

THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY

CONTEMPORARY
GROUP

East Anglia
Contemporary
Group

Return
Journey

March 2026



About East Anglia Contemporary Group EACG

We are members of the Contemporary Special Interest Group of the RPS who reside in East Anglia. It is a large geographic area covering from the M25 up to the Wash and the western edge of Cambridgeshire,

The participants are small in number and spread all over the region. We meet monthly via Zoom and try to produce bodies of work twice per year.

This zine is an attempt to do justice to the work produced

Contact the group at contemporaryea@rps.org

'Return Journey'

This theme is taken from the title from a wireless broadcast by Dylan Thomas in 1947. He describes returning to the place of his youth and what he does and does not find following three nights of bombing of Swansea during WW II.

His visit was in February 1941, some 85 years to the collation of the content of this zine.

It was a cold white day in High Street, and nothing to stop the wind slicing up from the docks, for where the squat and tall shops had shielded the town from the sea lay their blitzed flat graves marbled with snow and headstoned with fences. Dogs, delicate as cats on water, as though they had gloves on their paws, padded over the vanished buildings.

Dylan Thomas 1947

Cover photographs credit

Front cover: 1972

Tom Owens ARPS

Back cover:: 2014

Tom Owens ARPS

Exhibitors

Tony Fisher	6
Paul Ashley ARPS	16
Cristopher Cross	24
Jonathan Williams	34
Tom Owens ARPS	44
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The intent of this group is to interpret our set themes without necessarily taking the literal interpretation

As ever, this assignment proved to be somewhat challenging with not all members taking part in interpreting the statement, or indeed finding the reference work catalyse their thoughts..

The responses to this extract are as diverse as usual for the group.

Tom Owens ARPS

March 2026

Tony Fisher is new to our group but for him, this was home turf. His gritty and vernacular images whilst not depicting snow, certainly embody the opening words of Thomas' litany.

Paul Ashley hit upon a theme very early on in this exercise and his observations are like those of a choreographer watching a performance from the side of a stage. I'm particularly drawn to the mower man marching through lines of sacrificed lives whose memorial crosses are permanently at attention.

Jonathan Williams, finds validation in his historic and contemporary work. Time is often needed to be able to stand back and analyse those fundamental creative seeds sown many years ago.

Christopher Cross has proved the validity in making vernacular images that were very much of their time to document the rise and fall of a home, and the final effect of being on the wrong side of tracks.

Tom Owens went back to the starting point of his desire to graduate in photography and notes that not much, if anything has changed. Like Jonathan Williams' discovery, it is also a validation of his current practice that was far from fully formed in 1972.

Mark Farrington has also found merit in re-discovering cherished memories of people, life events and an underlying thread of key motorised vehicles that bear witness to his life experiences.

Tony Fisher

Return Journey

My return journey is to a place very close to Dylan Thomas's. I grew up in the Gower Peninsula near Swansea and spent my youth in Swansea and the Gower. As a teenager I used to catch the bus to Swansea and always had sausage chips and gravy in Woolworths. Still there but now a shell with a church in it. Mumbles Pier was also a very important place for me. My mum told me that as a child she used to have afternoon tea with the lighthouse keeper. I just spent many days ambling around Mumbles and the beaches of the Gower were my soul place, especially Rhossilli and Worms Head where I always swore I would have my ashes scattered. For a moody adolescent it was the perfect place, with a dramatic crashing sea in winter which matched my usual mood...





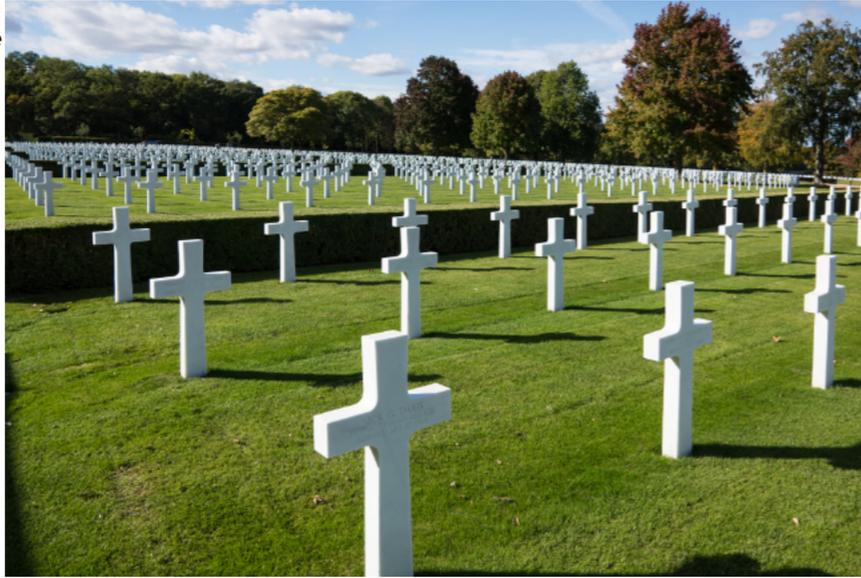
'It was a cold white day in High Street, and nothing to stop the wind slicing up from the Docks, for where the squat and tall shops had shielded the town from the sea lay their blitzed flat graves marbled with snow and headstoned with fences.'

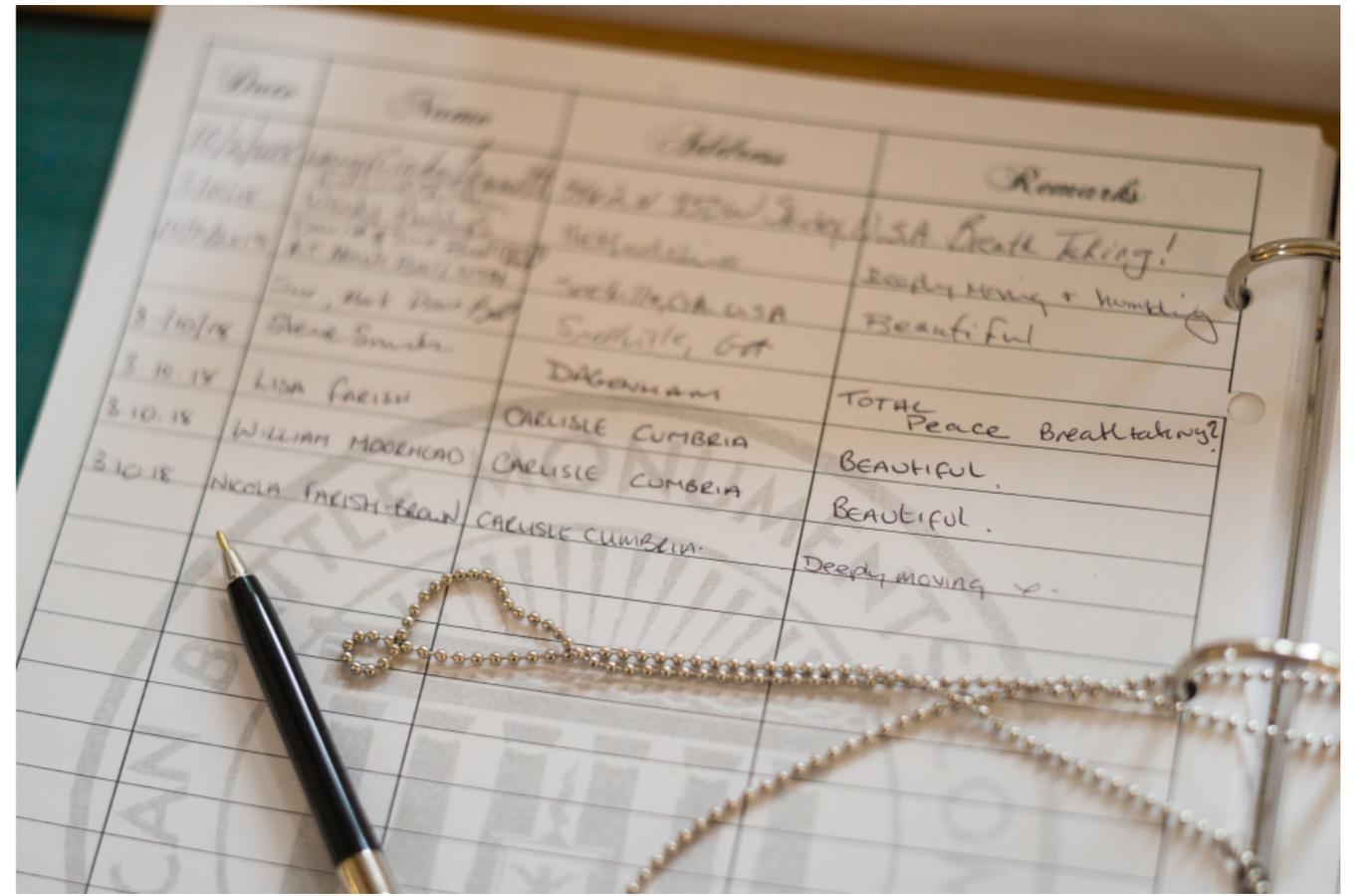




Paul Ashley ARPS

My photographs are of visitors to the American Cemetery in Cambridge. For the Americans buried there it was the return journey from the battlefield. For the maintenance workers, many of them veterans, it was a regular return to where their fellows lay. For the visitors from America it may have felt like a completion of the return journey (a joining of the end points) that their relatives had failed to complete. Prosaically, many would take a return ticket on the open top bus that makes the journey from Cambridge Station.





'Dead'. The Park-keeper said. 'Dead ... Dead ... Dead ... Dead ... Dead ... Dead.'



Christopher Cross

A Return Journey to the Queen Adelaide House – One Careful Owner

Built on the site of a previous wooden house belonging to British Railways as it was at the time, this very plain 3 bedroom house took its place. As my father worked for BR, a house came with his job as a residential crossing keeper, so this new house was to be ours after a move from Levington in Suffolk. The relocation took place in 1972 with me at the age of 11 ready to take a place in the newly formed comprehensive, City of Ely College. Life felt simple then with the house positioned in the angle between the railway and road frontage, diesel trains and manual crossing gates. The first big change came in August 1992 when the first electric trains came into operation. I had moved out by then, but returning to the family home, I can remember how quiet they were, but also seeing how close the overhead lines were to the house. The next big change came a few years later with the replacement of the manual crossing gates with automated barriers. Following my brother gaining his independence, everything remained unchanged until my father's sudden death in 2003. Mother could have stayed in the house, but soon moved into Ely, leaving the house empty. Being 'railway people', we understood the potential danger of the high voltage cables, but it was considered to dangerous for occupancy by others, so remained empty for the next 22 years. I was informed of the railway companies' intention to demolish the house last summer, so paid it a visit to see how things had changed over the years. This was followed by my last return journey with mother on the 7th October 2025 to view the changed landscape following demolition. The previous access lane to the side of the house had gone and nature had started to envelop the house. Unusual circumstance for a house of only 53 years to have only 1 occupant and then be demolished.







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Jonathan Williams

This project is about my return journey to Leeds. I went to university there between 1969 and 1972. I returned there in 2020 for a short stay. I wanted to compare the photographs I took while at university to the recent ones. Of course, I have changed and the techniques I used have changed from black and white to digital colour. This is in effect looking back at my younger self and comparing how I approached photography then, with my approach today, having more knowledge about photography, supposedly. Some photographs are very similar and others are completely different.

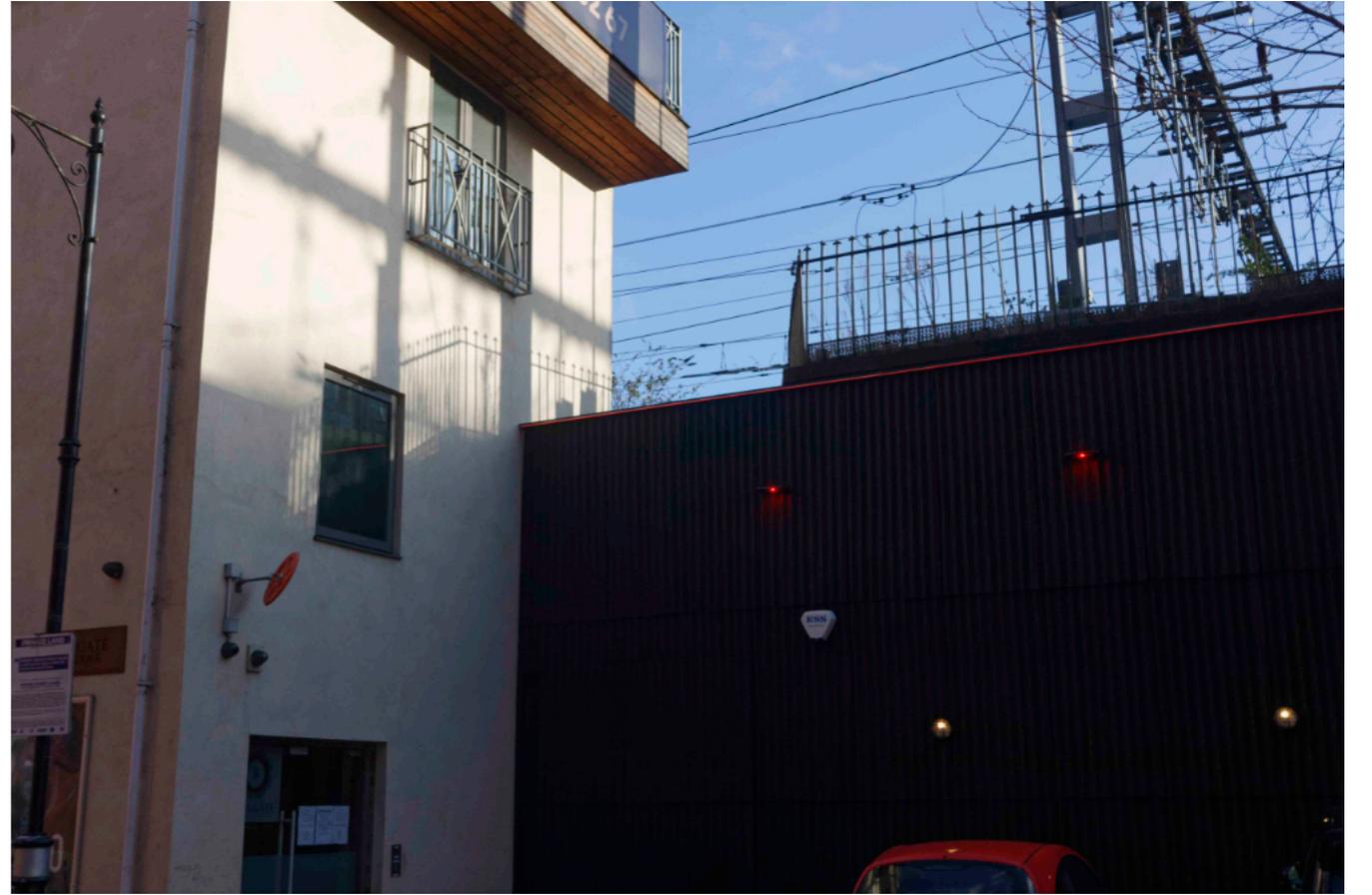
While at university I had the time (3 years) to explore Leeds while on my return I had 3 hours. In the intervening years have had the opportunity to absorb the knowledge of Weston, Sontag, Berger, Barthes and Adams (Robert and Ansel) and of course looked at thousands of photographs in books and in exhibitions.

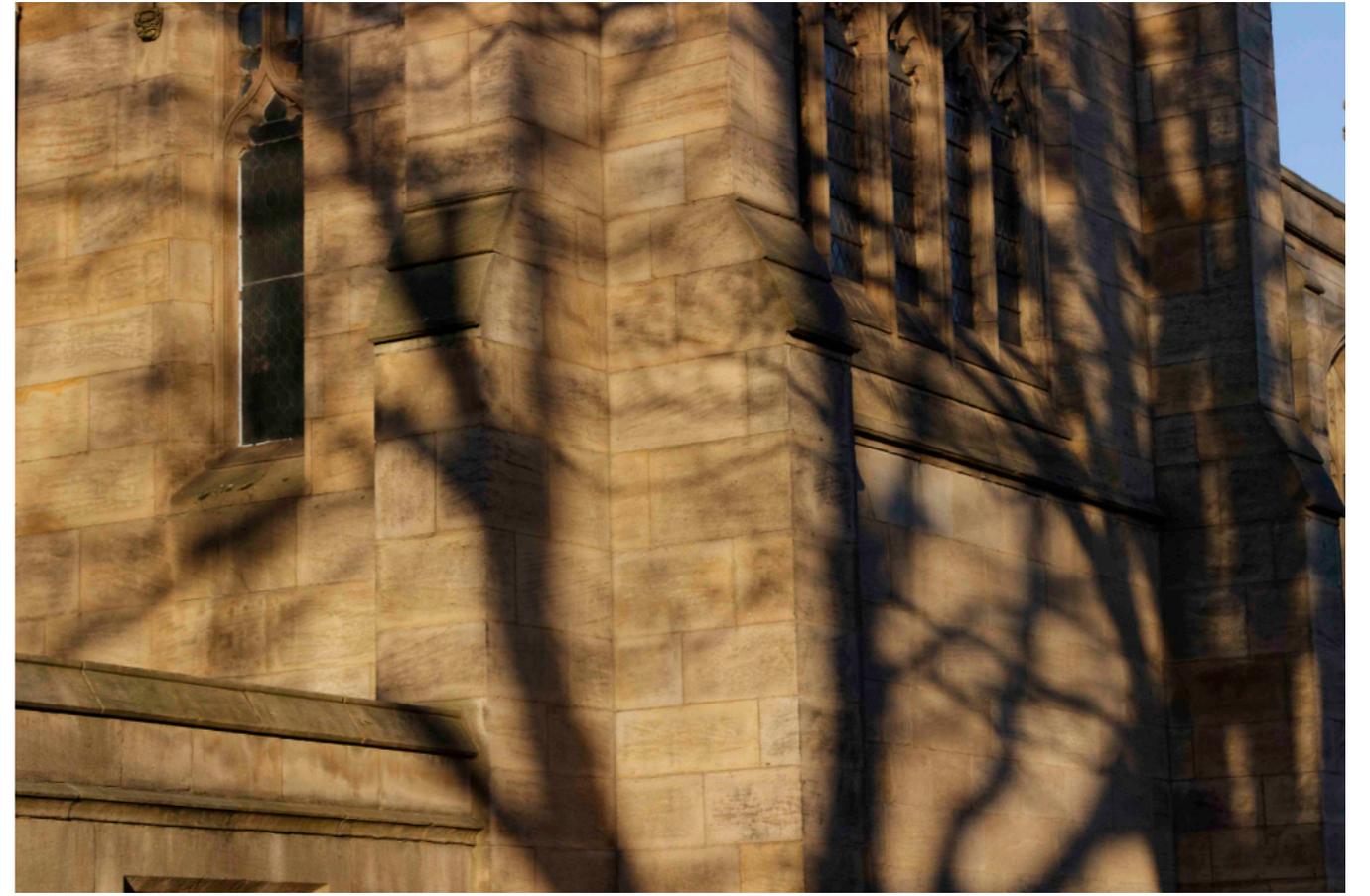
The comparison of these two sets of photographs raises a question, that is, was my naive and unknowing 20-year-old self, producing photographs that I would happily take today? Is it all there: - psychogeography, new topographics, structuralism, poststructuralism, modernism and postmodernism? Was I ahead of my time, as the categories my photographs fit into were not established or unknown to me?

The 2020 photographs are more about pattern and design but also colour. The difference is now I know that, when I take a photograph, I have to be able to justify it with words, because that's what you have to do now. I can write about the 1970s photographs now because I'm used to writing about photographs. In the 55 intervening years, it seems that the important thing I have learned is how to use text to justify my photographs.











Tom Owens ARPS

This theme set up a conundrum for me. My normal, current, practice is to make return visits to the same locations to make images for bodies of work. I immediately thought of my Edgelands series and I made an edit of images that could not be made again at the same viewpoints. That got me thinking more about what Thomas' broadcast was about. There is an underlying theme of death that runs through this broadcast made in 1947.

I decided to re-visit the images I made for my initial application to study photography at degree level. Coincidentally, making the initial series in 1972 was in fact a form of documenting the aftermath of German bombing combined with Liverpool City Council's attempts to finish off what Hitler started. I was offered a place at Birmingham to study, but I never made it. Work and life got in the way then I eventually studied for my photography degree at University Campus Suffolk 2011-14.

Upon completing that course in the Summer of 2014, we made a rare return visit to Liverpool, and I sought out the locations of some of my 1972 portfolio images.

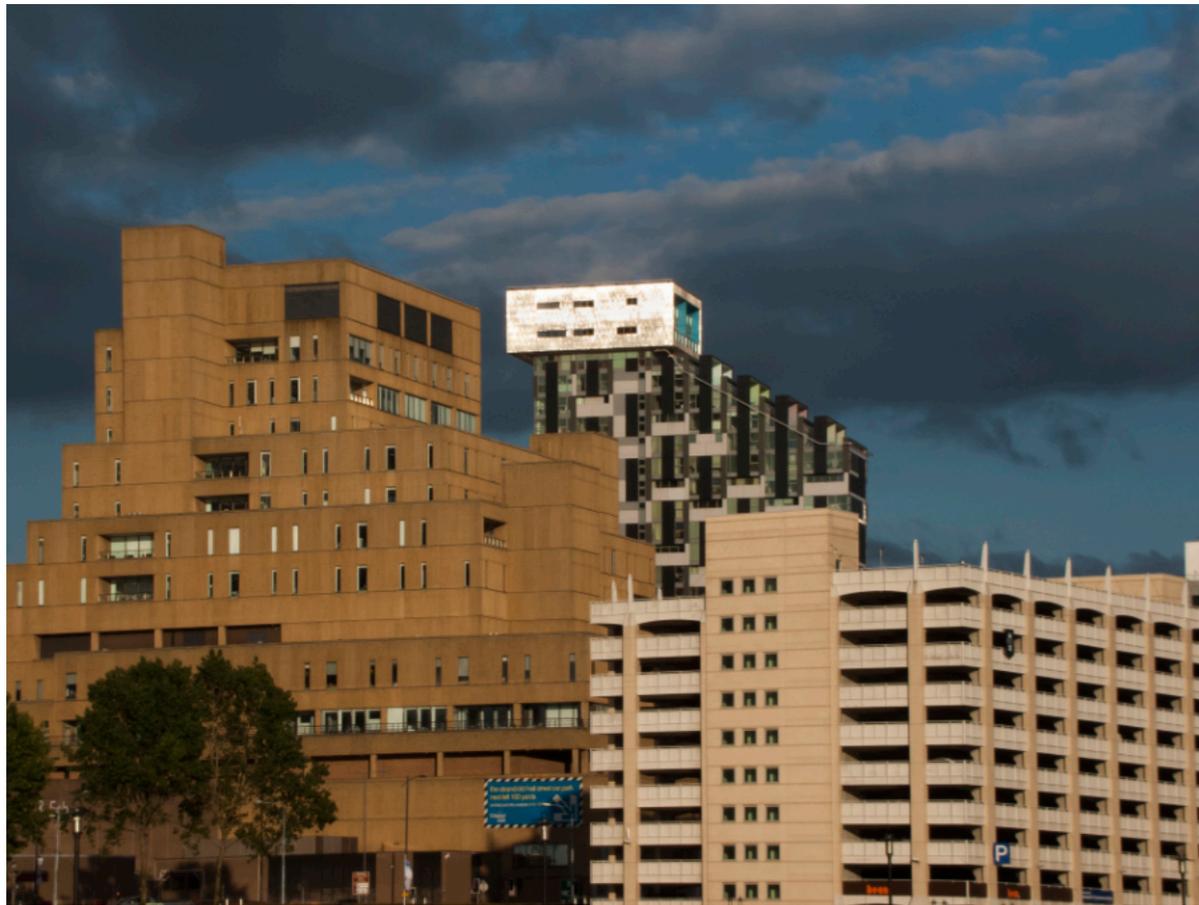
Things had changed insofar as I could not stand where I had once stood but had anything changed at all? The Liverpool University teaching hospital was stood empty and incomplete in November 1972 owing to an Electrician's strike that was part of the National building strike but here I was photographing the same hospital that although it was in part occupied, was in the process of demolition.

Major landmarks such as the Liver Buildings where I was interviewed for my career in the Civil Service, and the Cunard Building where I worked as a lowly clerk are still there but in 1972 these buildings were black from pollution. The Liverpool Echo and Daily Post site where I received my first payment for submitting photographs to their picture desk was all different as was Princes Dock but that was devoid of the Irish ferries that now sail from Birkenhead without needing to dock.

Returning to these locations brought back many memories but left me wondering whether very much had changed at all.









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Mark Farrington ARPS

My loves for photography and powered vehicles were both acquired from my father, and this is our journey together, back towards their origins.

I recognised other parallels that emerged on this journey - the details we both record to document our images, our love for the English West Country, our enjoyment of the technology and craft of photography as much for those of the vehicles.

How he would have revelled in the capabilities of modern cameras!



British Superbike at speed, Snetterton. 2024, Mark Farrington, digital image, Olympus OM-1 with Zuiko 40-150mm f2.8 and 1.4 teleconverter.



Kate Farrington feeding our daughter Claire with our 1979 VW Scirocco Storm, near Appledore, Devon coast. 1986. Mark Farrington, Ektachrome slide, Olympus XA.



Pit garages, practice day, Le Mans 24h race, 1979. Mark Farrington, Kodachrome slide, Olympus OM1



Mark Farrington with our rented caravan and Ken's 1959 Singer Gazelle, Porthgarra, West Cornwall. Early-1960s, Kenneth Farrington, Kodachrome slide, Zeiss Werra.



Ambrose Jeffery with 1957 David Brown Tool Carrier Tractor, Trebehor Farm, West Cornwall. Mid-1960s, Kenneth Farrington, faded Agfa slide, Zeiss Werra.



My father Ken with his beloved 1967 Daimler V8, near Wolverhampton. 1971, Mark Farrington, faded Agfa slide, Zeiss Werra.

End Note

This is the last zine that I am producing for the East Anglia Contemporary Group of the RPS.

I have managed the group since 2015 and now it is time for change. I need to re-energise my creative being by stepping away from the RPS and immersing myself into making new bodies of work.

I'd like to thank all the contributors to the activities this group has engaged in over the last 11 years, including physical exhibitions and face to face meetings prior to COVID. The pandemic changed how we operated and the use of Zoom made our group more accessible given the geographic spread that we cover.

I wish the group well with their future endeavours..

The quotes used in this zine were taken from <http://www.dylanthomas.com/blog/ashes-now-under-the-snow-dylan-thomas-return-journey/>

Tom Owens ARPS

March 2026



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For more information about the Contemporary Group of
the Royal Photographic Society please visit

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

