



November 2009

Newsletter of North Cheshire Photographic Society

See Focus on the web at www.ncps.org.uk

Exposure and Noise – 1st digital meeting 6th Oct 2009

President Roger Dye welcomed Barry Pearson as the speaker for this opening digital session of the 2009/2010 season. Roger noted that a speaker's basic problem now was getting the balance right between being too simple and too advanced for the audience.

Barry stated that his talk was really a “back to basics” one. Photographers through the ages have had the problem of choosing the correct exposure for a scene. Given their particular film with its stated sensitivity (in terms of “Film speed”) the problem was to choose the correct aperture and shutter speed which would allow the correct amount of light onto the sensitive film. With the advent of the digital electronic sensor the photographer had a range of “film speeds” which could be set, thereby introducing a new variable to the process.

The aperture determined the “depth of field” of the process. The shutter speed either “froze the motion” or introduced the desired amount of blurring (for instance to suggest “motion” within the image). In the past there was a trade-off between the desirable settings of these two parameters. Barry suggested that with advent of digital SLR cameras one could more easily choose the optimum aperture (f-number) and optimum shutter speed, and vary the film speed (defined by the ISO number) to accommodate the resultant light input. This was a great freedom offered by the digital sensor. Barry often set his default ISO value at 800 as a starting point in his photography. This was a revelation to many in his audience who tended to stick to lower values, and who thought it daring to set a 400 ISO value.

But nothing is perfect, and Barry noted that electrical noise is always present in electrical systems, including cameras. If small apertures and fast shutter speeds are used, then the amount of light falling on the sensor pixels is small, and setting a high ISO value is basically increasing the gain of the amplifier which has to measure the amount of light. Increasing the gain magnifies the noise in the total signal recorded. Thus, as the light signal gets smaller, (but the noise component doesn't) eventually the signal is lost in the noise. However way before this situation is reached there comes a stage when the noise component is unacceptable in the image. There are several programs available to reduce this noise effect and Barry had purchased Noise Ninja which he is pleased with. Most images are improved by a degree of sharpening, but sharpening can emphasize the noise, unless the noise reduction is attempted first.

Barry used a variety of images to emphasize the various points he was making and promised to put them and his notes on the NCPS web site for later perusal.

In proposing a vote of thanks Bill Chadband thanked Barry for a most enjoyable evening. He noted that Barry was always enthusiastic and also very thorough in his research before making his pronouncements. And tonight he had also been humorous and carried his audience with him as he explored the various aspects of exposure, noise and ISO numbers..He had pitched the level just right for his audience.

Bill Chadband

NCPS at the Chapel Camera Club 25th Anniversary Exhibition.

A number of NCPS members were in evidence at Buxton's famous "Dome" on Friday 9th October and were able to view, in those very impressive surroundings, a total of 452 exhibition prints submitted by members of Chapel Camera Club. The prints made an inspiring display as you would expect from a thriving club of Chapel's stature, who are celebrating their 25th year in grand style at this prestigious venue.

The main event of the evening was the inter-club DPI competition, a first for Chapel C.C. It attracted 18 clubs from a wide area, including North Cheshire of course. As organisers Chapel C.C had decided not to enter. Each club had submitted 5 images which were projected via a Canon Xceed 60 onto a large screen and commented on, in random order, by judge for the night John Cartlidge from Cannock.

Our members will recall John's fine wit and perceptiveness from his judging at our own exhibitions in the recent past and he was very much on form at Buxton. All images enjoyed constructive criticism before being awarded a mark, following a break for refreshments, part way through the evening. The operation went smoothly throughout with a score sheet appearing promptly for each club. The organisers, and the judge, deserved the fulsome praise proffered by Ed Roper of winning club Wigan 10 as he collected the £200 prize on their behalf as the evening drew to a close – at approx 10.30pm.

Despite our selection committee having been caught on the hop which meant having to decide upon our entry in a hurry, North Cheshire finished in 8th position out of 18 clubs – and would have been equal 4th had a deserved 3 more marks been awarded to our stronger images! However we could have no complaints whatsoever, having been up against top quality competition from an array of very strong clubs.

Tony Redford

10 Images in 10 Minutes - The meeting on 13th Oct 2009

This meeting was conceived as a chance for newer members to present some of their images, without being in competition, Despite President Roger Dye's best efforts these members were reluctant to come forward and the meeting was taken over by the old guard! Roger began with a series of shots from Poynton Show. Under the banner of "Rocking Horse" four riders performed acrobatic feats whilst riding one, two or three horses. Brian Turnbull had spent a wet week in Scotland and argued the case for monochrome images when the weather (and light) were bad. Colin Pickles used the opportunity to view some of his older images which he felt had not been appropriate for club competitions, though some thought that the blue rope holding the red ship could have done well. Joyce Streets showed that she had a good eye for an image. Her symmetrical fern, she claimed was real; and we all felt sorry for the dog up to his knees in mud. Having confused Joyce's Marmot with Marmite Jonathan Bawden went on to show images of his own. He took time to explain, and demonstrate how images could be improved with simple manipulations. He compared his straight shot of a Canarian Pine with attempts to satisfy a judge's comments, and wondered if there was any improvement. He also described the effort which went into his competition winning Hellibore image. Tony Redford used prints to illustrate that digital photographers with image manipulation software such as PhotoShop were no longer constrained by the simple view before them but, like all true artists, could produce stunning images using bits of previously recorded shots. So nowadays his photography had expanded to recording images which he felt could be used later to build up, or improve other images.

With no more offers on the table Roger turned to his backup, a disc of images from the RPS Digital Imaging Group 2007 Exhibition. We saw a great range of images and in the absence of sound on our system tried to imagine what the commentary might have been, particularly in the opening sequence when a man talked directly to us before showing the images. In the event, the early tea (at 8.30, so as not to interfere with the Gilbert and Sullivan in the main hall) was no disadvantage, and only once did the full chorus from next door hit us. Roger thanked Barry for his skill in working the projection system, and all members who had provided images. The meeting ended at 9.55pm.

Bill Chadband

See Hear !!

This was Tony Redford's intriguing title for his presentation to the club on Tuesday 20th of October. The evening was divided into four parts, each an AV Pictures to Exe presentation based on trips he and Dorothy had made to Beijing, to Hong Kong, and to Lisbon.

In the Beijing sequence we visited Tiananmen Square and the Great Wall of China; watched people dancing or singing in the Park, and took in a variety of portraits. It was a joy to watch Jack Bamford sliding down the mountain side on his toboggan.

Hong Kong was a great contrast, with crowded tall skyscrapers, colourful trams, and illuminated signs everywhere. The very modern buildings and giant shopping Mall contrasted with the old red-sailed fishing smacks (now employed as tourist transport). The cable car to the mountain provided a grand view over Kowloon across the harbour. After the break a short series of portraits from China (where everyone now appears to have a mobile phone) preceded a journey around Lisbon, reliving the recent Club trip to that City. The initial rainy day slides eventually gave way to the sunny Lisbon that we also remembered and to the memorable trip to the Fairy-tale castle at Sintra. But seeing was only half of the show; hearing was equally important, and we were impressed (and amused) by Tony's choice of background music, when he wasn't directly commenting on the scenes. In particular we expect him to provide us with the words of the now famous song "I Like Chinese"

The essence of these very slick shows was the judicious use of the various transitions provided by the Pictures-to-Exe programme; and we noted that Tony made maximum use of the screen by putting similar portrait formats side by side to present them as a single Landscape format. To complete the evening, the cat made an impromptu appearance.

Brian Bower proposed a vote of thanks. He thought he discerned a lot of Dorothy's images in the show. Brian himself had once been keen on AV presentations, in the days when transitions had to be from one film slide to another. He had been impressed by the many transitions now available and well used by Tony, and equally impressed by the selections of music to accompany the images. His wife, Valerie, had been riveted throughout, a sure sign of a good evening.

Tony thanked Brian for his comments and admitted that Dorothy and son Peter had had a hand in producing the images used.

Bill Chadband

Report on the 1st DPI competition.

Our good friend Tony Pioli ARPS ABPE from Chapel Camera Club did us the honour of judging the first of this season's digitally projected image competitions. As you will see from the [Competition Results](#) page, he was confronted with a total of 82 images, upon all of which he delivered a carefully considered opinion as well as making every effort to suggest improvements which may have lifted their marks. His great experience of judging was further confirmed by his instinctive "pacing" as he arrived at his final conclusions at precisely 10.00pm. We could ask for no more than this of any judge. Tony thoughtfully spent extra time discussing the pros and cons of the three "intermediate" images submitted by the single entrant in that category, Brian Adams. Once again the quality of these submissions confirmed the absence of any gap in quality between our "intermediate" and "advanced" categories.

In general, Tony's comments focussed on the balance and composition of the images in both categories. He emphasised that pictures are read from left to right, just as we would read a written page. He therefore preferred the focal point of a picture, such as the head of an animal, to lie close to the right-hand "third" rather than the left, an issue which led to a significant number of our pictures earning a comment that they would have looked better "the other way round". He wanted slopes to rise to the right and darker areas to form a "stopper" on the right also. A number of natural history subjects suffered because heads were turned slightly away from the viewer rather than looking slightly forwards. Distracting backgrounds were also an issue. However, "rules" are sometimes better broken as evidenced, perhaps, by Tony's final selection of potential winners. As we have discovered, there is usually a difference between a really nice picture and a competition winner.

I think we were all struck by the general high quality, and the great diversity, of the images projected throughout the evening, and few of us would have envied Tony in his task of sorting out the wheat from the chaff. Phil Riley's vote of thanks to the judge and his request for the audience to show their appreciation of a job well done met with an enthusiastic round of applause. It was well deserved, Mr Pioli.

Tony Redford

The ON One Plug-in Suite

Brothers Andy and Doug Campbell from OnOne arrived slightly flustered due to severe hold-ups on the M6 but they soon setup and with Doug manning the PC, Andy presented an overview of the various applications that make up the OnOne Plug-in Suite.

Starting with MaskPro, Andy explained how easy it is to create selections from tricky images, such as those that contain hair or shear fabrics, by using a combination of 'Keep' and 'Drop' colours. He then demonstrated that the selection can be viewed in a number of ways, such as against the standard Photoshop 'chequer-board' or as a mask. The audience was particularly impressed by the ease with which the selection of a near transparent ballerina dress was made.

Andy then moved on to show how FocalPoint can be used to control blur within a photo, with different degrees of feather, or to add grain or vignette effects. Andy pointed out that these changes are non-destructive as when the change is applied a new Photoshop layer is automatically created.

Print enlargement was then demonstrated via GenuineFractals, as part of this a file size was increased 1000% whilst still retaining detail. A tiling option was shown that would allow such a large file to be printed on a standard-sized printer, with user-specified overlaps between each element. A sharpen option is also available if required.

Andy then had fun showing some of the effects available from within PhotoTools, in the process demonstrating the various search options available. Multiple effects can be applied to the same image and each one can be tailored with fade and masking options. A combination of effects could then be saved as a 'pre-set' for later use. Further pre-sets can also be down-loaded from the OnOne website.

Finally, Andy showed the multiple framing and adornment options available via PhotoFrame. Again, multiple frames can be applied to the same image. After tea, he reviewed the pricing structure of the various plug-ins and which versions of Photoshop etc. they work with. He demonstrated that using the Plug-ins via Lightroom (currently) requires Photoshop CS whereas Aperture does not. For Elements users there is a cut-down version of the Plug-ins known as 'Essentials'.

Following requests, Andy demonstrated some selection 'tricks' that he uses. When selecting from a complicated image he suggested concentrating on those areas that are difficult to select using standard Photoshop selection techniques and to consider using multiple Keep/Drop palettes, as this will reduce over-all processing time (as defining large numbers of colours can significantly impact response times). He also suggested reviewing the Help files within the various Plug-ins as these contain useful tips. The On-One web site also has Tutorials that may be worth viewing.

Proposing the vote of thanks, Roger Dye thanked Andy and Doug for an engrossing presentation and praised the way the two brothers had worked so well together. He felt that even Barry had learnt something from the evening's event.

Lynda Hockin

The Anglo-Scottish Interclub Battle 2009

We had a wet start to this annual competition on the weekend beginning Friday 6th November. Saturday was equally bad though Sunday 8th was much improved. Despite the weather the turnout, both from NCPS and other clubs was excellent, ensuring a full house at Portinscale Village Hall for the competition

Under new ownership, the Derwentwater Hotel continues to give us excellent service and serves as a good base for the weekend. The Conservatory/Lounge is a comfortable place to read a book whilst the more foolhardy are out walking. Richard Scaife again organized the Saturday walk, this time centred on Crummock water. One such walker explained to me that walking in the rain was good for the soul. I had mixed explanations as to why John Allanson was up to his waist in Crummock water – did he slip, or was he pushed? And was Richard trying to wash him down or hold him under subsequently? – I guess now we shall never know the truth.

Several of us did car tours looking for that magic shot in the rain. The wet certainly brought out the autumn colours. But it was not always easy to stop when a stunning view suddenly appeared round a corner. We were entertained by the many old open-topped cars which kept passing us, occupants hidden in macs, hats and goggles; clearly an unfortunate weekend to choose for whatever vintage rally it represented.

The Hall was open from 3.00pm with coffee, tea & biscuits available soon after for the early arrivals. Jack Bamford, the organizer of the competition welcomed Karen Storr, our judge for the evening, promptly at 4.00pm. Karen was a breath of fresh air in her judging. She saw photography as an art in communication. The image spoke to the viewer; and in all the images she sought this inter-relationship – what was it trying to say to her? Having established this connection she occasionally commented on how changes to the image would have improved this communication. Having studied the 80 images at length in advance, she had ordered and marked them. As expected, all the images were of high standard, and she noted that no mark would be less than 20 out of 30. She, herself, used mostly film, and she had used a magnifier to examine, for example, faces in an image. She noted with interest the fact that some faces in an image were grainy, whilst neighbouring faces in the same image showed much less grain! With so many images she could only comment briefly on each one in the time available. Some of the audience seemed to be thrown by the fact that she offered suggestions on how she would have “improved” an image whilst still giving it excellent marks. However it was plain to most of us that she had already marked and ordered the images, and on the day was adding her honest comments on each one, and how it affected her. The prints were laid out on tables around the Hall, in club order, for the audience to examine them in more detail, after the judging, and whilst we were having more refreshments.

Initially, NCPS were doing well, with two opening marks of 24. Sadly this didn't last and the final scoring was:

Dumfries CC	243
Carlisle PS	242
Hartlepool P & DG	232
North Cheshire PS	225
West Cumbria PG	225
Keswick CC	220
Tyneside Digital IG	220
South Manchester PS	218

Carlisle had the winning print, **Railway Porkers** 30 marks, with **Gymnast** from Dumfries second with 29 marks, and **Mr Abdullah**, also Dumfries, with 28 marks.

Karen repeated the observation that in colour the viewer observed the clothes, whilst in monochrome one saw the Soul. She felt this applied to one of our prints **Wartime Gossip**. NCPS prints and marks are listed below.

Duplicity	24
Meeting Place	24
Off Road Vehicle	22

Misty Dawn	22
Puffin – Isle of Lunga	23
Hellebore	21
Reflection	22
Singing in the Street	22
Old & New- Hong Kong	23
Wartime Gossip	22

Jack thanked the judge and all helpers at the conclusion. Back at the Hotel, after dinner, our President Roger Dye thanked Jack for his hard work in putting on another excellent competition. The following NCPS members were observed during the weekend: Colin Pickles, Roger Dye, Tony and Dorothy Redford, Joyce and Gordon Robson, Barry Pearson, John Garner and Katie, Frank and Margery Hutchinson, Richard Scaife & Penny, Alan Bromage and Jackie, Karen Leefe & Simon, Jonathan Bawden and Rachel, Jon Allanson, Bill Chadband and Milly. Graham Johnston, Pam Davies, Jackie Robinson, Martin Currie and Jennifer, David & Lynda Hockin

Bill Chadband

The Keswick Walk: 2009

Buttermere Village this time. It was fine when ten of us met at the National Trust car park after an “interesting” drive over the steep and narrow road over the Newlands pass. If only I could stop there, but of course, being the Saturday of the trip it was not fine for long. Long enough for the group photo and to walk down through the woods to the beach at the south end of Crummock Water. A nice view up the lake and one or two photos, but the rain was then with us for the rest of the walk. A gentle stroll back to the road, then up the tumbling Mill Beck to the top of the wood and out onto the open moorside.

Here there was a choice. No-one fancied the climb to a possible view point over the lakes in the poor weather at the time. Some chose the short path directly down to car park, but most chose to continue slightly up and then a gentle descent across above the “Great Wood” to the corner of the lake. John decided to sit in a particularly wet patch of mud, but fortunately he had his full waterproofs on, so a stand-up bath in the nearby lake returned him to being just normally wet. The new concessionary path along the end of Crummock Water took us back to the beach where we started and avoided any need to walk on the road.

It had stopped raining at this point, and most people chose to return to the hotel to dry out, but we drove up Honister Pass to the Cafe

at the slate mine. Here we found out where all the open topped cars that we had seen all day had been heading. They had gathered for a hill climb on the mine's dirt road up the mountain. The cafe was warm and full of steaming wet open-top car drivers and reminded me of an alpine hut on a wet lunchtime. Unfortunately the rain had started again by the time we came out and the extra altitude had reduced the temperature producing steaming breath, so photos were soon forgotten.

Richard Scaife

An Evening with John & Katie Garner

John confessed that he had only been a photographer for about four years- since he joined the Society following a talk by Tony Redford to a Probus group of which John was a member. His first meeting had been a Digital evening at the Folk Centre where Bill Chadband had tried to frighten him with technicalities about cameras. When this hadn't succeeded, Joyce Streets had had a go, demanding to know if John was a photographer. Having passed both tests John had thought it safe to bring along his wife Katie.

In their introductory sequence John listed the various cameras he had owned, showing results obtained with each one. His first digital camera was a Nikon with 2Mpixels. He later acquired an 8Mpixel Minolta A200 with a 28-200mm equivalent zoom. In 2008 he advanced to a 10Mp Canon 40D. Katie's first "real" camera was an 8Mp Ricoh Caplio also with 28-200mm zoom, but more recently she had acquired a 12Mp Canon 450D. We saw a variety of images taken with each camera, ranging from a Tatton Park Cockerel, Birds, Butterflies, Cars, Flower heads and more recent images from Victoria Baths, Tatton Park Car show and Poynton Shows.

They had acquired a Canon Pro 9000 printer, PhotoShop CS2, Pictures to Exe, and the Audacity Sound program and had produced for us a variety of P2Exe presentations. The first, based upon the Crich Museum 40's weekend included opening images taken by John's father, and a shot of a Daily Mirror front page dated May 4th 1945.

After the break John and Katie presented several P2E sequences, all with accompanying music, ranging from Pompei, Sorrento, a classic car show at Tatton, to a trip to Venice, Verona and Lake Garda (a taster for the Club trip to Venice next year).

Martin Currie proposed a vote of thanks. He felt that the presentations had highlighted what he thought was best about camera clubs – the friendly atmosphere and the shared experiences from which we all benefitted . He had enjoyed the whole evening, perhaps singling out the Pompei sequence as his favourite. He thanked John and Katie for another good Club evening, and the audience responded with applause.

Bill Chadband

Martin Avery Digital Print Competition

Eight North Cheshire members were amongst the thirty three members of the audience for this competition held on Wed 18th November 2009 at Southport. No doubt the dire warnings of extreme weather put off some intending attendees, though in the event there was no rain, just blustery winds.

Bernard Longley the Chairman of the Southport Digital Imaging Group welcomed the visitors and the judge for the evening, Christine Widdall DPAGB AFIAP. Digital images had been requested in advance and were projected on a screen as the judge considered each image. As is almost the norm nowadays, the judge commented on the high standard of the prints, which would be marked out of 20. Christine considered and commented on each print in turn, retaining ten of them for further consideration. The meeting started at 8.00pm with a refreshment break at a little before 9.00pm. Southport did the visitors proud, ascertaining if we would prefer tea or coffee as we signed in, and providing sandwiches and cakes in abundance.

Once the scores were in, we waited in nervous anticipation as the scorers attempted to get the software to reveal the totals. Several failed attempts only served to heighten the tension. Eventually, the computer made the following announcement:

Results

1 st	Southport PS	206 marks
2	North Cheshire PS	199
3	St Helens	191
4	S. Liverpool PS	190
5=	SLIC	189
5=	S Manchester	189

Christine presented the plaque to South Manchester's representative for the winning image, and the special trophy containing Martin Avery's Gold medals, to Southport.

North Cheshire Results

1	Duplicity	Geoff Robinson	19
2	Meeting Place	John Garner	16
3	Misty Dawn	Jackie Robinson	16
4	Puffin- Isle of Lunga	Alan Saunders	17
5	Hellibore	Jonathan Bawden	15
6	Reflection	Martin Currie	17
7	Singing in the Street	Barrie Pearson	16
8	Old & New – Hong Kong Harb	Paula Martin	16
9	Wartime Gossip	Geoff Robinson	17
10	Lines & Curves	Graham Johnston	16
11	Courtyard Tree	Dorothy Redford	16
12	Aldburgh Fisherman	Gordon Robson	18

Second Print Competition

President Roger Dye welcomed David Platt of St Helens Camera Club as our judge for this competition. Roger commented on the room full of people saying “we must have over 40 people here tonight”. Jonathan Bawden was quick to tell him that he thought everyone was over 40!! This set the tone for the evening. Roger welcomed the judge as a newcomer to NCPS but David insisted he had been here before.

The Judge had 70+ prints to consider. They were all of high standard and he felt sorry that, in order to differentiate, some images were going to get lower marks than, in other competitions, they deserved. He would go down to 12 marks and also use half marks in this attempt. Judging was a personal thing in that inevitably the judge has certain preferences and certain dislikes. In attempting to be objective the judge commented on what attracted him to a picture, and what distracted him. In general, white objects drew the eye away from darker objects – Was this the author’s intention? Or was it bad composition. Some prints seemed to have a colour cast, usually Magenta. He assumed this was unintentional. A young bird occupied about 20% of an image. If the bird was the main object, was this sufficient? Could we be including too much background in attempting to illustrate its environment? As a judge he wasn’t sure he could face six backsides at once, even if they were all highly decorated.

Still, images needed impact, and he thought some excellent flower compositions lacked this impact. The three conker close-ups were well composed, but, he felt, the whole lot should have been in focus. In still life pictures he felt he could expect all of the image to be in sharp focus. In some cases a gloss paper would have brought out the colours better. He liked steam trains and required to see all the details in those presented.

In one landscape scene he detected three separate images; in another he thought the pale uniform sky let the image down, though in another landscape he complimented the author on how, at every level as one moved up (=back) through the landscape interest was retained. Inevitably Nicola 1 was in competition with Nicola 2, Nicola 3, and Nicola 4.

David retained ten pictures for further consideration. We thought they would all be in the 17 to 20 bracket, but competing trams pushed one such aspirant down to only 13 marks. Finally a Red Sunset by Jackie Robinson emerged as the winner.

In his vote of thanks Geoff Robinson noted that dealing equitably with 70+ prints in an evening was no mean feat. David had made his observations equally on all of the prints, and we had had a good and thoughtful evening. The judge was applauded.

Barry continued to use his binoculars at the back of the hall. Is he setting a new trend?

Bill Chadband