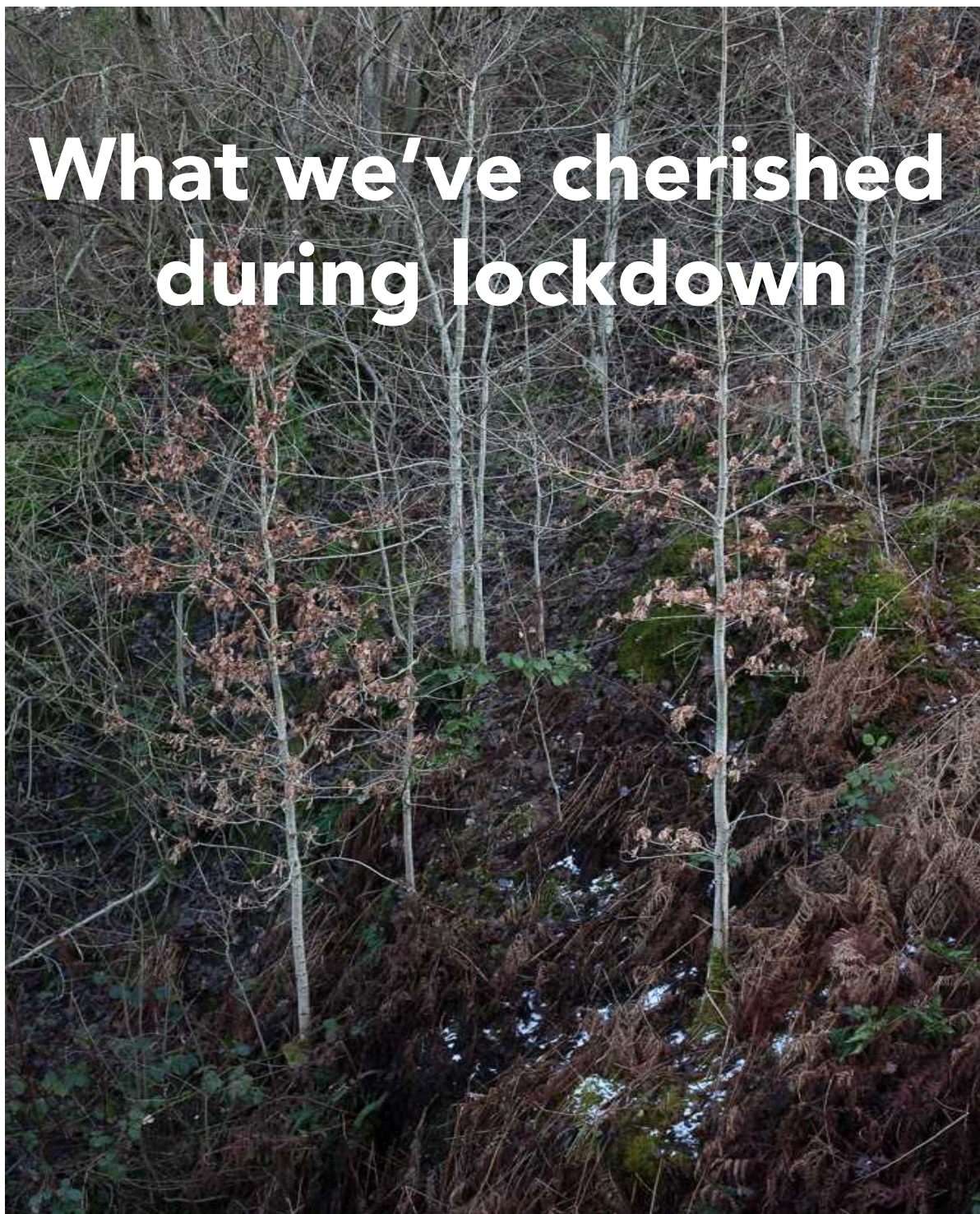


February 2021

The Newsletter of the Royal Photographic Society Contemporary Group

What we've cherished during lockdown



In this issue

Editorial Romney Tansley ARPS

View from the Chair Alan Cameron LRPS

What We've Cherished Members' Contributions

Contemporary & Documentary NW Meeting report Alan Cameron LRPS

Fragments of Sappho – a mini project Paul Ashley LRPS

Blogging the pandemic – stories from the time of COVID-19 and lockdowns
Sean Goodhart ARPS

Contemporary Group AGM

Concept:

Editor, Romney Tansley ARPS

Design & Layout, Ken Holland ARPS

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The editor welcomes the submission of articles and features.

Please send to Romney Tansley by 31st March 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: Romney Tansley ARPS



Editorial

All great art demands a response. We remain unmoved only by the mediocre and clichéd. Great art - and here I include great photography - provokes us to think and feel in new and unexpected ways, and that experience can be more vivid than almost any other. We respond by forming opinions, offering interpretations, debating our differing viewpoints. This results in the growth of a symbiotic relationship between images and the written word.

No gallery exhibition is complete without its profusion of text displays plus a weighty catalogue containing interpretive essays, all to support the main attraction - the pictures on the wall. Each of these needs the other. The written explanation/interpretation proves itself by how well it makes sense of the pictures and how well it helps us understand why these in particular are considered good or great. Without that interpretation the pictures themselves would likely make less of an impact on the viewer. Great writing about art has itself become an industry. Susan Sontag among others helped define how we understand the place of photography in our time. And many photographers write (and speak) movingly about their own work helping us deepen our appreciation.

This notion takes centre-stage in this issue of Concept. Members of the Facebook RPS Contemporary Group were invited to submit a picture of something they had cherished during the lockdowns and to write about it. The result is subject matter of very diverse kinds. And in the writing accompanying them we are transported into a sense of the succour they afforded to those individuals. My own submission is in there too. Rising to that creative challenge turned out to be much harder for me than I had imagined.

Also in this issue Paul Ashley writes illuminating of how the beautiful lyric verses of the ancient Greek poet Sappho inspired his new project. And here the process I've tried to describe is reversed. Rather than the words being inspired by the pictures, instead it's the text that inspires. The result is a striking set of images produced by the collaboration of photographer and model. Poetry and pictures are to be savoured together.

We also have Alan's report on the two most recent meetings of the Northwest group, the only one of our regional groups to post a report this time. His account eloquently conveys the individual photographic interests and preoccupations of those present. I normally attend these meetings and gain much from them. Alan's account testifies to how via Zoom we can enjoy sharing and discussing our photography.

Remember that the purpose of Concept is to share the life and photography of the Contemporary Group as a whole. If you have a project you are pursuing that you'd like to unveil to fellow members, please get in touch.

Romney Tansley ARPS



View from the Chair

Welcome to 2021, I hope it is much better for us all. I think it's safe to say that most of us will wish to forget most of last year. A year ago at this time I was in southern India, Kochi to be precise. It seems a lifetime ago, but in looking to the future I am an optimist, so I'm planning where to go next when I can and it's safe to travel once again. Unless I look forward I find my spirit sinking into winter blues and the lethargy that comes with it.

I'm not sure which part of my brain dominates at the moment. One part of me see the path ahead as clear and sunlit, but the other part sees fog and uncertainty. Reviewing the fantastic collection of blogs curated by Avijit Datta and Sean Goodhart on our web page <https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/> I find that, of course, I'm not alone. I'd like to say thank you to the contributors as well as the editors as I feel that the stories they tell show that we can survive and we will flourish.

In reviewing Glenn Gameson-Burrows blog <https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/january/together-we-are-stronger> I find that, while he shows us the stress and agony of the pandemic, the wonderful images first of the newly born infant and second of the Covid patient leaving hospital show that there can be positivity in the chaos.

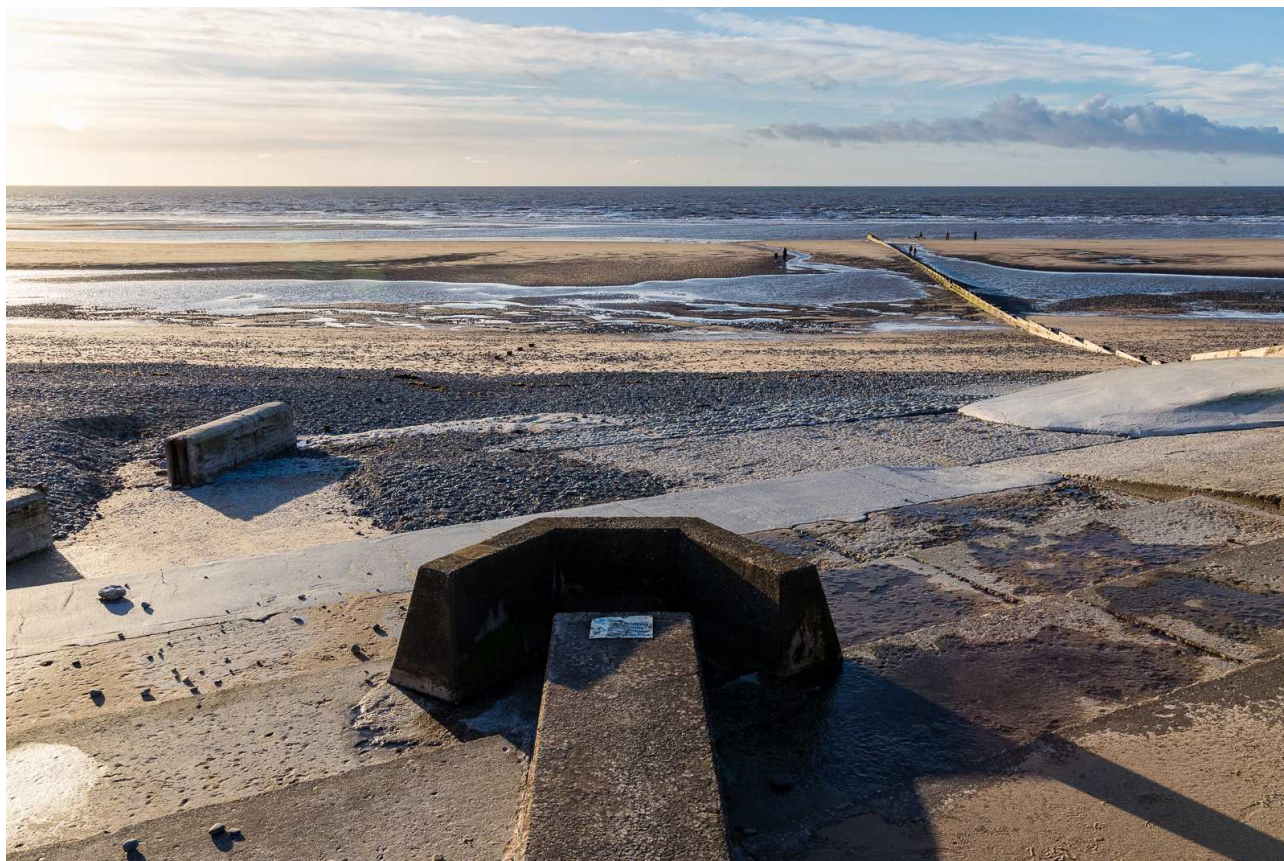
Giles Duley Hon FRPS who participated in December's on-line talk also has a moving blog and his connection with the ICU, in which he was treated for his horrific injuries caused by a landmine gives him a unique and personal view that few of us will experience. <https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/january/inside-imperial-college-healthcare-nhs-trust-icus/>



Projects also feature in the blogs and I would encourage you to take the time to try to develop something. I know that will not be easy particularly if you are in full time work and it can be challenging. When I was working, in my last decade of work I was frequently away from home, living in hotels and eating lonely meals. I found myself staying sane by keeping my camera with me so that I could take my mind off the pressures and transform my working environment from mere grey walls to living towns and cities. Even if you can only find a few minutes each day to think of your photography you may find that it helps: I certainly did.

Speaking of projects, our latest restriction have both interrupted and effectively extended my lockdown project on the re-opening of a local restaurant. I keep plugging away and I hope you can too. In working with the restaurant team I have formed new friendships and have been included in their family. I have created a draft book for them to see and it has caused them excitement and given rise to smiles in a desperate time for their business, though I have to say that transcribing and editing recorded interviews has been a challenge - pushing a shutter button is so much easier.

I am pleased to say that the blogs, on-line talks, on-line meetings and social media presence have had a positive effect on membership numbers in the Contemporary Group and our page on the RPS site is now the second most viewed. The blogs keep coming and we welcome entries and our online talks have proved to be fascinating. On 13th February we welcome the renowned photo journalist Sarah M Lee, followed a month later by another much anticipated talk by Maria Falconer FRPS. Maria's talk come just a few days after her contribution to the Photography Show. April will see Dewi Lewis Hon FRPS talking about Publishing Photography and I am working to get a range of photographers. I'm hugely enjoying this series and I hope you are too.





Lastly our AGM will be on 27th March and we will be publicising that very soon.

See page 28.

In the meantime stay safe, get vaccinated when you can, and enjoy your photography.

Alan Cameron LRPS

Chair

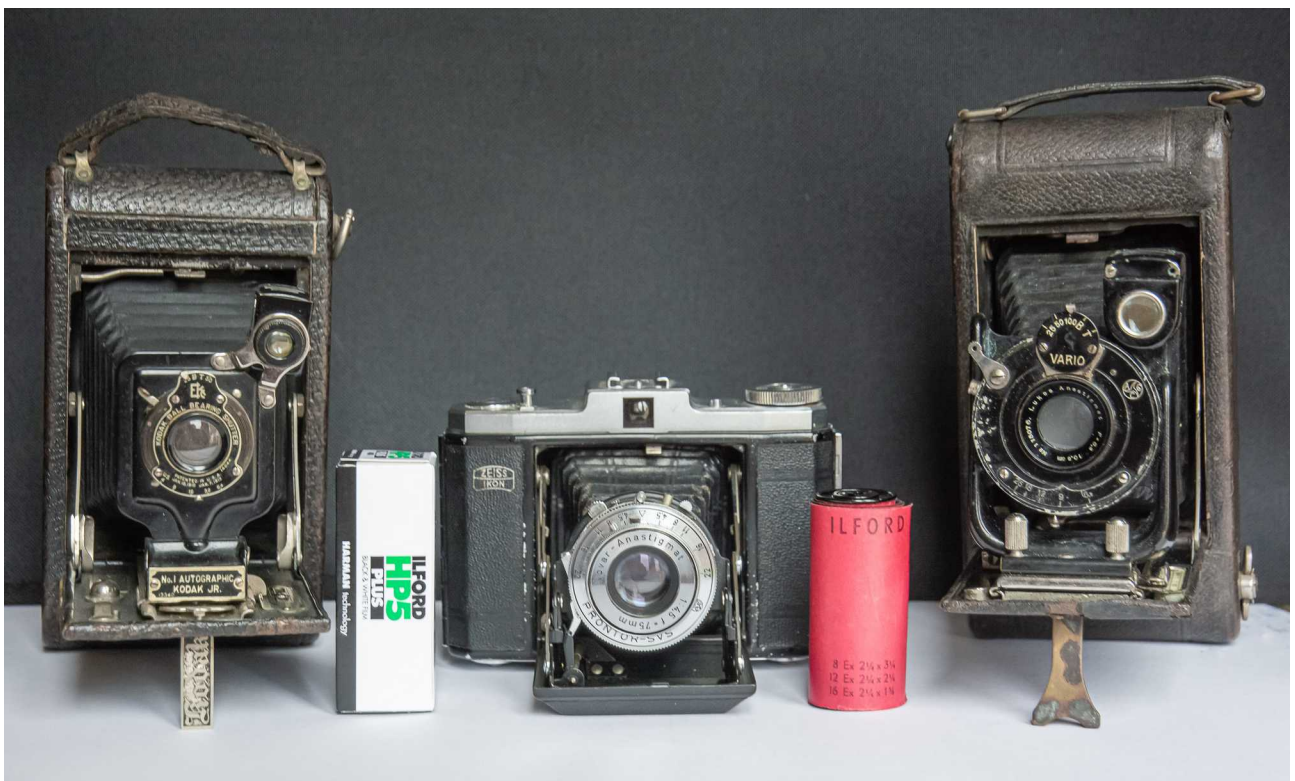


What We've Cherished.

What has comforted us, provided consolation, inspiration, and pleasure over the periods of lockdown? We invited photographers in RPS Contemporary Facebook group to submit one picture and tell us about it. Here are the entries we received...

Revd Dr Adrian Hough LRPS

Throughout 2020 my employment continued much as normal but working from home. Excluding family, what sustained me through this period were Zoom meetings and the anticipation of retiring from paid employment at the end of the year. Retirement offered the possibility of world-wide travel (or adventures as my wife calls them) and more time for photography. The first of these is largely in abeyance which leaves photography. One plan had been to take my collection of vintage medium format cameras, mostly acquired for next to nothing at flea-markets, and try them out. I already have a developing tank from long-gone experiments with 35mm film, and my wife has recently discovered HP5, ID-11, Stop-Bath, Rapid-Fixer and various beakers arriving at the house. The photograph shows three of these cameras, a roll of HP5 and a very old roll of unexposed Ilford film which was in one of the cameras. Based on the colour it's possibly 1950s Selochrome.



Adrian Hough LRPS

On the left is a Kodak Autographic from 1917 which my father used in the 1940s and 50s. I last used it in the mid-1960s to take my own first pictures so it's now over twice as old as when I last used it! On the right is an Ensign from the same period which will make an interesting comparison with the Kodak. In the centre is a Zeiss Ikonta-B from c1953 that I bought as inoperative but which works as the vendor did not know about the shutter-lock.



The Ikonta is amazing, being smaller than many DSLRs and even the larger 35mm SLRs - even before it's folded!

So, I'm going to see what contemporary photographs I can create with very non-contemporary equipment. Depending on the outcome you may even get to see the results.

Bob Farrer

My late father was a great family man. A tolerant, modest man, he changed as society changed around him and was held in much love and affection by colleagues, friends and family.

He joined the Coldstream Guards aged eighteen in 1945 and served for eight years. He loved his army years and kept many small items of his personal kit with his army number stamped on them. He did not see action, but many with whom he served had. Those men, those survivors, by my father's own admission provided the most formative experience of his life.



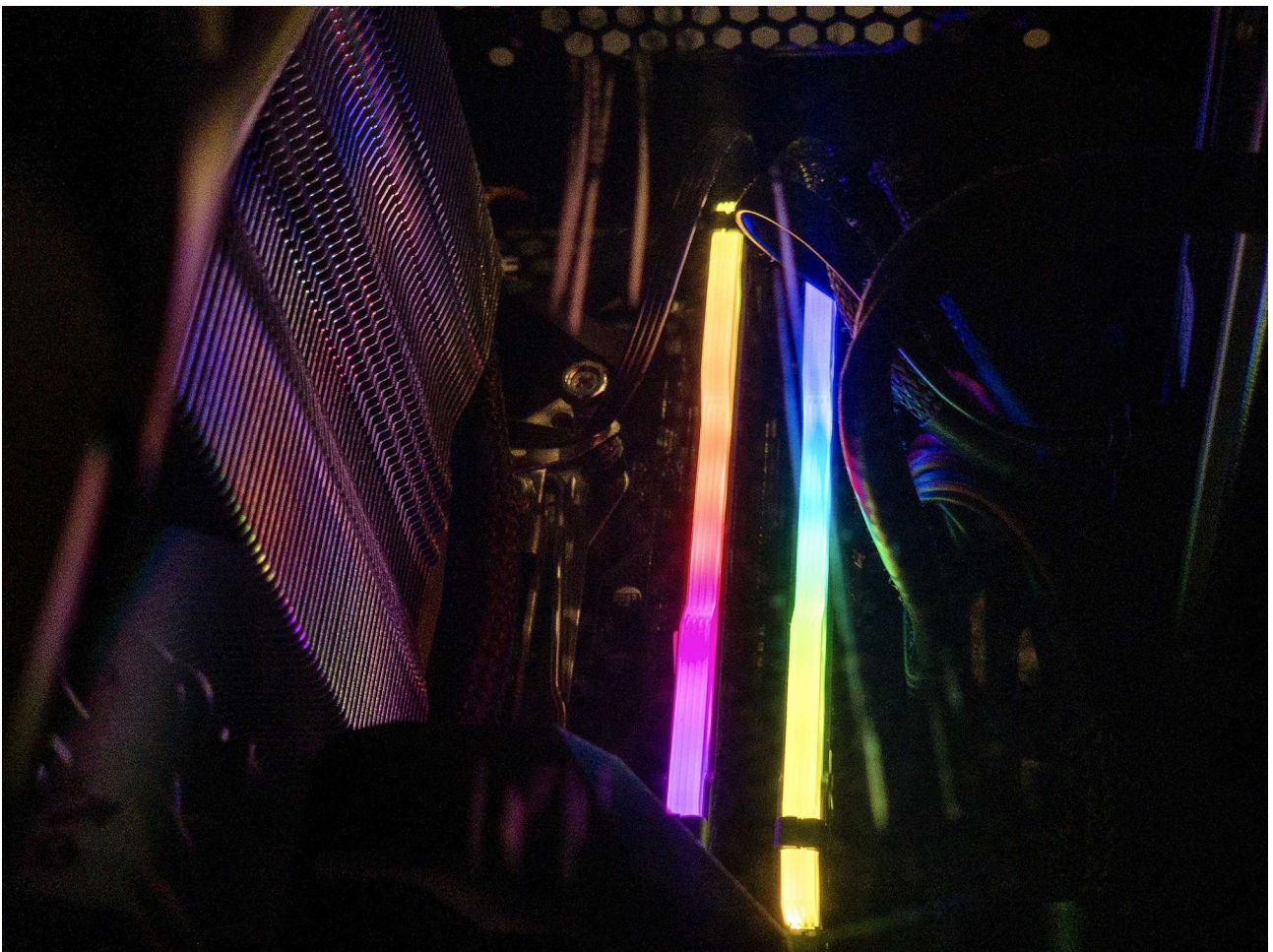
Bob Farrer



I cherish the cap badge my father wore, the front polished smooth, together they were consorts of universal values shared among those who had the collective experience to know their worth.

Brian Rope

During 2020 I cherished the additional time available to me to walk the nearby streets for exercise, particularly to exercise my shutter finger with my DSLR or my smart phone camera, gathering images to then transfer to my equally cherished computer and post-process seeking to create occasional masterpieces.



Brian Rope

This image is of the internal lights of my computer which glow reassuringly when the room is dark, letting me know it is still operating and inspiring me to work on more projects, to rediscover overlooked images from the past and share them with all who care to look on my social media posts, to write illustrated articles for blogs, newspapers and magazines, and develop ideas for future books. It is a critical key element in all the creative work I have pursued, and continue to develop.



The Solway Coast (Revisited) Keith Launchbury FRPS

For over 25 years I was a weekend and holidays visitor to the Cumbrian Coast, exploring through my photography there the notion that it is 'quirky'. Retirement in 2012 presented an opportunity to search for a permanent residence in substitution for the static caravan pitch I had occupied since 1991. In 2017 my wife and I made the big move from Lancashire to a small village just outside Allonby, that coastal location so beloved by the late Raymond Moore. It had been in following his thoughts as to how, on revisiting any place, our feelings towards it may have changed somewhat that gave rise to my own re-invention of it for the purposes of pursuing what became a photographic opus: 'Cumbrian Coast Revisited'. The primary fascination for me came through that endless retrospection as to just what influences may be bearing within and without my consciousness when revisiting a particular scene, one which may by that time have become very familiar, but only then, at that singular moment, would some inner threshold be breached to spark an irresistible urging to make a photograph. Sometimes I was able to rationalise the cause - that it was the light or the recognition of some juxtaposition, even the introduction of a 'new' element, but as often I departed to contemplate at later leisure that pressing of the shutter button.



Keith Launchbury FRPS

Most recently, and especially during these long periods of COVID 'lock-downs', I have had more time to reflect generally on how I feel now about the Cumbrian Coast and, more particularly, the Solway Coast closest to home. 'Home', yes, that is a significant change of circumstance and one that has caused me to conclude, after much consideration, that I can no longer recognise that all-prevailing existence of 'quirkiness'. Could it be that we are able to conjure ideas about places from which we are usually removed and more



distanced, yet when these become more associated with 'home' then our sensitivities harden and our point of view 'shifts' (to quote a term employed by Raymond Moore). However, to make photographs without feeling is to deny something utterly vital to the pursuance of photography and so, falling back on our national willingness for self-deprecation, I am using humour more, a quality hitherto merely a sidekick to that main driver to my 'seeing' through the viewfinder of quirkiness. Humour nourishes my soul and through my passion for photography I encounter more in this World that makes me smile.....CLICK!

The View Ken Holland ARPS

I have cherished many things during the Covid19 lockdown.

The thing that has helped me to cope most is something I have enjoyed for the past 35 years. What encouraged me, and my family, to move to the house we still live in was the beautiful sea view from our back windows.

Every morning the light is different: hard, soft, warm, cold, dramatic, or subtle. That in itself is to be cherished. But, during the pandemic, redundant cruise liners have taken shelter in Torbay, and I have witnessed them come and go, literally like ships that pass in the night. To see these mighty vessels from my window has been a surprise every morning, as they change places.



Ken Holland ARPS



This image of the P&O Ventura is one of many. The light was one of the magical winter sunrises we get, facing east on the south coast. How much longer, I wonder, will it be until passengers, once again, enjoy the magic of a cruise on board?

Romney Tansley ARPS

Sweet object of desire, I gaze on you in your fancy packaging - gift-wrapped - and realise that you seduced me long since. And despite my awareness that everything you offer is already available more cheaply though less stylishly elsewhere, and probably at less cost to the environment.

My Google Pixel Buds, you worked your magic on me well before the US launch, so effective was the marketing. By the time of your arrival here last July I was hooked. I knew I didn't actually need you, I was already enjoying the previous model and could have rested content with them. But I wanted you so much. You seemed to offer so much more.



Romney Tansley ARPS

Two tiny trinkets pushed into my ears, automatically linked to my phone and transforming my world. I'm elevated into another dimension as I set out on my long solo walks through the grey city, my head filled with Mozart's Don Giovanni. Or perhaps today the orchestral brilliance of Harrison Birtwistle. Or rather the pop magic of Dua Lipa. In fact anything that takes my fancy is there for the asking (thanks to my Spotify subscription). On another occasion, documentary or drama on Radio 4 may be more to my taste.

Much as I know that you represent the excesses of our consumerist culture, I am captivated by the illicit pleasure of acquiring something that I don't actually need but want



nevertheless, conscious all the time of how I'm being manipulated. Why? Because you fill me with a kind of joy achievable in no other way.

Tom Owens ARPS

I consider myself to have been in a form of Lockdown since August 2018 when I put my photographic practice on hold whilst I built an extension to our home. I began to emerge from that self-inflicted purgatory in February 2020 with some large format images made on our allotment field. I also dusted off my digital gear ready for a holiday in March when I would indulge my passion for Kingfisher photography. Sadly, that never happened. Lockdown 1 was enforced.

Our allotments are and were a haven for me to get away from the building work and grow most of our vegetables. They became more of a haven within our serial lockdowns as it satisfied 'permitted exercise' and 'food production'.



Tom Owens ARPS



One never knows how crops will pan out. There are so many variables but there is always hope that the nurturing and caring of nature will succeed. I try to grow using the 'No dig' method which means plenty of compost is required.

This image was made last Saturday morning half an hour after the local livery had dropped off two tons of stable manure and bedding. I will nurture this muck by turning it every ten days in the hope that invisible, but good micro-organisms will hopefully convert this waste into organic compost. This sustains me through the cold months of Winter whilst I envisage what crops will emerge from my husbandry. All of my fellow gardeners live in hope of a good outcome and this hope is good for my soul and keeps my mind focussed on good things in life.



Contemporary and Documentary NW Meeting Report

Meetings were held on Zoom on 12th December 2020 and January 9th 2021. Five people joined the call in December and eight joined in January including new members from the Documentary Group.

December

Five members attended and long term member John Corbett had hoped to join, though IT issues prevented him from doing so.

In December Brian Williams shared a number of images from the Manchester Libraries archive with discussion of what Contemporary photography was. He suggested that at the time these images were taken they were contemporary in the sense of recording that particular time. We saw images of trams where perspective indicated that the vehicles were as tall as the houses, a display of a V2 rocket in Albert Square Manchester and another of children playing in the streets of the area in the 1960s. We discussed the value of recording the quotidian as part of captured memory as distinct from images of special occasions and ceremonials.



Denton Street, Hulme, 1965 (Manchester Libraries)





Upper Lloyd Street- Moss Side 1934 (Manchester Libraries)





German V2 bomb on display, Manchester Piccadilly Dec. 1951 (Manchester Libraries)



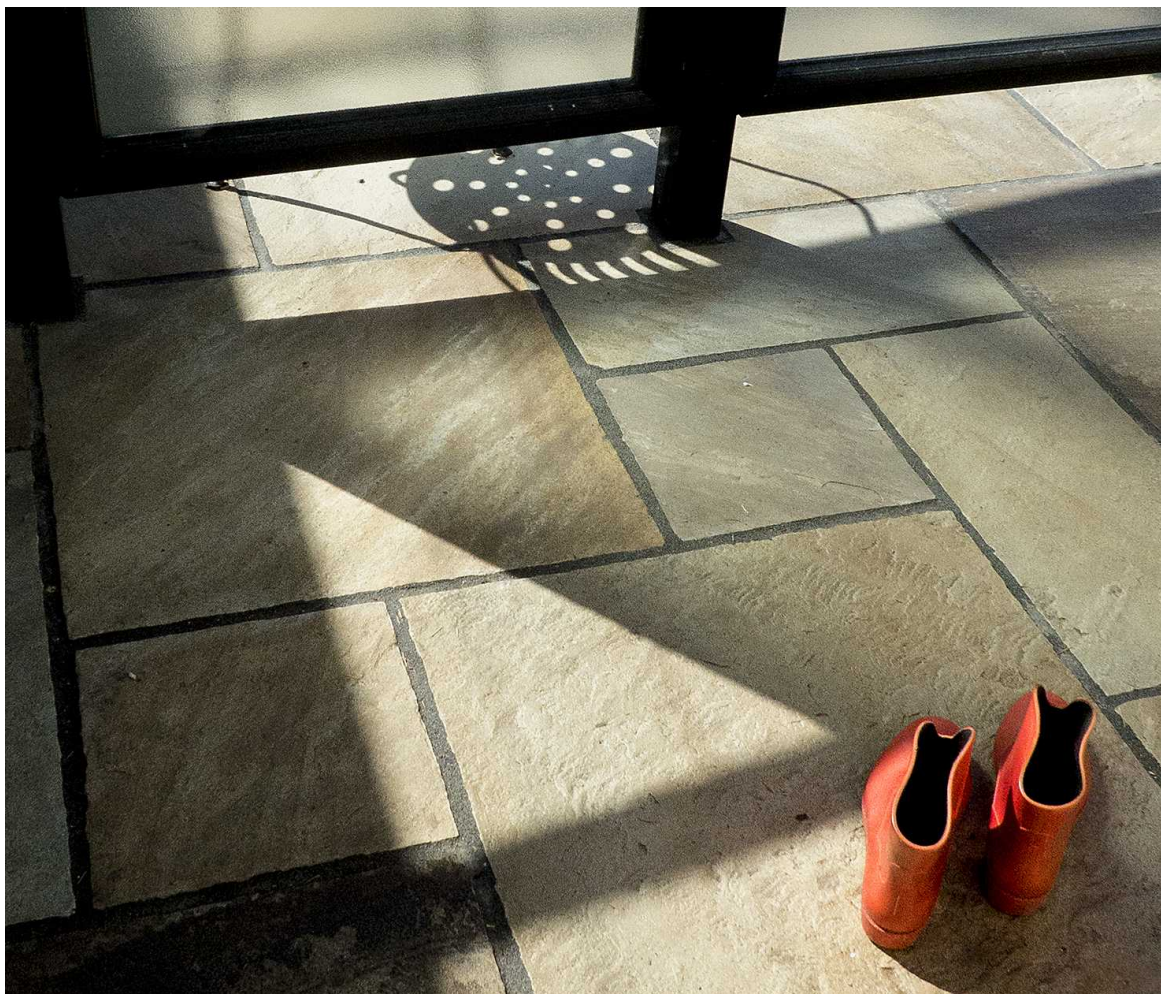
Keith Launchbury showed monochrome images of Wastwater following on from the previous month's colour images. He discussed his love affair with the landscape of Wasdale and the feelings engendered by detailed and wider perspective images.

Alan Cameron showed some more images of his Restaurant project encompassing menu pages and Keith suggested that they might work as separate sheets attached to the book. Ken Rollatt shared images but said that they were representative of work he was doing rather than Contemporary Photography.

January

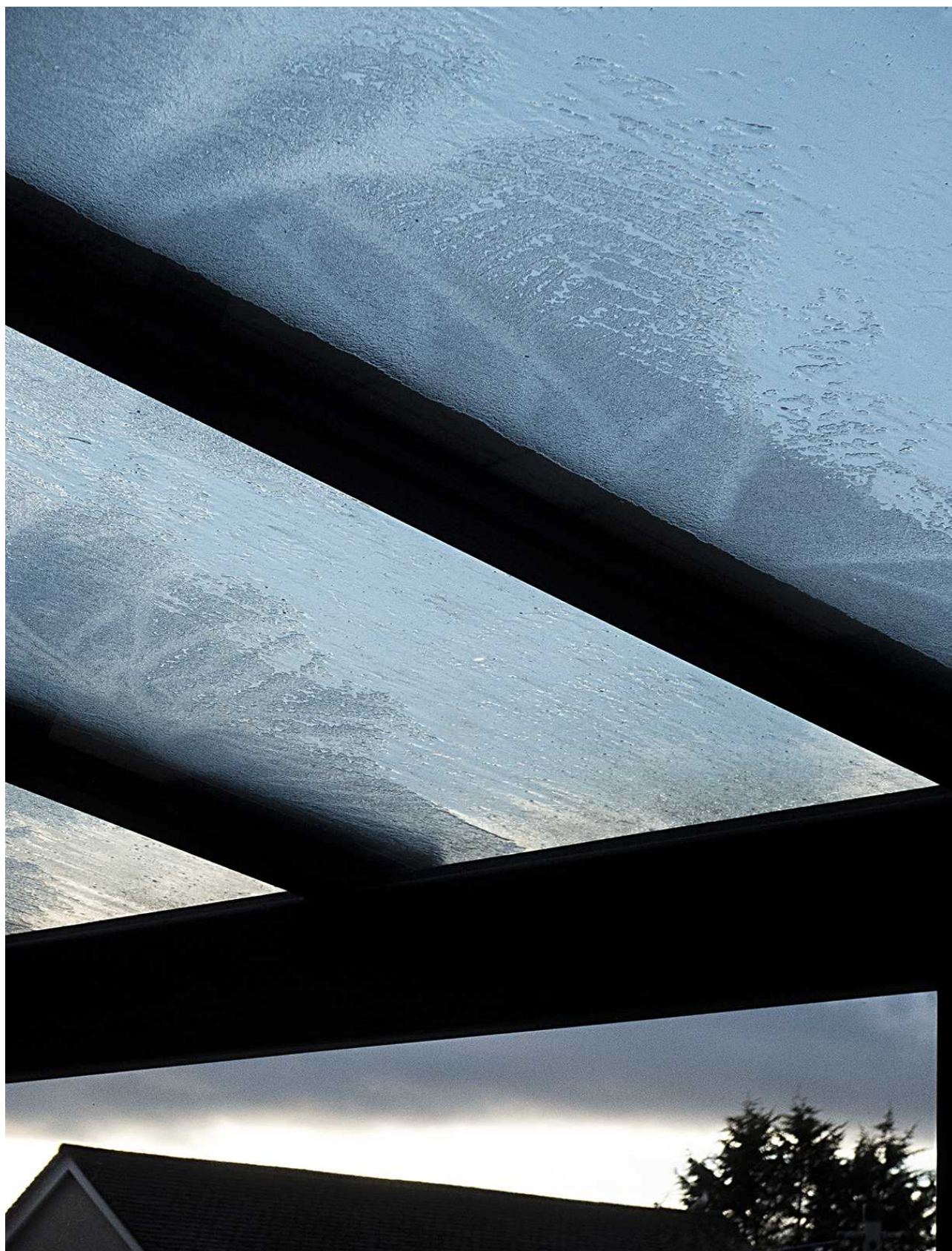
Following discussion within the Contemporary NW Group a broadcast message was sent to Contemporary and Documentary Group members of the RPS NW region asking for interest in creating a joint group for the NW. Several replies were received and two new members were able to join us - Peter Knight and Alan Edwards. Long term Contemporary NW members John Corbett and Tim Hancock joined us for the first time on Zoom. A third person expressed interest and said he would probably join in February.

Image highlight was John's series called "Awning Light." he says of his entertaining series, "The 2020 Covid lockdown made the world smaller and more localised, encouraging one to observe the familiar in a different light. Noticing sunlight in the kitchen and adjacent garden patio, through the shapes of a glass awning, these objects were photographed as they were found to be at the time."



John Corbett





John Corbett



Keith initiated a discussion on the distinction process and how he found that the success of the process comes from a statement of intent first rather than from the images. Creating a coherent and meaningful panel comes from the thought process behind it. He detailed his progress towards his FRPS when he first had a set of images and thought that he could craft a panel from them. However, once he'd sought advice, he realised that the purpose of a panel should shape it. This caused him some upset at the time as he thought that he had images that would work together and he was initially resistant to changing his mind. However, he was glad he did as the final result was much better - and successful.

He had recently joined a discussion with Contemporary North, the purpose of which was to appraise work for Fellowship submission. He felt that one member was making the same mistake in approaching her submission as he had done and had urged her to create a purpose for her work and then fit images to it.



Keith Launchbury FRPS



Keith Launchbury FRPS



Tim showed us on screen some books that he has been making recently using a printer called Mixam and utilising Affinity Publisher software. He pointed out that the cost of books from Mixam was lower than most online printers and indeed multiple copies were inexpensive. He encouraged us to try using Mixam with or without using Affinity. It's fair to say that the details were taken down by most on the call.



AlanCameron LRPS

Alan shared some images taken with a new 50mm f1.8 lens saying how much he enjoyed the discipline of using it, particularly the shallow depth of field when wide open.

Ken showed some printed images that he has been producing of local scenes and also Cardiff. These were discussed in terms of what he has found it possible to do during the Covid restrictions. His project on the changes to his village due to new building work is necessarily on hold and can only resume once restrictions are lifted.

The next meetings are scheduled for 13th February and 13th March at 13.00.

Alan Cameron LRPS

Regional Organiser



Fragments of Sappho – a mini project

Paul Ashley LRPS



I have long enjoyed the snippets of the poetry of Sappho that have come down to us from sixth century Lesbos. Twenty times as much has been lost to us, and yet what we have does not contradict the opinions of those from classical times who put her on the same level as Homer. I admit to being a sucker for romantic poetry (less so for romantic novels), and Sappho's verses, addressed to women, men and the gods, evoke feelings not just of her time and place, but what we know is true now, because we have felt the same ourselves.

With such short pieces, and not being a classicist, I am at the mercy of her translators; I have sometimes been disappointed to find that what were a favourite few lines have been corrected to mean something different in a later edition. Nevertheless, I looked for an opportunity to combine some of the pieces with photography; it came in the form of an 18th century town house cleared for refurbishment, and a talented friend who was willing to perform for me.

I experimented with processing the images in different ways: cyanotypes with the poems overlaid, or monochromes, or heavily stylized. None had lasting attraction, until I took a lockdown online workshop on bookmaking, from which the output was to be a small concertina-style book. I chose to present each image on one page with the corresponding lines on the facing page. The poems were laid out in Photoshop in the Papyrus font – a suitably rustic antique design with a modern freshness.



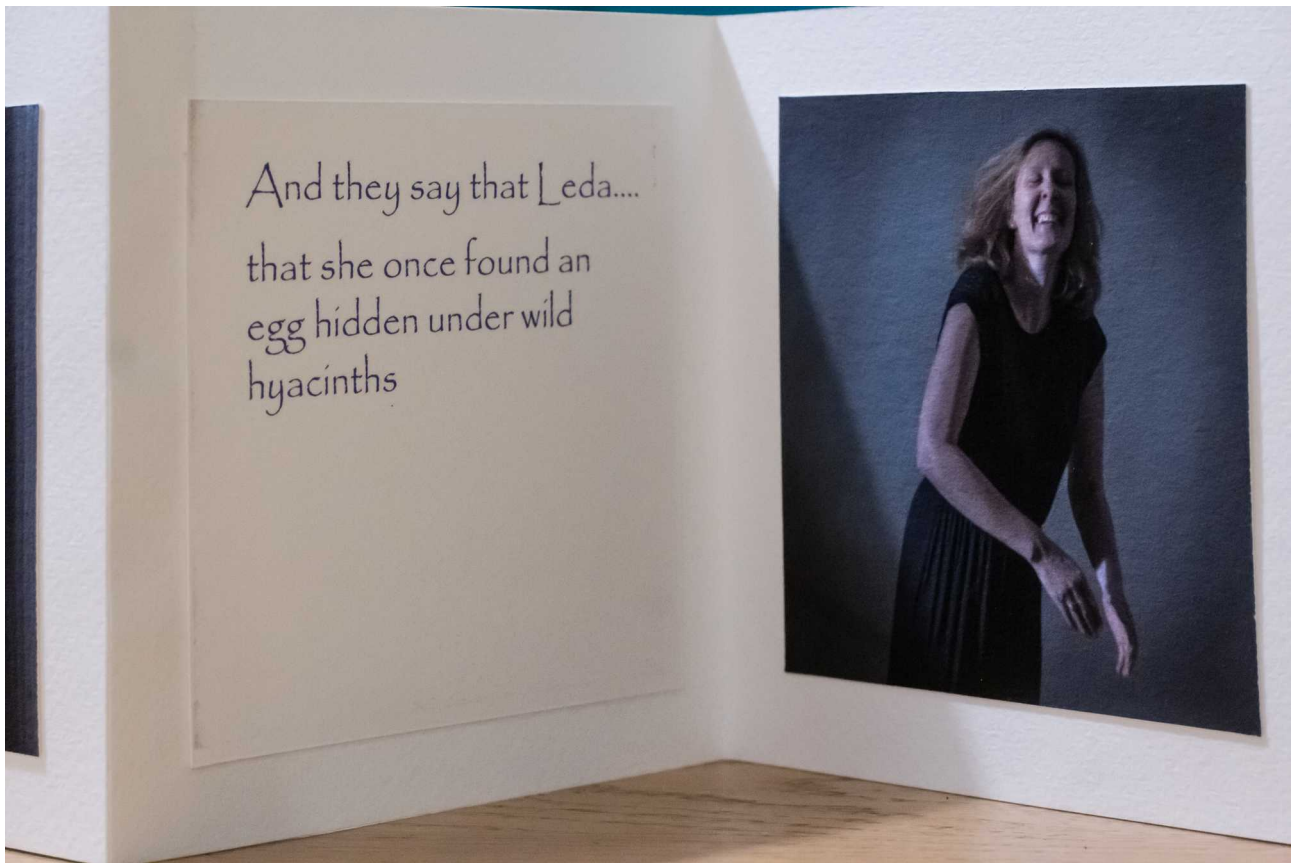


In planning the project, during the shoots (two visits) and in laying out the book, it was not my intention to make a direct photographic correspondence between each poem and what might be seen as its dominant sentiment. Nevertheless it was not difficult to place them in pairs nor, in the end, in a sequence that looked 'right': it was easy to put 'dawn' at the beginning, and 'night' at the end, though the order in between might not make sense to anyone but me!

I am sorry that I cannot quote more of the poems here or show the pairings except as they can be seen in these photos of the book. The translators obviously own the copyright; while using their texts in a single book for myself is fine, publishing them online in Concept without permission would rightly upset them, as it would me if they took my photos and used them in the same way.

I want to make more books by hand, probably not of poetry though..... or perhaps..... I photographed a musical performance of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner last year..... and the poem has only 600+ lines!














Blogging the pandemic – stories from the time of COVID-19 and lockdowns

Sean Goodhart ARPS

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We are all in it together




Published 13 July 2020

AVIJIT DATTA FRSA FLS FPHYS
Vice Chairman, RPS Contemporary SIG


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This is the first of a series of illustrated blog posts on the contemporary photographic approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. We hope that it will stimulate members to submit more blog posts on lockdown.

This work is a lockdown project from the Contemporary group's vice-chairman Avijit Datta FRSA FLS FPHYS.



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 (<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-covid-19>).



You may have noticed that our website <https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/> has had a near constant stream of new stories. At the time of writing, we have published 25 blogs since mid-July 2020. Topics have included the impact of lockdown on home life and employment, the need for social distancing when outside the home, the impact of COVID-19 on our health service professionals, mental health, dealing with loneliness, book making, educational projects and the sudden normalisation of video conferencing for communication.

The lion's share of the work of securing blogs and material has been carried by our deputy chair Avijit Datta, with me as webmaster finalising, uploading and formatting text and images in the rps.org system. This all takes time, but we are happy to see an archive of imagery from the time of this pandemic coming together.

Contributors include professional photographers, photojournalists, photography academics, bloggers, healthcare workers, religious leaders, the RPS president, the RPS CEO and RPS International Photography Exhibition winners. We have people from around the UK and around the world – with more international blogs coming soon.

The work started with us writing up the blogs based on discussions with authors of images secured by personal contact or through offers coming in via email, Facebook or Instagram. More recently many individuals are writing more of their own material for the blogs. If you have a story to tell please contact Avijit - contemporarydeputy@rps.org or me - contemporaryweb@rps.org.



Contemporary Blogs



The Furlough Diaries



Published 17 August 2020

JULIA HADJI-STYLIANOU ARPS

Contemporary Home | Events | News

This is the fifth blog in a series on COVID-19 and lockdown, edited by contemporaryweb@rps.org and contemporarydeputy@rps.org



I live in Desborough, a small town in Northamptonshire. I am a graduate of De Montfort University in Leicester, having gained both a Bachelor's Degree in Photography and Video in 2012, followed by a Master's Degree in Photography in 2014. I joined the RPS in 2014 and continue to create my own personal projects and work alongside my full-time career.

I work as an associate lecturer teaching photography and video for De Montfort University, alongside working in the commercial photography industry as an image retoucher at Next PLC.



I, like many others, was furloughed in April this year, shortly after

SHARES



A date for your diary

RPS CONTEMPORARY GROUP AGM

Saturday 27th March
10am via Zoom

Booking details will be issued via the
Contemporary Group page on the RPS website
(click on the logo below)





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