

December 2020

The Newsletter of the Royal Photographic Society Contemporary Group



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Next issue: due for publication: mid February 2020
The editor welcomes the submission of articles and features.
Please send to Romney Tansley by 31st January 2020 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: Blackpool Tower, Alan Cameron LRPS



Editorial

It's sometimes said that taking photographs is too easy today. With a high quality camera installed in every smartphone, we're equipped like no earlier generation to depict our surroundings for posterity. This has led to an astronomical increase in the number of photographs taken. Ten years ago it was reported that on average more than 250 million photos per day were being uploaded to Facebook. In 2014 it was reported that 1.8 billion digital images were uploaded on average every day. That's 657 billion photos per year. In effect every two minutes, humans were taking more photos than ever existed in total 150 years ago. The figures are likely to be much larger now.

When a skill becomes widespread we tend to devalue it. Does this mean there is less good photography? Not necessarily. Do serious photographers work less hard to get good images? It doesn't follow. Less effort may be required to work the technology, but this opens the door to channel creative energy more ambitiously. Photographers working today at the top of their game in all fields, display a level of excellence rarely achieved in the past except by a very few.

We should celebrate the advances we have seen. And we are fortunate in the opportunities on offer to see the best work and learn in the process. At Society level Peter Hayes FRPS has hosted online interviews with a series of brilliant photographers over recently months. Alan Cameron LRPS our Chair has been doing the same with a set of equally illustrious names, and these are set to continue. Our sister publication Contemporary Photography edited by Paul Ashley LRPS, carries features on a diverse group of practitioners in every issue. And here in Concept we endeavour to show the best work of our members up and down the country.

In this issue we get an insight through the reports from our regional groups into this work, in particular from recent well attended Zoom meetings of both the North West and South West groups. We also carry a set of images by Sean Goodhart ARPS taken across the globe before lockdown, in which he meditates on how his pictures convey his sense of loss. Finally there's a short article by Brian Steptoe FRPS on Hoxton Mini Press, an exquisite publisher of photobooks.

We wish all our readers a Happy Christmas and refreshment as we glimpse the possibilities on offer in 2021.

Romney Tansley ARPS



View from the Chair

Inspiration requires perspiration

As we come to the end of this extraordinary year I want to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has helped in any way with our activities over the past twelve months.

In all our activities we hope that the work of our volunteers will inspire you to get the most from the extraordinary passion that is photography. To enable us to give you inspiration requires a lot of behind the scenes perspiration, and what follows should show you just how much work goes into the group.

Regional Groups

Our regional groups are an important element of our success. They allow for discussion and debate about our photography and, in the absence of face-to-face meetings, Zoom has permitted continuing contact. Again without those members of the committee who oversee the regions, such meetings wouldn't happen. In addition to thanking those of you who have been carrying on the job for years, I'd like to highlight Steff Hutchinson ARPS who has just kicked off a new joint Contemporary/Documentary Group in Central region. I'd love to see more regional meetings so, if you fancy giving it a go, please get in touch.

Publications

Concept appears every two months and Contemporary Photography every three, and producing them is a considerable task. Thanks go to Romney Tansley ARPS and Ken Holland ARPS who between them edit and create the layout of Concept. Over on Contemporary Photography Paul Ashley LRPS and Brian Steptoe FRPS edit and layout our journal and my thanks to you both for producing an excellent publication.

Blogs

Our Vice Chair Dr Avijit Datta FRSA FLS FPhys is an extremely busy doctor, but still manages to coordinate our blogs along with Sean Goodhart ARPS. This is a tremendous effort and has really increased the content on our web page. I owe Avijit and Sean a blog on singing and wellbeing. If any of you reading this would like to contribute please contact Sean or Avijit.

Exhibition

Early in the summer we decided that, though the ethos of Contemporary Photography is not competitive, we ought to give you the chance to share some of your images by way of an online exhibition. We had 44 entries in three categories, Lockdown, Open and Climate Change. The selected entries have now been posted on the website <https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/exhibition2020/> Thank you to everyone who entered and congratulations to those of you whose images were chosen.

Yet again these inspirational images only come to you as result of hard work. Thanks go to David Grimshaw ARPS for collating and obfuscating the image files to allow anonymous image viewing, Tessa Mills FRPS, Brian Steptoe FRPS and Sean Goodhart ARPS for selecting the image sets, and Sean Goodhart ARPS for the website work to prepare the exhibition for display.



Online Talks

The last element of inspiration I'd like to mention is our Online Talks. First of all a big thank you to our speakers. I found all of them impressive and thought provoking. I've tried to build diversity into the speakers and their contributions.

Three of our speakers have told us stories, Chris Steele-Perkins HonFRPS talked about his "New Londoners" project and Ken Holland ARPS walked us through his fascinating project "Little Poland." In between Prof Paul Hill MBE inspired us to look at the world through different eyes, to explore and challenge ourselves to greater things. Our November speaker Rehab Eldalil, a young woman based in Cairo, talked us through some of her projects, concentrating on "Collaboration in Visual Storytelling." She makes sure that the people whose images she captures are collaborators rather than subjects, and the result is a body of work which to my mind is an exemplar of Contemporary Photography.

I'd like to thank our Webmaster Sean Goodhart ARPS (again) for prompting me to set these up, and also for helping at each event to corral questions on viewers' behalf.

We have four more speakers lined up and I'm thinking hard how to bring more amazing photography stories to you via Zoom.

Finally

We are hearing happy news at last where scientific inspiration and perspiration has brought forth vaccines which will enable us to return to a more normal life within a relatively short time. We will of course restart our previous activities when we can meet once again, but I hope we have learned the benefits of modern technology and we'll be able to continue to use them when the pandemic is a memory.

In the meantime, thank you all for your loyalty, you make the Contemporary Group what it is. I wish you all a safe holiday season and a happy and healthy 2021.

Alan Cameron LRPS

Chair



Some Day We Will Go Back to The Light Sean Goodhart ARPS

Until March of 2020 my job had always involved regular travel. I'm normally away from home working with colleagues around the world at least half of every month. Now work has had to adapt and I'm spending my days in video conferences instead. Whilst being at home every day does give more family time there is a sense of loss for my former life. So I've been looking back at my archives of snapshots made while travelling, yielding several series of images which I've published on my Instagram pages @seangoodhart

Covid-19 has massively impacted our ability to travel, especially internationally, and to take part in large gatherings of people. My 'travel' and 'event' images all have strong memories for me. By reprocessing them in monochrome, I see the loss of colour as representing a sense of the loss of access to these places and events.



New York

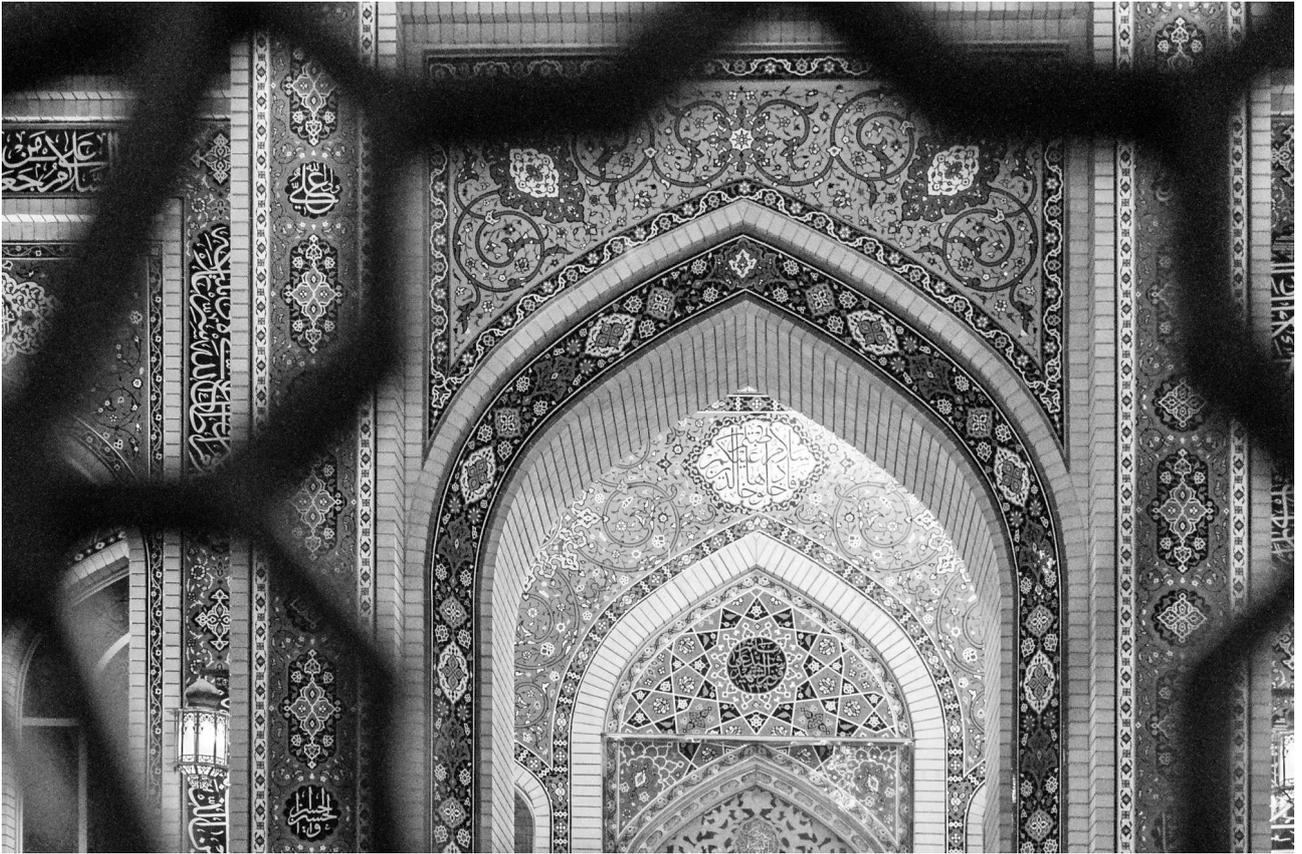




Incheon near Seoul

My images from New York and Incheon near Seoul represent lost memories of travel itself. Railway and airport terminals in themselves often have great architectural features. Another image shows a view from inside of Musée d'Orsay in Paris and another is of a mosque in Bahrain. These for me represent the loss of cultural exchange. My final three, from Benicàssim in Spain and from Ulsan in Korea represent the loss of contact with people.





Bahrain



Musée d'Orsay





Ulsan



Benicàssim



Benicàssim



Southwest Contemporary Group Adrian Hough LRPS

We met on Zoom on the afternoon of Sunday 15th November in a meeting which, surprisingly, lasted for almost three hours although it seemed rather shorter at the time.

In the short business session we noted the welcome proliferation of on-line talks organised by the RPS both nationally and regionally and the much greater attendance and participation which these had enabled. It is hoped that this initiative continues in parallel with physical meetings when we can start to move about again and meet up in person.

I noted that for various reasons I had little to offer but had been fortuitous in having booked (back in November 2019) a visit to Switzerland at exactly the time in August when it was possible to travel. This included a visit to 'The Restaurant at the End of the World', 'Die Ende der Welt' being the name of a side valley with a dead end surrounded by cliff faces some 600 metres high.

Carol Ballenger has been focussing on video of late but also working on images for a book of poems by John Powls about growing up in Teeside.

This involved the production of a set of images of Whitby following the 'Ritual Route' which John's family used to follow every year. Due to the inability to visit Whitby at present, Carol used images from Google Streetview. However, due to the heavy rain falling at the time she decided to use effect filters. The results are bright and quirky, and to me this makes them feel more like Whitby than Whitby itself. A second part of her project involved further Streetview images of the lead mining area of Gunnerside together with satellite images. These reveal fascinating patterns of both land-use and the after effects of the mining in the area as a quick online examination reveals.



John Evans-Jones





John Evans-Jones

Carol has also been looking at the effects of the China Clay workings in Devon and the large scale excavations and processing plants, almost invisible from the road. How many visitors to Devon driving down the A38 realise they are passing large opencast clay excavations both near to Ashburton and to the north-east of Plymouth at Lea Moor?

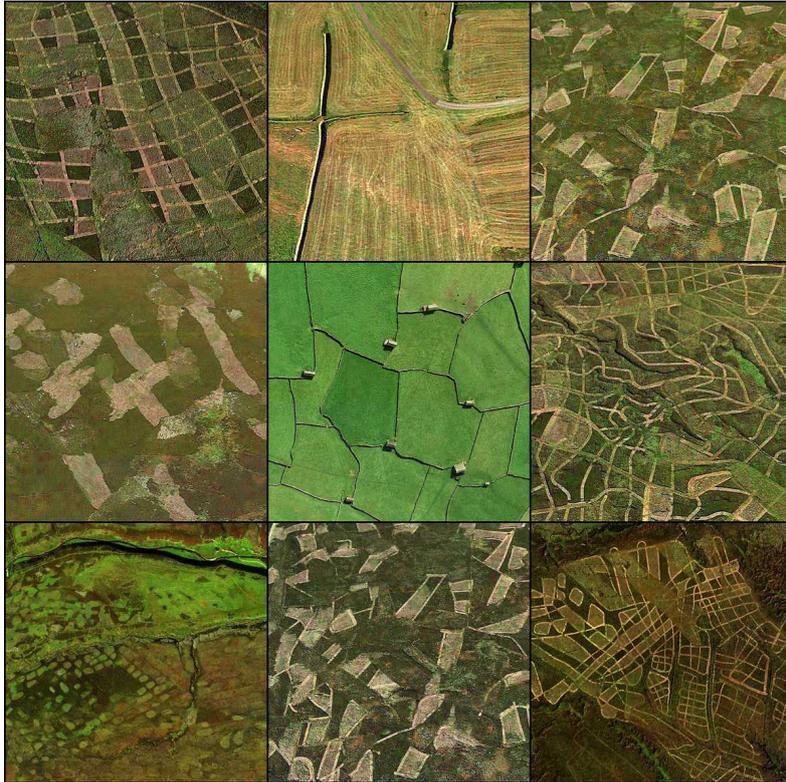
Ken Holland has been collecting topical images of rainbows and showed twenty-two such images taken during lockdown during his daily exercise. Drawn largely by children they showed great variety. And there were other objects on display also in rainbow colours, including butterflies decorating a fence and a gate in the fence itself.

John Evans-Jones had, pre-Covid, been taking photographs from the upper deck of a bus travelling along the route from Peckham to Waterloo. This involved comparing and contrasting the same set of images in colour and in monochrome. One such pair is included here and is my particular favourite as - in monochrome - the reflection of the wheel on the bus can be mistaken for the dry cleaning machine in the shop.

Not content with spying on the unsuspecting populous of south London, John turned his attention to the view from the windows of his apartment in Cornwall including the various activities of his neighbours. However, the images were mainly concerned with contrasts in lighting, weather, tide, visibility and various other pairings.

Finally John showed a four by four grid of reflections of various cloud patterns in a puddle on his neighbour's roof - again taken from his window.





Carol Ballenger



Adrian Hough



Martin Howse showed a number of monochrome photographs taken of the Hall for Cornwall (the former Truro City Hall) prior to its refurbishment in 1996, following a request for such images. As with much of Martin's work, they were 'analogue prints' from push-processed HP5 in 35mm which he had painstakingly created in the darkroom. However, due to current restrictions, these had to be scanned to enable us to see them. Hopefully in 2021 we will again be able to feel the depth of the quality in the printed images produced by both Martin and Viv.

A second set of images (this time prepared from 2¼" medium format) showed the evidence created by the overnight activities of Beavers (the animals rather than Beaver Scouts!) near to Launceston. They included a dam, the resulting lake, felled trees, some having fallen in the wrong direction.

Finally **Graham Hodgson** showed a video project under development using some of Carol's images of meadows and the start of 'something' based on googling himself (personally, I'm an Australian actor).

Along the way we also met Muriel Somerfield's cat, something which would never have happened without Zoom.

We plan to meet again in March on a date yet to be determined. If any other Southwest Contemporary members would like to join us then please contact me via the email address.



Ken Holland



Contemporary NW Meeting Report

Alan Cameron LRPS

Enabled by Zoom once again, we met on 14 November and were joined by Keith Launchbury, Nigel Richards, Ken Rowlatt, Romney Tansley, Christine Storey and Brian Williams. I am very pleased that Keith is able to join us from his far flung eyrie on the NW coast of Cumbria. I feel that we will be continuing to meet using technology even when things ease off though with a few face-to-face meetings too and hopefully too in joint meetings with the Documentary Group.

Six of us presented work. Here they are mostly their own words.

Alan presented over 25 images, mainly in “before and after” pairs. “I tried to capture the effect of Lockdown 2 on Blackpool and specifically the Illuminations. Pictures were taken a day before Lockdown and a week later. A common feature on many images was Blackpool Tower which is all that has remained illuminated. The forced jollity of the Illuminations certainly attracted the crowds and the cars while, after lockdown, roads were deserted and the displays were unlit and drab. Only the illuminated Tower continued as the bright heart of Blackpool.”

Keith shared some beautiful images of his annual trip to Wastewater. He called his series, Please Park Responsibly. “It’s only 40 miles by road from where I live on the Solway Plain but it takes an hour-and-a-half, so I choose my day carefully in the hope of gaining the prospect of favourable weather.



Keith Launchbury





Keith Launchbury

Will it be busy, will I get parked - questions to ponder as I drive over Cold Fell. Wast Water, by popular vote England's favourite view, is understandably much visited and photographed.

There's that perennial chestnut as to why photograph such a much photographed view and that retort - but not photographed by ME! Without doubt it is a park-up and shoot scene, however, therein lies the challenge to find my own takeaway image in acknowledgement that photography is a means to transform looking into seeing. If I fail to get in the mood to invest some of myself into the process of image-making then nothing of original note can be expected to emerge. Whenever I have arrived at Wast Water I have never doubted the decision to make the effort to get there. For me, its allure endures."

Christine showed some images from a walk around the promenade at Blackpool South Shore. "Editing them I was struck by the number of barriers, fences and railings there were. So that is the theme. I've also experimented with inserting skies – plain ones where the main area of the image is complex and more interesting ones where the subject itself is uncomplicated."

Ken showed us three sets of images covering a series of themes. One covered activities he can't do at the moment as the official photographer at his local Hospices. This includes taking images of celebrities, such as Mary Peters, who comes to visit, but also activities like the annual Santa dash. His second series was a continuation of the historical images of ruined cotton mills and finally his last series had its genesis in works by Robert Law and Ken Holland. He is embarking on a project to show how his home village of Norden is changing as development accelerates and its character is changing too.





Christine Storey



Nigel Richards





Romney Tansley

Nigel writes, "Over probably the last 15 years I have visited Bidulph Grange frequently documenting the seasons and weather, it is a very compact place but full of twists and turns and surprises around every corner, I always try to visit several times during Autumn to try and catch the colours. It never disappoints.

I am especially drawn to the "China" area with its acer trees, the last photo attached was taken in 2013 and is probably, for me the definitive autumn image I have captured, I think I went 5 times in three weeks. The other image were taken this year in late October. It is one of those long term projects that one day may turn into a book of images."

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/biddulph-grange-garden>

Romney told us about his technique of shooting unobtrusively with his camera and 50mm lens held against his lower body. He says of his images, "Going somewhere for the first time your senses are super attuned to new experiences. You see everything afresh. On my first visit to the city of Valencia just before lockdown in March there was so much to excite the attention. Fellow tourists at turns bewildered and entranced by new discoveries. And how to convey the fascinating spectacle of a crowd of hundreds surging through the streets in a surprise evening procession. And the fabric of the city itself, the medieval buildings, constantly in a state of refurbishment and renewal for the modern age."

Brian hasn't been able to get out with his camera for several reasons. We briefly discussed his interest in the techniques used in the past to record life in the region, such as trams captured on city streets and the perspectives used by the photographers of the time. These images are available on the web and we encouraged him to extract some and then we could discuss them at the next meeting.

Our next meeting will be on Saturday 12th December at 13.00 via Zoom. Alan will send an invitation in advance.





Alan Cameron



Romney Tansley



Christine Storey





Ken Rowlatt



Ken Rowlatt



Hoxton Mini Press

Brian Steptoe FRPS

Hoxton Mini Press are photobook publishers based in East London, run by Mike and Ann Usbourne. They make books that everyone can afford. Most are about East London but they are gradually broadening out to other areas and topics, always with an eye on the urban and niche.

In the days before Covid restrictions they organised very successful book launches, with free beer on offer from local brewers. My wife and I attended the launch of 'Unseen London' in 2015, where we found ourselves alongside Andy Sewell, best known for his book 'The Heath' about Hampstead Heath, which has been described as 'a landscape of the imagination as well as a record of a real and familiar place. A classic of understated observation (The Guardian)'. Also present on that evening were Simon Norfolk, who contributed a photo series about Crossrail to 'Unseen London' and Lorenzo Vitturi, who had recently produced 'Dalton Anatomy' about the exotic Ridley Road street market.





www.hoxtonminipress.com





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RPS Contemporary Face Book group

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