



Newsletter

**BRACKNELL
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CLUB**

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Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

With Christmas now well behind us, and both the postman & front door mat groaning under the weight of credit card bills, it's nice to reflect on the contributions by our members to this issue of the Newsletter.

Firstly, a big "thank you" to all contributors. If you can't see your article here, then please be patient as it will be published before our season ends.

I was particularly impressed with Janice Bradley's article and the amount of knowledge & skills she has gleaned since first picking up a camera when only aged six. It was also a delight to read that she had been through the "darkroom stage" as I suspect not many members, I guess, have had the opportunity to experience that side of processing images. My daughter Candice is, as you know, at Portsmouth University doing a degree in "Illustration". She recently borrowed one of my Canon cameras (not my beloved EOS 1VHS, I might add!) to undertake a module in black & white photo taking & processing in their darkroom. She said she enjoyed the experience again (having done similar for GCSE) and her tutor was pleased with her work.

Chris Bradley so eloquently explains the pitfalls of dust, especially when it causes a scratch across the emulsion surface of a film. This can be irreparable to film stock and a hell of a job to remove from the digital version. We would all do well to take heed of his advice.

And John Bickerdike's article reminds me very much of British Leyland cars (BLMC) back in the 1960's. They were so badly made in those days that the word on the street was "never buy a newly introduced model - wait for all the gremlins to be sorted out and then buy the mark II model!" But then BLMC had the foresight to change its name to Rover, to which an American motoring correspondent retorted "a dog is a dog, whatever name you give it!" Price is one thing but reliability is, I feel, the overriding factor with any newly introduced piece of machinery. Even Canon recently caught a cold with a manufacturing problem on one of their newly introduced, top of the range, zoom lens and had to spend millions on free repairs.

You have been warned !!



My Photographic Evolution

By Janice Bradley

After much deliberation (and some persuasive heckling from Ruari) I thought I would have a go at writing an article for the newsletter. This is somewhat different to my usual

style of writing – procedures for a busy Pharmacy Aseptic Unit – so forgive me if I suddenly slip into giving instructions.

I have only been with the club since September of last year, so here is a little background info on my photography skills (or lack of).

It all started when I was around the age of 6 or 7 years old....my Dad came home from work one day with a small instamatic camera for me. My photos often missed heads, arms or feet (and sometimes all three), and quite often the film would fog, or suffer with flare from the sun, not to mention the odd finger over the lens, but regardless, I thoroughly enjoyed snapping away. Sometimes I was let loose with my Mom's old Box Brownie and my Dad's Polaroid – this always provided lots of hilarious waving of arms whilst the photograph developed.

Between the ages of 13 and 14 I took up photography at school, having been 'loaned' my older sister's (by now 3rd hand) SLR camera (a Zenith, if I recall correctly). I loved being in the darkroom, the smell of the chemicals, and seeing that piece of white paper develop into the image I had so carefully composed and taken. We tried out lots of different techniques, including: lith printing; solarization (one of my favourites); toning; zooming the



enlarger head; sandwiching negatives; printing through textured

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glass and probably a few more I have since forgotten about. I sat my photography 'O' Level as I turned 16 years old, passed, and got bought a brand new Canon AE1 Program camera all of my own.

At the age of about 20, I hired (by the hour) a darkroom at the local leisure centre and developed and printed (for what turned out to be the last time) some black and white photographs of some old school friends – one in a rock band, and one in a local basketball team.

Work and family life took over, and although my interest in photography and picture taking didn't stop, the subjects in my photos changed mainly to family snaps and the odd 'arty' shot on holiday. The camera by now was mainly used on auto, as this always seemed to be less troublesome (and a lot faster) with small children.



About 5 years ago, my husband purchased a 1 mega pixel digital camera, which I didn't take much notice of. A few years later he bought another – 4 mega pixels this time – and I started to use it for two reasons: the first was that it had a built in flash (yes, I know they aren't much

good, but for some time now, my own flash hadn't worked, due to the fact that someone who should have known better had dropped my original flash and broken it, and the replacement never seemed to work as well, and eventually I stopped using it altogether) and this meant the digital camera came out whenever I took photographs inside, or when it was dark.

The second reason was that I could see instantly what I had taken, and this meant my youngest child would actually pose for me.

A little more time passed and I enrolled on a short introductory course in using Photoshop. Now my eyes were wide open, but I still wasn't totally convinced, and carried on shooting film as well as digital.

The last year or two has seen me get downhearted and lacking inspiration photographically, and earlier this year I managed to persuade my husband I needed a 'decent' digital camera (thank you Ian, for the Canon 20D!) and I decided to join BCC.

Since joining BCC, I have had the kick start I was after and am photographing new things, brushing up on my technique (very rusty after years of using the program mode for speed) and am

basically engaging my brain before my shutter finger.



The speakers at the club have shown some fantastic and inspiring images, and so far there hasn't been anyone whose work I don't enjoy viewing. I have been

very tempted to drive off to a mountain and start climbing, but for now I will just have to look forward to the upcoming trip to Stonehenge, and continue to drag my daughter out in the cold and dark around Bracknell as my unwilling assistant. She has endured various days and nights photographing urban landscapes, the fair (she didn't even get to go on the rides while I was photographing), and the nearest underpass whilst I tried out panning, night photography, photographing motion and looking out for interesting light. I lose count of the times I have gone out with the dog, only to rush the walk and run back for my camera. And believe me, there have been many cries of "this is so embarrassing, I hope I don't see any of my friends" and that other adage "why are you taking a photo of THAT". Still, there are always portraits to attempt, not that I am allowed to show them to anyone!

Listening to the speakers has also heightened my awareness of the different ways people employ to choose the images they want to photograph: some will deliberately set up something to photograph, others have a preconceived idea of what they want to achieve, some will just walk with a camera and if inspired, take a photograph, and then there are those who just seem to have the luck of the gods when it comes to needing a person or animal in their picture.

My own photography seems to rely on all these methods, but



increasingly I am noticing the missed opportunities. These usually occur when I am driving the car and either don't have my camera or are unable to pull over. I missed an incredible photo opportunity a few weeks ago when stuck in a traffic jam on the way to work. An owl was sitting very boldly on the fence next to the road, just watching the cars.....WHY didn't I have my camera with me!

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Having obtained a new camera, I am slowly building up my range of equipment (having had to start all over again now being digital). As well as the lens that came with the camera (an 18-55mm) I have a 75-300mm telephoto. I would love a macro lens, but for now am using a close up filter to see how things turn out before I spend any more money. My next purchase really needs to be a flash... maybe next year.

I have splashed out on a new printer (an R2400), but this has not been without its problems. I thought I understood colour management after the speaker a few weeks ago, but now I'm not so sure, and I am still trying to work out why I cannot select matt paper. However, I have rediscovered my love for black & white prints, although watching it coming out of a printer doesn't quite have the same magical quality as a print appearing in a tray of developer (and there is no familiar smell either).



Now, onto the debate about digital v film....Having read various magazines, & listening to comments around the club, I get the impression some photographers frown upon digital manipulation as though it were some terrible crime. However, many of the speakers at the club have explained in detail the way

they manipulate their images in the wet darkroom in order to achieve their idea of perfection. This ranges from a bit of dodging &/or burning to some of the techniques I mentioned earlier. Surely this is what programs such as Photoshop are based on? Some of the techniques even have the same names. And aren't layers just the same as using film to expose multiple images in one frame, or even sandwiching negatives or slides together? Does it really matter if the technique is carried out in camera, in a wet darkroom or on a computer? Essentially the end result will often be very similar, or is it just sour grapes (or snobbery) from those who consider they only have one chance to create the image they desire?

I do agree that at times software does appear to go too far, and creates some extremely bizarre images, but usually this is plainly obvious, and it does have its place. In my own personal opinion, less is often more, but on occasion I have been known to turn my daughter blue (she prefers purple) and distort my son's face (much to his amusement), just for fun. Quite often I will marvel at the skill of a photographer who has heavily manipulated an image using computer software, regardless of whether I like the end result. And so, the debate continues.....



Keep it Clean

By Chris Bradley

The modern SLR camera is a wonder of optical, mechanical and electronic wizardry. One of the main advantages of the SLR over the viewfinder camera is the ability to interchange lenses very quickly and easily. The other advantage is that 'what you see is what you get' when you look through the viewfinder (at least about 95% anyway). This facility to change lenses can cause the unfortunate ingress of dust, hairs, moisture and any amount of undesired debris.

Another and perhaps more obvious way of introducing dirt is via the camera back in film SLRs. I have found that, while you may take every care when changing a film, some dust or worst still a grain of sand can still find its way in. To avoid this I generally put a piece of Elastoplast over the slot where the camera back opens in order to stop anything being swept in each time the back opens. It is always wise to change films indoors, but this of course is not always possible if you are in the Outback or the Kalahari Desert. If you are changing films in an area that is likely to be dusty, use a blower rather than a lens brush to clean the 'tracks' where the film runs and the pressure plate behind the film. I once used a brush with disastrous consequences – unbeknown to me a single hair detached itself from the brush and lodged itself somewhere within the dark recesses of the camera back to appear a month later as a single diagonal line on about seventy shots!

One of the many advantages of the Digital SLR is that it does not have a 'back' where dirt can be introduced – however it has an extremely sensitive plate called a Charge Coupled Device (CCD) which is basically a device holding a vast array of light sensitive detecting elements covered with a low-pass filter. These individual elements are the size of a speck of dust so it goes without saying that the introduction of any tiny amount of dirt, dust or moisture can leave a mark on the final digital image.

You may wonder how any offending foreign matter is introduced. Well it can only be through the lens opening (when you change a lens) and any dust or moisture will wait there until the shutter is operated and is then swept onto the CCD. The presence of any foreign matter can easily be seen if you set the aperture to f22 and take a shot of a clear blue sky

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or white piece of paper. My advice is DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CLEAN THE CCD unless you have great confidence or experience. Various manufacturers charge different amounts to clean the CCD. I only have experience of Nikon who charge £20 & believe me it is well worth it.

So to sum up, whether you have a film or digital SLR, when you are changing lenses try and keep away from dirt, sand and moisture (such as can be found in a Butterfly House or Tropical Greenhouse).



Lies, Damn lies and Statistics.

By Alan Fretten

At the beginning of August 2005, I moved the Bracknell Camera Club web site to a new server. One of the benefits of doing this is that I now get a comprehensive set of

statistics about access to the site. Did you know for instance:-

- Since August there have been 2,468 visitors to the website viewing a total of 20,674 pages. Visitors have come from places as far away as China, India, Australia, USA, Canada, Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Rwanda and all over Europe. (Oh, and a few accesses from US Govt. Computers.....).
- Thursday is the most popular time for browsing the website and between 5pm and 6pm is the most popular time.
- The busiest day to date was August 18th (First day of the our Exhibition displayed in Bracknell town centre).
- 95.6% of people who accessed the site were using Windows, 2.2% were using Macs.
- The most popular web browser was Microsoft Internet Explorer with 85.2%. In second place was Firefox with 10.6%.
- An estimated 30.7% of visitors had added the website to their "favourites" listings.
- 10 people visited the site on Christmas Day !
- "Bracknell camera club" was the most used phrase for searching and finding the website and Google was the most popular search engine.
- Apart from the homepage, the picture galleries were the most visited part of the website.

I really think I need to get out more.....

Let's hope Alan comes back refreshed from his three week sojourn to Patagonia.....Ed



External Competitions to Enter

By Ron Gafney

Over the past few issues of this newsletter, we have been telling of external competitions that you can enter.

We have now improved the sources where you can find out about these events. Firstly, we will announce at club meetings, any external competitions which have recently been advertised and support that by displaying the relevant information on both our club notice board & website.



The Value of Patience

By John Bickerdike

In all situations patience is certainly a virtue but it is particularly valuable to a photographer. The most obvious example of this is when we are taking pictures.

The landscape photographer with the patience to wait until the light conditions are just right will get the best results. And when photographing all manner of subjects the patience to persevere until the right expression or composition appears is, again, one of the secrets of success.

I got to thinking about the patience issue recently from quite a different direction. It occurred to me that impatience to have the latest equipment as soon as it is available can result in having to pay a lot more than you would if you waited just a bit longer. Some months ago I was on the South Bank in London with my camera looking for pictures. A fellow Nikon owner approached me and we got to talking about his new camera, the top of the range digital SLR the D2x. It had just been released and he had paid the full list price of £3,500.

I noted recently that this camera is now available, new, at about £2,800 – a discount of 20%, & £700 less than the price paid by the man who had to have it as soon as he could. More recently Nikon have announced their high-end replacement for the D100, the new D200. This lists at £1,300 but is already advertised in AP for £1,200, although it is not yet freely available. I am sure that in a few months you will be able to buy it for just over £1,000. Last week I was interested to see one of the first D200's being auctioned on Ebay – it went for £1,425, about £400 more than you might pay in a few month's time !

I suppose there are occasions when someone has to have a piece of new equipment for an urgent use but, generally, the price of not waiting a bit seems to be pretty high. It is even more true, of course, if the photographer is happy to buy a superseded model, but in the world of digital photography this has a definite downside, as improvements are taking place rapidly. The film-user can be a lot more relaxed about buying last year's model.