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I've been a member of Durham PS for nearly 30 years, and before that briefly a member of Durham NAGLO Camera Club. I was introduced to NALGO PC by a friend who worked at County Hall and they allowed me in despite the fact I wasn't a member of NALGO nor did I work for the Durham County Council. I believe they had a meeting to discuss my membership when they heard I worked for the Evening Chronicle but decided it was okay because I wasn't a professional press photographer, just a common or garden reporter.

This life changing moment came after a photographic career that had hitherto progressed at the speed normally associated with a lethargic slug crossing a particularly difficult cabbage patch.

My photography had progressed slowly and in phases.

Phase one was when I was about 13 my dad bought me a Brownie Box Camera because I was a train spotter – one of those grubby urchins who used to gather on top of The Keep in Newcastle to watch main line trains chuff past.

I bought all the train magazines and read the railway books and thought I would like to take pictures to match those of the top railway photographers such as Bishop Eric Treacy or Scotland's WJV Anderson.



A bleak outlook

It might have helped my skill with a camera had I also studied Amateur Photographer in those days.

As it was I did learn a little more at the youth club I attended in Consett in my mid teens. There one of the youth leaders was a keen amateur photographer and he set up a dark room where I learned how to develop and print black and white film.

On leaving school I went to work on a weekly paper in Consett and worked alongside a semi-pro photographer who part timed on the paper between shifts in the steel works. From him I learned a lot. He told me my pictures weren't fuzzy because I couldn't afford a camera with a good lens but because I used shutter speeds that were far too slow and they were causing camera shake.

By this time I had a folding camera which enabled me to change shutter speeds and aperture settings. It's a pity I hadn't bothered to learn the connection between the two.

Then there were other interests. Quite apart from my job on the newspaper which was totally absorbing, I was into cycling, at first youth hostelling around the Dales, the Lakes, Scotland and North Wales, then I was a member of Tyne Velo Cycling Club and got bitten by the road racing bug.

Training and racing took up all my spare time until I met Irene and after marriage it was time to further my career on daily papers. First the Northern Echo, then the Journal and Evening Chronicle beckoned. I stayed with the Chronicle where I did various jobs in the editorial department until I retired.

It was when our two children, Stephen and Susan, were born that I realised I ought to be getting out my long disused camera and start taking family snaps.

This was when Phase 2 of my photographic career began. Working alongside professional photographers convinced me I should get an SLR (film in those days) so I bought a Zenit E, built like a tank but it had a decent f2 lens.

At this time, in the late 1960s/early 1970s, many press photographers were still using twin lens reflex Rollei cameras, but many were switching to SLRs, mainly the Pentax Spotmatic.

So before long that was the camera I had to get. Plus a couple of extra lenses.

And I've stuck with Pentax ever since.

Phase 3 of my photographic career was launched when I joined Durham NALGO Camera Club and I became a club photographer. There many of the pictures on show were bog standard shots of the Lake District which weren't very exciting but were better than anything I could do. Fortunately one or two of their members, including Bob Weil and Royston Thomas, who are still friends of mine, were much more progressive.

Their graphic colour shots of abstract subjects, keen observation and photographic sense of humour, switched me on.

When they left NALGO to widen their experience at Durham PS in the early 1980s, I followed them.

One visiting NCPF judge at a competition at Durham NALGO turned out to be a keen critic of all the entries, but he had a good eye for the real winners. His dry comments were entertaining. Of one picture which flashed on screen he said: "Is there a coroner in the house?"

He was there again when I got to Durham PS; the general secretary Colin Armitstead. He's still general secretary, now a long time friend of mine whose best advice has always been: "Don't take pictures to please the judge, take them to please you."

In my years at Durham PS, I've won quite a few competitions; I've been on and off the committee and have held several posts including president, (twice), competition secretary and programme secretary. I'm the current president, 2010-11.

By the late 1990s many of my friends were turning their backs on film photography and were going digital.

Computers were a mystery to me. Although I had used one at work for years to me it was just a posh typewriter and I never did anything clever on it.

In fact I was actually put off digital photography at that time by some of the outrageous excesses pioneers in the form were producing and showing in their lectures round the camera clubs. My photographic output by the late 1990s, early 2000s, had virtually dried up although I was still a keen member at Durham PS.



Magenta Alley

Phase 4 of my camera career came next. I couldn't put off the inevitable and at the end of 2005 I bought my first digital camera – another Pentax.

Since then I just can't stop taking photos, entering competitions and submitting to international exhibitions such as the NCPF Salon.

And I've discovered the joys of on-line forums. We have several running within Durham PS on our excellent web site and I'm a member of the Pentax User Forum which stages weekly and fortnightly competitions. The person who wins selects the next set subject and judges the competition. It's all good fun.

I'm not a specialist photographer although obviously some subjects interest me more than others. Much as I love the countryside, particularly the Scottish Highlands, I'm certainly not a landscape photographer. I'm much happier in an urban environment picking out architectural abstracts. Modern architecture offers fantastic shapes and colours. I love street



photography where you grab candid pictures of people, often in situations that provide interesting juxtapositions and also looking for pure abstracts of shape and colour in every day items. Wandering the streets of any city gives me the opportunity to grab shots spontaneously.

Portraiture isn't my scene but I do like photographing at events such as the Goths Festival at Whitby or wartime re-enactments at Pickering, where you can get some fantastic portraits of very willing models in wonderful costumes.

Victorian Style

Projects and set themes interest me a lot, both are very popular at Durham PS and the Pentax Forum. Last year I spent several happy hours taking pictures inside Newcastle's famous Grainger Market. I always asked the stallholders if they minded, in every case they agreed. One said "It's a pity all the photographers didn't ask. Some just snap you without asking."

And I've gone back to my second childhood. More than 40 years after British Rail banished its last steam locomotive preservationists have reintroduced more and more steam hauled special trains on the main lines of the UK. Nostalgia rules once again as I hunt them down in action.

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