

A Very Short History Of Crewe Photographic Society

Foundation

Most of the information for this article is taken from our original committee record books. They are a fascinating read and provide a unique view of the club down the years.

The Society came into being following a foundation meeting held in Christ Church Parochial Hall on Wednesday 12 November 1947, convened by Mr. J. K. Baggley, who subsequently became the first secretary.

The first agenda item was -

“...to discuss the possibility of forming a Photographic Society in Crewe.”

At the meeting under the chairmanship of His Worship the Mayor R. Peach Esq. were 15 photographic enthusiasts who subsequently resolved

“...that such a Society should be formed forthwith. To be known as ‘The Crewe Photographic Society’”.

Meetings were to be held fortnightly on Wednesdays and members were asked to contribute one shilling (5p) to defray expenses. A sub-committee was formed to find suitable premises and an Annual General Meeting scheduled for January 1948.

That first AGM was held on 7th January 1948 in the Congregational Church Hall where a new committee was installed with a first task to draft a constitution. Promptly, on 9th January, just two days later, at a committee meeting, the new constitution was presented and adopted.

The constitution has been revised many times over the years but the basic aims expressed in the original have remained constant.

“... to promote and to further the interests of Photography in all its forms..”

Very interesting that phrase ‘in all its forms’, in view of all the changes to photography since 1948, not least the advent of digital photography.

And further evidence of the founding fathers progressive thinking is expressed in the following tenets still incorporated in our constitution

“...the Society shall be open to all persons interested in Photography.”

also

“...at least one member of the committee shall be a lady”.

and

“Rejection for membership must be for sound reasons and not be based solely for reasons of age, sex, colour, class or creed.”

Finance and Membership Numbers

The main concerns of the society in early days were financial and correspondingly membership numbers, both have fluctuated greatly since 1949. An initial subscription was set at £1-1-0 (£1.05) payable on the 1st January annually, or in quarterly amounts. A guinea was a greater proportion of weekly income than our present subscription but 47 members registered nonetheless and it remained the subscription for the next 9 years.

In those 9 years membership dipped to just 28 in 1950 and then recovered to 70 in later seasons. However despite that recovery in membership, eventually an increased subscription was found necessary, up to £1-5-0 (£1.25).

There is a curious entry in the minutes of February 1953 which refers to an Income Tax demand for "...unpaid tax on our previous premises".

The Secretary of that time was instructed to write and ask for leniency. It must have worked as nothing more is recorded

In the early sixties a financial crisis loomed again and was attributed to "...a steep fall in membership and, unpaid subscriptions." The "projector fund" was raided to maintain solvency and subscriptions were raised again this time by 17%.

By 1966, while England was winning the World Cup, the Society was again losing members (down to 33) and consequently, revenue. Catastrophe was avoided only by imposing a drastic one-off levy of 10/- (50p) on all remaining members.

The following year, 1967 saw the introduction of "*the attendance levy*". This was set at 1/- (5p) and helped, as it does today, to defraying expenses for judges and speakers.

Decimalization caused some consternation in 1971 and together with the decision of the Crewe Fete committee to withdraw permission for the Society to run a raffle at the exhibition held at the Fete, which had been a nice little earner, again financial disaster loomed. So fees went up again. Ordinary members were charged £2.50, wives and juniors £1.25, joint membership was set at £3.75 and juniors under 16 and senior citizens 50p. The attendance levy soared to 10p.

Things settled down and remained fairly stable until the late '70s. Membership numbers increased steadily during at this time and were probably the major reason for this period of financial stability. There were 51 members in 1972, about 60 in 1973 (when the cost of the annual Dinner was about £2.50 and the President's dinner was paid for by the club (though it was Lady Lovell at that time), 59 in 1975, 68 in 1976 and 81 in 1977.

Records for the next 10 years or so become a little hazy and incomplete but membership numbers appeared to have remained fairly healthy. Record keeping clarity was restored on the appointment of Alan Goodin as Secretary (and subsequently President) in the late '80s when the membership was around the fifties.

The next ten years saw a steady fall in membership numbers - from 53 in 1987 to only 29 in 1995 before recovering hesitantly, with ups and downs, to the present day total of around 40. Subscriptions, however, have not increased hesitantly over this period. Inexorable rising costs have provoked no less than eleven increases to the present day (2017) rates of £25.00 for single membership, £40 for joint membership and £5 only for Juniors and students. The 'attendance levy' vital in helping to defray club meeting costs is now £2.00.

Competitions.

Competitions are now a major part of our activity programs. However internal competitions as we know them today were rare at the beginning. "*Print Nights*" were arranged and experienced photographers, initially from the Society's own ranks, were asked to comment on the work submitted.

Gradually the competitive element increased and today's competition scene evolved. Independent external judges were introduced to assess the entries which were, at first, prints

and slides derived from film and subsequently, as now, work produced by digital means.

By 1974 competitions were well supported. Slides were the most popular class. A striking example is the entries for that year - beginners submitted 214 slides, intermediates 40 and advanced workers 69. Print workers were also busy - 50 beginners prints, 69 intermediate prints and 24 advanced prints. This from a total of 60 members - quite an expression of the vigour and enthusiasm of the Society at that time.

Probably the single most significant event to occur in all the years of our history, was the advent of Digital Photography. (Arguably greater than the introduction of colour perhaps.) Worldwide digital methods now dominate and are the major way in which photographs are taken and produced. Most prints are produced using inkjet printers. Slides have morphed into 'Projected Digital Images' (PDIs), which are viewed on a computer monitor or projected onto a screen.

This has had significant effects on our competition programs, especially in the content and the production of images. Post production of digital images allow techniques, hard learned for film photography, to be practised more easily and therefore more available to practitioners. Further, brand new techniques are coming into being on a regular basis. All allowing members the ability to produce higher quality photographs and providing a wider variety of subject matter to be attempted.

Digital photography was first discussed and its possibilities at a committee meeting on 13th February 1997. Some members were anxious not to miss a trick and not to fall behind 'progress'. Others were less enamored. But the subject was referred to the AGM in May 1997 and our competition rules at that time were duly amended to accept digitally produced and modified images.

We were ready for the digital revolution.

The revolution was slow to take off and only took root gradually.

It was given a huge boost following a visit in January 1999 by Barrie Thomas, the digital guru and evangelist of the day. At the time his talk broke all attendance records and resulted in the following year in a significant increase in members producing digital work for competition.

In 2003 we enhanced our digital capability by successfully applying for an 'Awards for All' grant to buy a laptop computer, a digital projector, a selection of digital imaging software, several packs of digital imaging instructional CDs and a high quality projection screen. The grant, financed via the Lottery Fund, amounted to £4870.

The revolution was in full flow.

By 2005 the slide competition program was on its last legs and digital prints were competing highly successfully against 'conventionally' produced versions. In 2009 slide competitions were substituted by PDI competitions and all prints were digitally produced and inkjet-printed either at home or by commercial printers.

Internal competitions today mirror, to a large degree, competitions in the heyday of film photography. League competitions still determine winners in monochrome and colour classes though an exclusively nature class has been introduced. Annual competitions

determine the 'best print' and the 'best PDI'. Although film photography entries are not excluded, all entries over the past several years have been digitally produced.

The late 1990s and early 21st century saw the emergence and rapid development of the Internet. The society was quick to adapt. Email became the principal method of communication between club and members. Transport of PDIs images by email became the norm for both internal and external competitions. Then a website was constructed which is now well used and has become the source of, and repository for, all the society's affairs.

External competitions have been an important part of the life of the society for many years. 'Battles' pitched the work of local clubs against each other, assessed and scored by an independent external judge.

Since about the early seventies - early records are sparse - there have been contests held between several local clubs, culminating in regular events today with Nantwich, Alsager, Mid-Cheshire, Sandbach and Whitchurch. Results down the years have generally been very creditable and contacts between the competing clubs extremely amicable though still competitive.

The eighties and nineties saw Crewe dominate the 5-Towns Monochrome Print Trophy, a competition involving the above clubs in various combinations, winning the Alan Challoner Trophy 11 times in the 24 years the trophy has been contested. The competition originally strictly for 'home produced' monochrome photographs from film origins finally allowed digital monochrome entries to compete in 2004.

In 2000 we re-entered the Robertshaw Trophy, a five town competition (Crewe, Leek, Stoke, Chelford and Acton Bridge) originally for Slides which evolved in 2007 into a Projected Digital Image competition in which we have had moderate success.

Forays into the national competition scene have also been made with gratifying results. For some years we have had many successful acceptances in the Lancashire and Cheshire Photographic Union club competitions. More recently, club and individual success has been achieved in the Great British Cup with club team finishes in the top 10 in the general classes and outright wins by Ian Whiston in the individual Nature classes.

However the activity of the club has not been wholly dominated by competitions. Annual programs, down the years have included events presented by invited speakers (and from our own membership too) on a wealth of photographic subjects. Talks by specialists, on technique, on content, on 'how to do it', on presentation, all encourage in improving personal photography and some talks can be simply inspirational in exhibiting superb bodies of work.

This has been just a glimpse of the history of the society over the last 70 years but is one which identifies some of the great changes in photography over that time and how the society reacted to them.

CPS still survives and has accommodated successfully to these changes and will continue for as long as there remains an enthusiasm for Photography and innovation.

So remaining true to the intention of the founding fathers of the club in 1949 *'to promote and to further the interests of photography in all its forms'*.

Tom Seaton.
Secretary 1991 - 2016