolina accompanied by multiple tracking of her own violin performance of contemporary music.

John Evans-Jones had been walking to four local locations in Wadebridge and photographing the 'garbage' left behind. In a presentation entitled 'Photo-assisted Garbology' he attempted to undertake an analysis of the objects that he photographed from the perspective of a future archaeologist (practising as a Garbologist) who knew nothing of current culture. This illustrated the pit-falls of assuming that we can interpret historical 'found artifacts' in an accurate manner when we don't have enough information about the context in which they were used.

Ken Holland spoke about his examination of every photographic print of his family that he had either inherited or taken himself, the earliest inherited images dating from c1885. In order to avoid this historical record being lost when his children inevitably dispose of the photographs, he prepared digital images of the prints and produced a detailed photobook which included a family tree to show how the various characters were related to each other. We were treated to views of a number of the images all of which were photographed 'as they are' with no attempt to improve definition in any way. Ken had also produced a second book, comprising one hundred of his own favourite monochrome darkroom prints. Again we were treated to a viewing of some of the images, including Ken's final ever darkroom print.

Martin Howse showed his contribution to a series of 'Little Black Books' being produced by Truro Camera Club, in his case being entitled 'Roadside Rubbish 2021'. Martin also spoke about the Cornubian Arts and Science Trust (CAST) and its purchase of a building which had begun life as a school founded by John Passmore Edwards. This remained in use as a school until 1972 before enjoying mixed fortunes as a Community Centre including the provision of dedicated space for Helston Photographic Club. Martin's images showed the building prior to its purchase by CAST in 2012, the early days of CAST and a number of the different 'Artists in Situ' who have worked there over the past few years.





Works outing, Oldham circa 1910 (copy: Ken Holland)



Eden Project, Cornwall Ken Holland



Finally **Graham Hodgson** showed images which illustrated issues surrounding the labelling on a number of commercial products which rely on image recognition as they don't actually state the nature of the product. The 'Gold' version of a certain tea which is blended and packed in a well-known northern county does not mention 'tea' on the packaging, only the name of the county. Similarly a certain 'Red Label' brand of tea only has the word 'tea' in small print whilst the Fairly Traded version of the same 'Red label' tea is supplied in a blue box. More dangerously, some drinks bottles and those of cleaning agents look very similar.

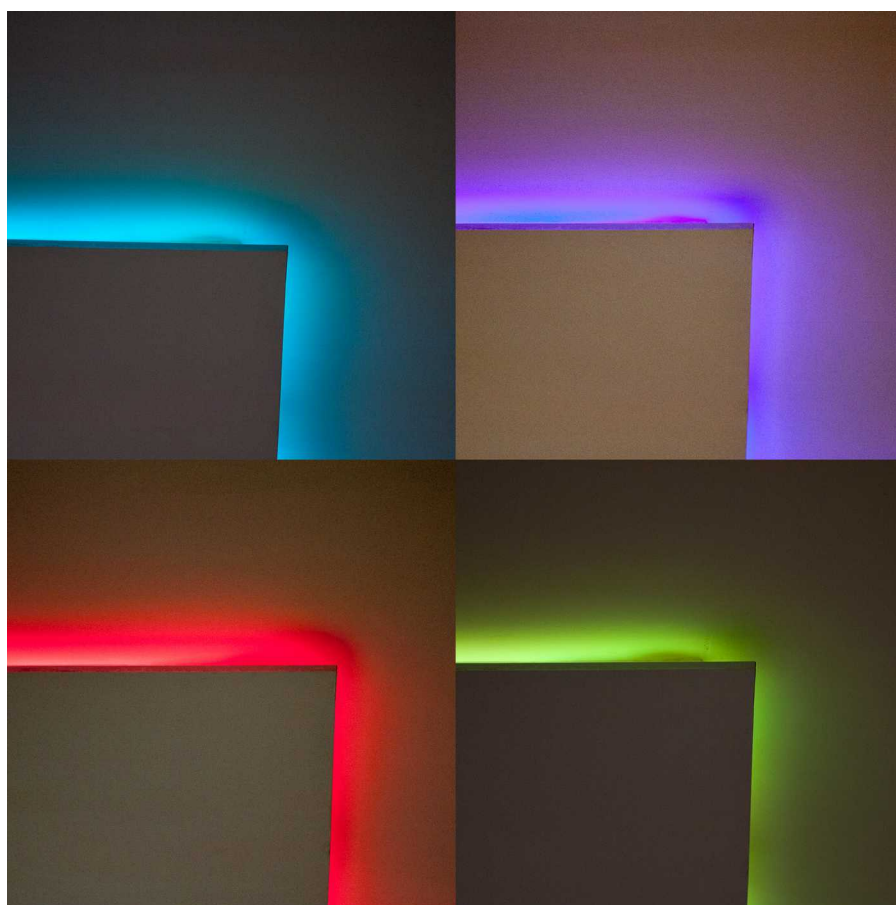
My own images fell into two categories. Firstly, I noted that Contemporary Photography is photography about things and concepts rather than of them. Bearing that in mind I then showed fifteen sets of four images of the lighting at a conference centre in Coventry. Despite having been invited partly to take photographs of the speakers, almost all I can remember of the conference are the ever-changing coloured lights on the ceiling in reception and so, for me, they are the best illustration about the conference rather than of the conference. Quite why a conference organised by Devon on aspects of Rural Life was held in Coventry remains a mystery.

My other images were black and white photographs of old buildings in Wolverhampton that look as if they could have been taken in the 1930s until you spot the tell-tale reflections of image of a video-camera lurking almost unseen.

Finally, it occurred to me that if we add in my images of rubbish on Branscombe Beach from one year ago, we seem to have taken a great many images of rubbish over the past year.

The plan is to meet again in the early summer on a date yet to be determined. Whether we will be meeting in person or via Zoom is another fact unknown at present. However, if any other Southwest Contemporary members would like to join us then please contact me via the e-mail address.

Adrian Hough LRPS



Adrian Hough



My Local Hill Farm



Fell gate



New dog



I am lucky enough to live in a small hamlet of 25 houses dating back to the 17th century, within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. During the pandemic many photographers have been restricted to taking images very locally, and I'm no exception. Over the last few years I have created a small portfolio of photos of the local farming community. I've used lockdown as an opportunity to add to these, aiming to produce a set of images telling the story of the life of hill farmers without the need for extensive explanation.



New sign

The hamlet is a dead end with no through road, dominated by the local farm and farming family. The daily passage of tractors, sheep and cows often exceeds that of road vehicles, although delivery vans have become a prominent feature over the last year. The farmhouse with its metal framed windows and absence of double glazing dates back to the early 18th century. It is surrounded by 'in-bye' land managed as permanent pasture for grazing, or meadows for cutting and baling grass or transport to the silage clamp. At the far end of the hamlet and adjoining the main barn and farmyard area, the upland fell takes over, with curlews calling throughout the spring and early summer, and buzzards soaring overhead. Grazing rights to the fell are handed down over the generations through the system of 'gates' which dictates how many and what type of livestock can be put on the fell by a particular farm. Sheep not in lamb stay on the fell most of the year, with water shipped up in an old towed tanker during the occasional periods of drought, and haylage during the harsh winter weather.





Bales





Sheep



Toddgill cows





Old tractors

Local farmers and families I have always found to be very friendly and happy for a quick chat. They live a pretty isolated existence and will readily update you on the progress of lambing, sheep prices, and of course the weather. Swaledale sheep and some Leicesters are the main breeds locally, with few cattle. Farm machinery is old and maintained on an as-need basis. Sheep dogs are kept chained to their 'kennel' for hours on end. Farming is a complete lifestyle and that's how these farms are run, with family helping out at busy times. Incomes are small and heavily dependent on livestock prices, direct and support payments, and a bit of extra income thrown in as it comes along, maybe in the form of a fallen tree.

Life here is doubtless hard, but the scenery spectacular.

Tim Hancock ARPS



Contemporary and Documentary NW Meeting Report



Alan Edwards



Alan Cameron



Ten people attended each of our online meetings in February and March. A common theme appeared in both meetings of view of the Bridgewater Canal and Salford, one from Alan Edwards, a native of the area, and the other from Romney Tansley who has been living there for the past two years. Romney's view was tempered by the knowledge that the new architecture is replacing old landmarks. Alan's view was influenced by long experience of towpaths and in March finding at least one had been made impassible by developers - a view of a disappearing reality.

Echoing the Salford old versus new, in February Nigel entertained us with view of contemporary design typified by the creation of the modern metropolis of La Defence and specifically the EDF building which he first captured during construction. In March he shared scans of images of Hong Kong taken on a Horizont panoramic camera.

Many of us were prompted to digitise some of our old negatives and slides by Ken Rowlatt who described his set up for digitising images using a light tile and digital camera. It seems to have caught the right moment and we saw some of the results in March. Alan Edwards shared an image of a rag and bone man and Alan Cameron a shot of his mother aged 20 in 1938.



Alan Cameron



Tim joined us in February and shared some of his chronicles of the farm life of his village, while in March Keith shared his latest trial book of his trips to the Isle of Lewis which can still be seen until mid April. In February Alan showed images taken with a 50mm pancake lens on his Canon EOSR, fired from the chest. A new technique but giving enjoyable images.

John shared some images of his trips to London (pre-pandemic) treating us to his inimitable style of slightly wry images all of which demand a second look particularly when there are reflections which seem to comment on the unreflected subjects. In one memorable capture a man walking past a shop window seemed to have been re clothed from the display.

Peter showed us a mix of public and behind the scenes images from Great Ecclestone Show where he is official photographer. This allows him to capture preparations for the show as well as a more intimate view inside the show ring so much nearer the animals some of which don't always behave too well.

Brian has been having some mobility issues but having been challenged at the February meeting to get some pictures in his back garden he came up trumps with a fascinating series of images of a crew pollarding huge trees at the rear of his garden. An iPhone video of one part was particularly exciting as a huge trunk was cut and safely lowered despite looking as if the task would be barely possible.

Next meetings are 10th April and 8th May on Zoom at 13.00

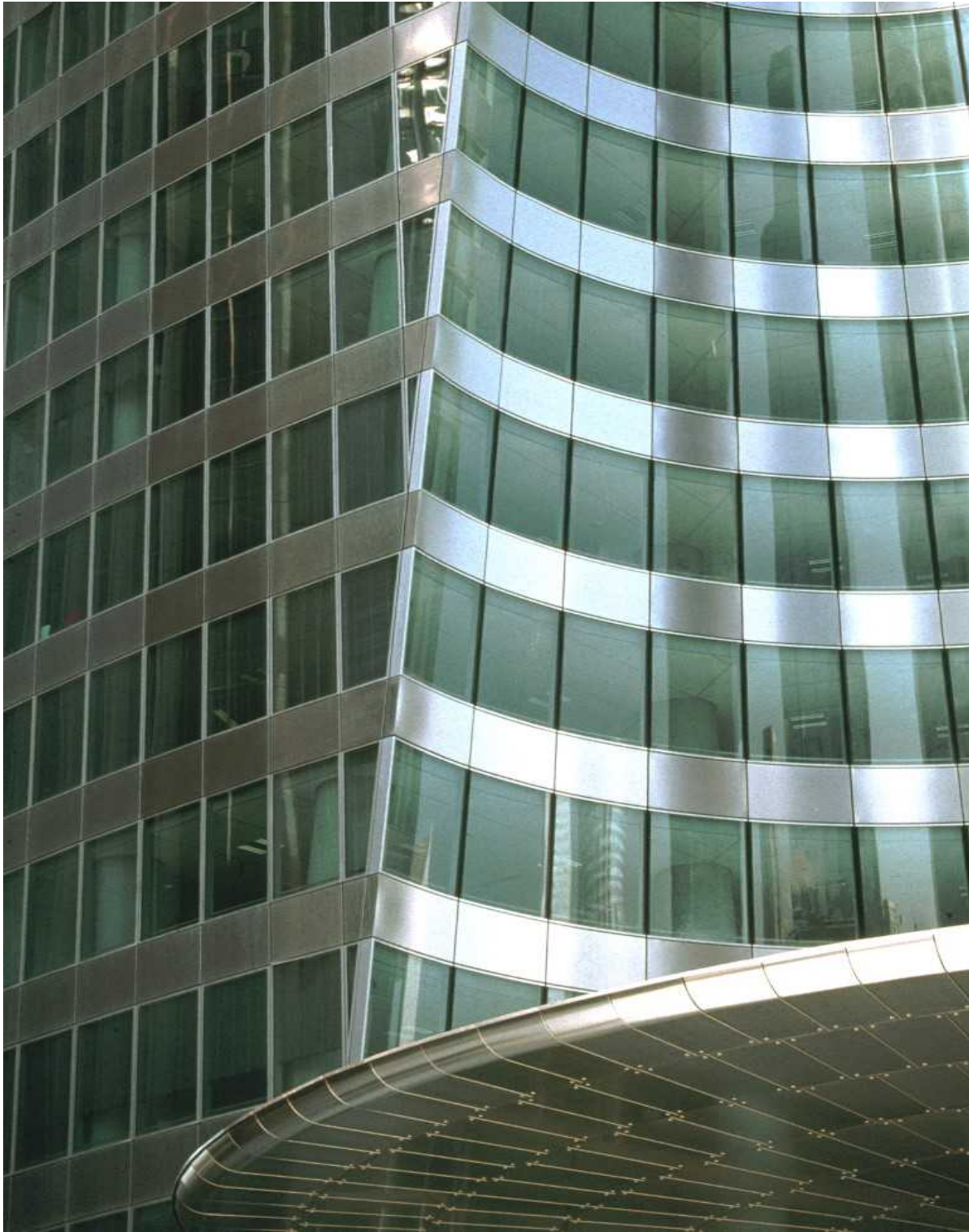
Alan Cameron LRPS





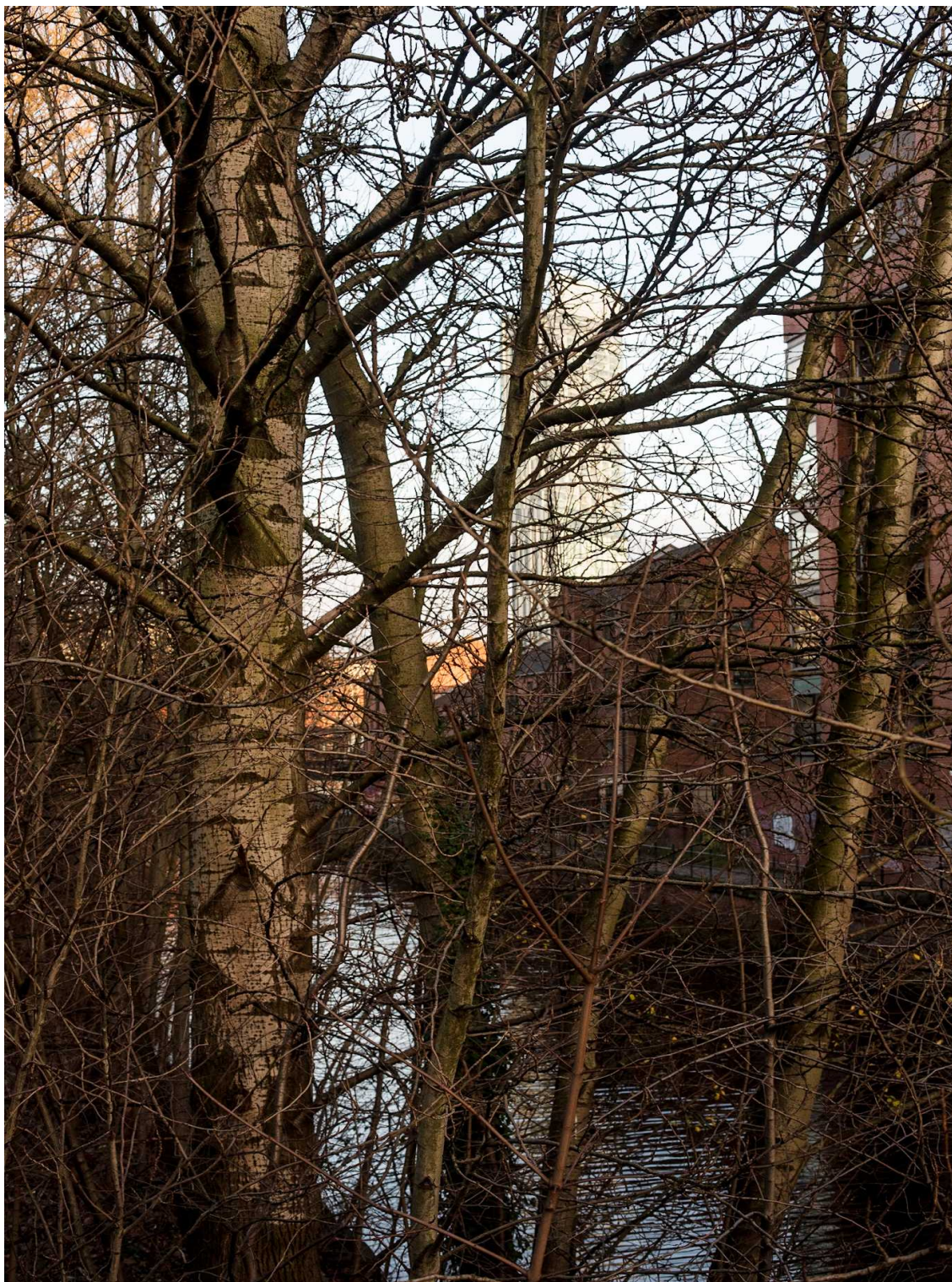
Nigel Richards La Defence





Nigel Richards La Defence 2





Romney Tansley Entanglement





Romney Tansley Mosaic





Click on these links for more information...

[RPS Contemporary Group web page](#)

[Concept archive](#)

[Contemporary Photography archive](#)

[RPS Contemporary Face Book group](#)

[Contemporary NW Facebook group](#)

[RPS Contemporary Instagram page](#)

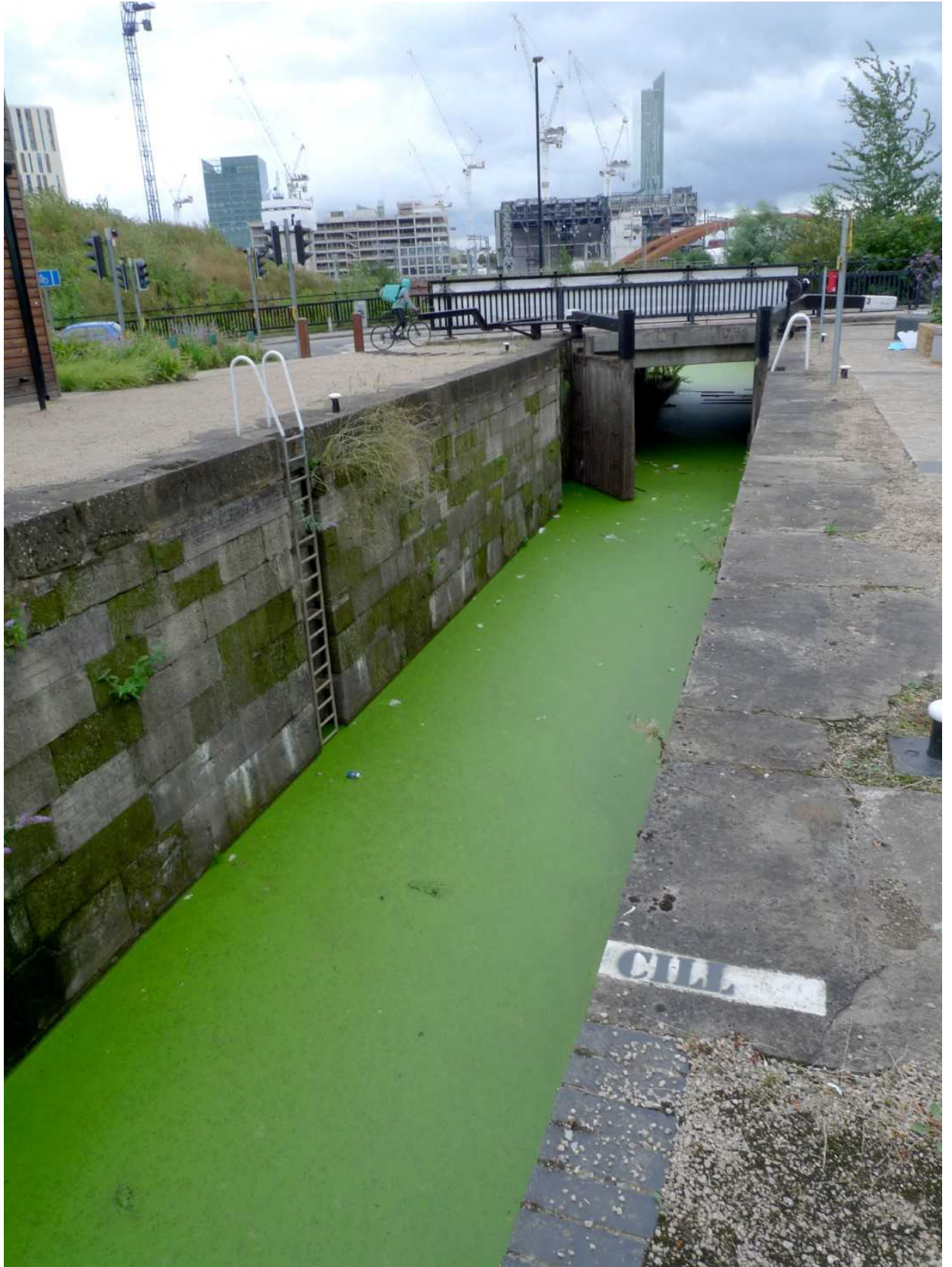
[Contemporary Group Exhibition 2020](#)



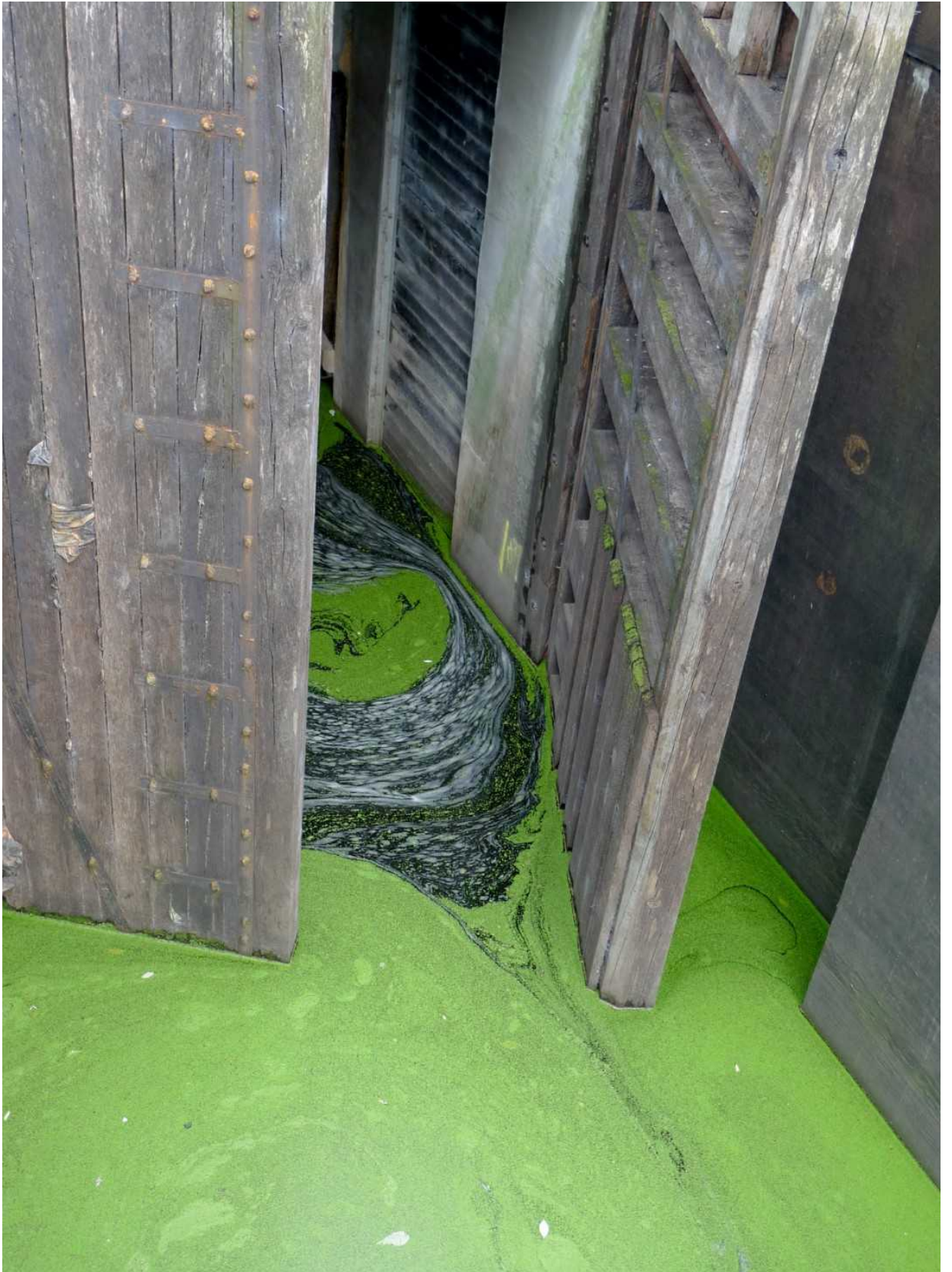
Middlewood Locks to the Irwell

Middlewood Locks lie between Oldfield Road and Ordsall Lane Salford and used to serve Salford Rolling Mill and Ordsall Lane Cotton Mill with canal transport. They were part of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal many sections of which are now empty or filled in. They lead into the River Irwell only 10 minutes walk away passing under train lines and roads to get there.











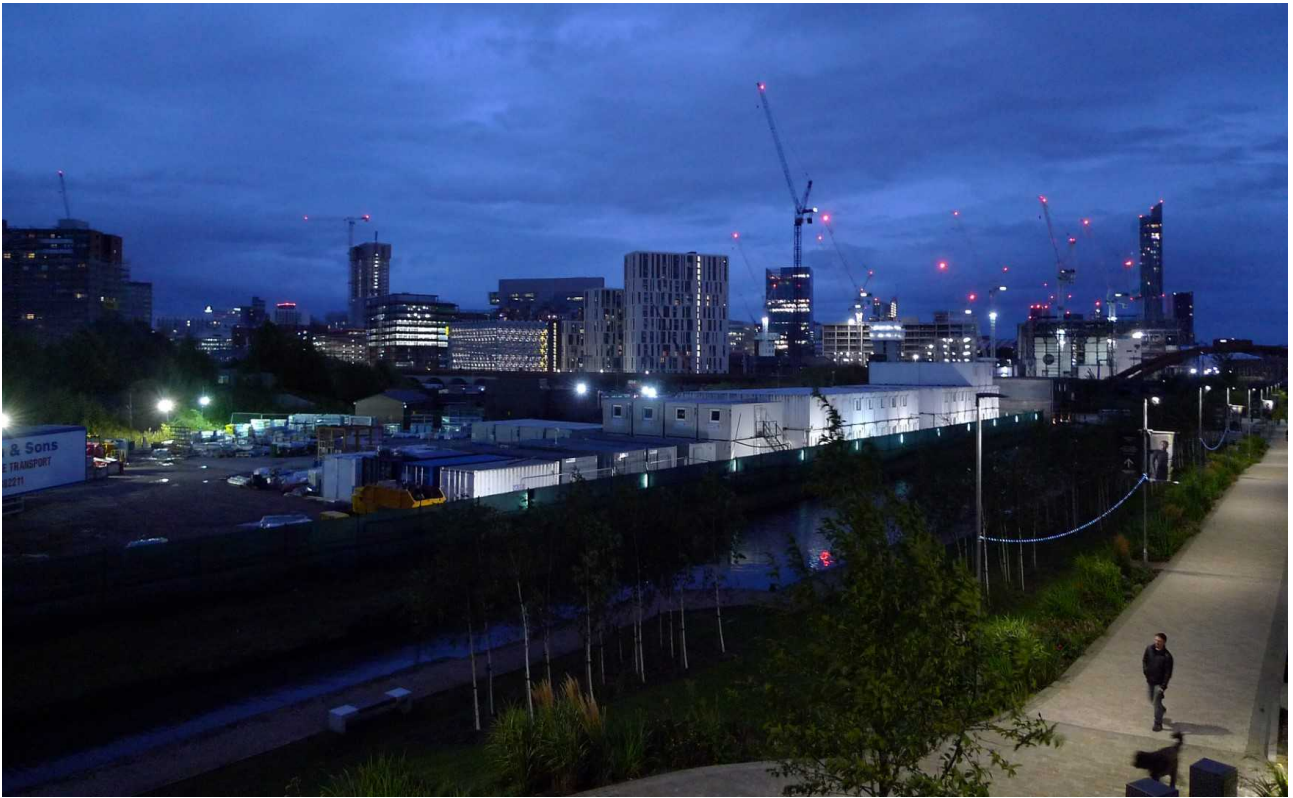
My intention which was unfortunately cut short by lockdown was to document the contrast between the new developments and the old now vandalised industrial areas. At the time the Locks were full of water albeit mostly green with algae. For many years this ex industrial area of Salford was derelict but now it is full of new blocks of posh flats and new building developments which contrast with the plethora of graffiti and overgrown weeds found nearer the Irwell. The Canal turning circles, bridges, lock gates and access to the Irwell were restored only in 2008 at a cost of millions but now seem to have been allowed to decline into disuse.

I don't like to get too deep into an analysis of what I photograph, I like the viewer to make up their own mind. I don't even like titles on images as they direct a viewer how to look at the image. I like images to be sequenced and draw the viewer through the work. The photographs start with an image taken from the flats and then follow a walk on a dull day to the Irwell.

If I had carried on the project I would have radiated out from Middlewood Locks. I used to spend a lot of time walking around Manchester and Salford before Urban Renewal.

Nigel Richards MA ARPS





Concept

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