

Is it really 70 years?

Introduction

Several weeks ago I received a query regarding one of my photographs and it came as a bit of a shock to realise it had been taken in 1950, 70 years ago. This made me start thinking how come I had started photography when I was just eleven or twelve, and what I had achieved over the following years.

Early years – 1950 to 1958

Actually I had started using a camera before 1950 when I was given a folding camera, a pretty useless object since the bellows leaked. However despite that the bug had bit and I got myself a trusty box camera. Being the son of a railway worker, and an avid locospotter, many railway images were taken over the next few years. Many of the photographs taken were local to where I lived in the Brighton areas and on family holidays in South Devon. Most which ended in the bin as blurred, out of focus, etc., etc., however the survivors are a now a piece of social history.



1952 – Plymouth, Box Camera

Advance forward to 1955 and, working in an office containing some renowned railway photographers, and pending National Service, it was decided the box camera was a bit naff so investment was made in a 'better' camera, a used Purma Plus. Better is a misnomer, yes it had three shutter speeds, but also a fixed focus, fixed aperture lens. In fact a glorified metal box camera. Having said that, at times a good image could often be achieved. Anyway the Purma lasted until about 1958 by when I was no longer taking photographs, the coming of age thingy.



September 1954 – Brighton Station, Purma Plus, FP3 127 film

The 1960s – mainly a decade of railway photography

However I continued to keep a watch on all things railway, well for one thing I worked in the industry. By 1961 I was in an office that

contained no less than seven people taking railway photographs and, being concerned about the rapid reduction of steam locomotives, decided to join in the game as it were. Firstly it was necessary to get a suitable camera and I opted for a used twin lens reflex, which was to provide a good tool for different genres of photography especially since I preferred to work in monochrome film. So armed with trackside permits, reduced rate rail tickets and an ability to walk into engine sheds off I went. I was to continue in this general vein until the end of 1966 when personal circumstances, I was then and still am a believer in family comes first, made me cut back on travelling.



March 1962 Hitchin, Montana TLR, Kodak Tri-X



June 1962 Edinburgh Montana TLR, Ilford HP3

Meanwhile an investment was made in a 35mm SLR sold by what was later to become Dixons, a very nice Canon lens but otherwise a terrible camera. There was a continual issue with the shutter mechanism, two transverse blades that did not keep in synch resulting in much of the image being wrongly exposed – I suspect in today's world I would have been able to reject it as being not fit for purpose. Anyway at the time it was a matter of pressing on regardless. Film types used during this period were HP3 and TriX with the TLR; Kodachrome, Ektachrome, FP3 and Prinzpan mainly with the SLR, although I did use a fine monochrome transparency film made by Agfa. Also during the 60s I took images in a number of genres, transport, flowers, landscapes, buildings, etc., in fact a jack of all trades but master of none. This variety of genres has continued right

up to the present time. However portraiture and the use of flash and auxiliary lighting has never been my bag.



September 1963 Carlton Hill Edinburgh, Reflexa SLR Kodachrome II



April 1965 Wishaw, Scotland, Reflexa SLR Agfa Dia-Direct monochrome transparency

Although railway photography more or less finished in 1966, I continued taking photographs, mainly of whatever caught my eye. The terrible first SLR was discarded and replaced by a reliable EXA500 body which accepted the lenses previously used.

The 1970s, a quiet decade

The 70s dawned, from a photographic standpoint little changed except for the gradual retirement of the TLR. I joined a photographic evening class in Newhaven, which in reality was a collection of like minded individuals comparing their work under the supervision of an experienced photographer; no equipment was available other than whatever was brought into the sessions, so no processing and printing skills, etc. were developed. The main highlight of this class was one evening when as a group we were sent round to produce a photographic portfolio of the centre's activities, our supervisor decided to lend me her Nikkormat SLR and a love affair with Nikon cameras started, which was not to be consummated until 1983. At the same time I joined Eastbourne Camera Club for a couple of years, an interesting period where I met Liz and Roger Scott, and Colin Westgate. Colin introduced me to image cropping, something I still feel strongly about. But how do you crop a 35mm slide without using scissors you may ask, in fact it is easy, use a glass mount and cover the unwanted area with thick silver foil.



Newhaven evening class 1972, Montana TLR FP3

In the early 1970s, when working in Edward Street, Brighton I started a project to record some of the changes taking place in that area. This project was undertaken during my lunch break and was eventually curtailed through lack of time. However people who have seen the images have likened them to street photography and urban graffiti, two subjects I have returned to many times over the intervening years.



Brighton 1973, Exa 500, Ektachrome X

The 1980s – New York and the start of using Nikons

In the early 80s I was to make several business trips to New York, which in the main did not result in photo opportunities. However there were two periods when I was based there for several weeks on end, and not wanting to miss the chance to record what I was seeing I purchased a Rollei XF35 viewfinder camera for that very purpose.

Back home in 1983 I saw in the Jessop's shop in Eastbourne my first Nikon camera, a used Nikon lightweight EM. This camera served me well for several years, despite its Achilles heel weakness in the rewind lever. I persevered and eventually bought a replacement EM body.



NYC 1981, Rollei XF35



Balcombe Place 1983, first image from a Nikon EM



Paris 1984 Nikon EM

At the end of 1987 a personal disaster struck, as a result of 'Black Monday' I was made redundant thereby seriously curtailing any photographic or holiday trips for several years. The first thing I did was to get a job looking for a job. This was a frustrating exercise with very few interviews forthcoming – too old and too experienced - and my wife suggested I had earned a holiday, so pulling in some due favours from people I knew at American Express, and using some of my redundancy money, I wangled a trip to Arizona at a heavily reduced price, flight, car hire and hotels, etc.



April 1988 Wupaki National Monument, Arizona Nikon EM

Eventually at the end of 1989 I got a low paid temporary position which, except for a couple of years, lasted until 2009, obviously I got paid more progressively than other temps. I must have been good at what I did! Because of the nature of the temporary job, dealing with company takeover and mergers, it had entailed working extra hours during the week and many weekends, a fact which applied to the fulltime employees as well, very strict deadlines had to be met.

The 90s, very few photographic opportunities

Therefore the 90s offered very few chances to take photographs, and the few taken were of aircraft. Having said that again looking in the window of Jessops in Eastbourne I found for sale a used Nikon F501, for which I traded in my good EM body as part purchase. Most people are aware of a famed Nikon F, F2 and FM series of professional cameras notably used by press photographers throughout the world right up until the digital age, however Nikon also did a similar semi professional F series range of motor driven cameras, the F501 being one. Although being heavy my F501 served me well when taking aircraft photographs. However the F501 belongs in the new millennium.



Shoreham July 1995, Nikon EM, Tamron 70-210mm zoom lens



Coventry Airport August 2000, Nikon F501, Tamron 70-21- zoom lens

The noughties – a switch to digital

Early in the noughties my wife had a big birthday and we decided to splash out of a fly drive holiday to California, starting in Los Angeles

and onto the Mohave Desert, Grand Canyon, Napa Valley and San Francisco. However first there was a visit to France, our first holiday since 1987.



Lucas, Haute Vienne, France June 2002 Nikon EM

Before we even prepared to plan for the trip to America I decided there was no possibility of lugging the F501 about so, in an attempt to join the modern world, the decision was to go digital. Being ignorant of such things as to what would be best camera and stay within our means was unknown, the Nikon DSLRs cost too much and looked no smaller than the F501, and the then Coolpix range were weird with a body and lens that rotated, in any case all the controls were designed for right handed people – no good for a left hooker. Eventually I opted for an Olympus C720 which in the main proved adequate except for the zoom and focus toggle switches. In the event the use of digital cameras enable me to broaden the range of subjects I took photographs of. What I did find was the improved quality of the images in relation to colour rendition, sharpness, etc., previously when using film I had opted for the expedient 'Photo me' style in shop cheap film and processing. To me at the time I thought

the results were adequate, one of the perils of having a restricted photographic budget.



May 2003, Williams Arizona Olympus C720



May 2003 San Francisco, Olympus C720



July 2003 Stratford upon Avon Butterfly Centre, Olympus C720

Other similar viewfinder cameras followed, listed at the end of this dialogue, all of which suffered from the toggle switch issues – all I wanted to do was focus and zoom as before using the lens barrel!



July 2005 Moulin D'Angibeult, Indre, France Minolta Dimage

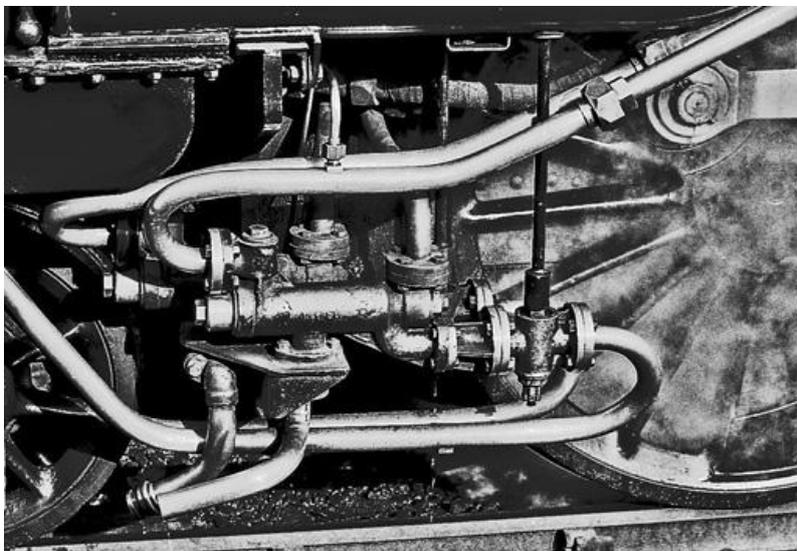


May 2006 Paris, Minolta Dimage



August 2007 Dunsfold, Surrey Fuji Finepix S6500

During 2009 I discovered Fuji Neopan 400 35mm monochrome film and decided to try a few rolls in the Nikon F501, well I am a monochrome man at heart. Earlier, 2008, I joined the flickr photograph sharing site. I have found this to have been a rewarding experience, sharing and commenting on images with my peer group.



March 2008, Bluebell Railway Sussex Nikon F501 Fuji Neopan 400 monochrome film

Finally near the end of the decade I bought a proper DSLR, a Nikon D3000, bliss. Of course after switching from film digital diarrhea set in, no processing costs so blast away all those images are free! Well not really since they need storage space and the time and effort to edit each of them. However having a DSLR added to the range of images I would take and how I would process them.



September 2010 Ste-Malo Nikon D3000

2010 onwards – club photography and developing further skills

I had visited the SPS annual exhibition several times over the years but had not joined, however after visiting the Crypt in 2010 I thought 'I can produce photographs as good as these' so signed up. How wrong I was, firstly I decided I should be in the Intermediate section, wrong! Secondly I had not experienced judges, love or hate them. A disaster all round and I was really disappointed with my score and the comments made, not by SPS members I would add, and I almost quit after six weeks! Having persevered and received good advice from other SPS members I have upped my game over the years and eventually one year won the standard pdi competition with 98/100 and became standard class photographer of the year runner up the same year. That was a good year considering I do not do my own printing.

A problem I have had since 2009 relates to my mobility, resulting in no less than five joint operations, this led to my leaving SPS in 2018, I could not drive to the meetings and when there found the seating arrangements uncomfortable. Now thanks to ZOOM I can meet from home and have rejoined SPS.

All the above has not meant I have been idle all the time, except perhaps for the current year, that has not been the case. Instead I believe I have honed my skills, thinking more about post production processing and monochrome conversion. Two things I believe in are trying for simple images and cropping, trying to remember that a photographic image, as with all visual arts, should tell a story. I use Elements rather than Photoshop/Lightroom. In 2013 I upgraded to a Nikon D5100, still used, more often in the garden with a 60mm macro lens. I tried to use the F501 but found the electronics had died and gave it to a collector. Instead I swapped an unused Mamiya C330 for a Nikon F801, the last good one in that range of semi pro cameras. I would dearly like to use the F801, but with a weight of 1kg for the body and 50mm lens alone it is not practical to carry it around using a walking stick. But I will find a way!

Other than the D5100 I use a Nikon Coolpix B700, which I blow hot and cold over at regular intervals, and mainly an iPhone. Easy to use and versatile, the later versions having some really good features. Just imagine doing panoramas without the stitching.

Some of my images from this decade, using a variety of cameras, follow. A further selection can be found by visiting my pages at www.flickr.com/photos/31514768@N05/



September 2011 Blaenau Ffestiniog Nikon D3000 mono conversion



April 2012 Spean Bridge, Scotland Nikon D3000 with monochrome conversion



July 2014 Goring on Thames iPhone 4S monochrome conversion



June 2015 Seaford Sussex Nikon D5100



August 2016 Borde Hill, Haywards Heath iPhone 6S



September 2016 9/11 Memorial NYC Panasonic TZ60



April 2017 Sovereign Harbour, Eastbourne Nikon F801 Fuji Neopan 400 film



June 2017 Seaford, Sussex Nikon D5100 plus 60mm macro lens



August 2018 Bruges Nikon Coolpix B700



April 2020 Seaford, Sussex Nikon D5100 60mm macro



July 2020 Seaford Sussex iPhone 8S portrait setting



August 2020, Seaford Sussex iPhone 8S using panorama setting

Success over the years

Going back to the 50s and 60s, all those railway photographs have done me proud resulting in no less than four books being published using some of them, including the very first one from 1950. The books, all published by Amberley Publishing and available by ordering from bookshops or Amazon, are

- Steam around Basingstoke and Salisbury
- Search for Steam – British Rail 1951-1962
- Search for Steam – British Rail 1963-1967
- Search for Steam – Industrial Railways 1964-1966



August 1950 Kentish Town Box camera

Resulting in my postings on flickr I have had frequent requests to use individual images of different genres to illustrate books and magazine articles. I even have a large acrylic print on the wall of the Premier Inn near to Park Cameras in Burgess Hill, well I assume it is still there.



1965 Burgess Hill, Sussex, Reflexa SLR FP3

Cameras used in this digital age include

- 2003 to 2005 Olympus C720
- 2005 to 2007 Konica Dimage, a really crap camera
- 2007 to 2009 Fuji Finepix S6500
- 2009 to 2013 Nikon D3000
- 2009 Nikon F501, brought back into use for a short period before electronics failed
- 2012 to 2017 Samsung PL24, replaced by iPhone 6
- 2013 to date Nikon D5100, sometimes with 60mm macro lens
- 2014 to 2016 iPhone 4
- 2016 to 2018 iPhone 6S plus
- 2018 to date Nikon Coolpix B700

- 2018 Nikon F801, waiting further use
- 2018 to date iPhone 8S plus