

**Reminiscences of 40 something years as a member of the
Windlesham and Camberley Camera Club
by Mike Cliff**

On my first visit to the camera club I was not greeted with a welcome but asked what camera I had. I have recently bought a Practica. Throw it away and get a decent camera, was the response. It was a while later when I again approached the club at the suggestion of Club President and recently retired nursery manager, Percy Wiseman. It was in 1968, as the records confirm, that I eventually joined Windlesham and Camberley Camera Club, and paid the subscription which was then £1.5.0 (£1.25 today). The clubroom was behind the chemist's in Bagshot's High Street. It was a dark, damp and cold venue but it did provide a darkroom with an enlarger. For an evening meeting someone had to light the oil stoves quite a while before the meeting and even earlier if we had a portrait or a figure evening. A while later the chemist wanted more room so we had to find a new home.

The opportunity then arose to move across the High Street to the Windle Valley Day Centre. This really was a change as it was light, warm and spacious. I well recall the 1971 Annual General Meeting which was held there. Our President, Percy Wiseman had died, the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Programme and Competition Secretaries, Cine section leader and three committee members were all leaving and had to be replaced. The club membership then was small but there were just enough members present to share these tasks. I took on the role of secretary and Jeff Wagner began his stint as the Club Chairman and Alf Tarry as a Committee member. The subscription was £1.15.0. (£1.75 today). A few years later Jeff Wagner produced a duplicated newsletter called, "Hold It". This, Alan Meeks has successfully resuscitated. When we moved out of the clubroom there was a deal of equipment and furniture which had to be found alternative homes. I housed an large old wooden tripod in the flat at Sunningdale Nursery where it became quite a feature in the hallway, providing a useful stand for house plants. When I moved from there, Alan agreed to look after it. It is now an archive item.

In those days print and slide competitions were a regular part of the programme. Prints involved buying a monochrome film often 100 ASA 35mm Ilford film which could take either 24 or 36 exposures. When exposed they were often left with the chemist to develop and make contact prints. If you developed your own film one had, in the dark, to wind the film from the cassette onto a reel which fitted inside an Ilford developing tank. Then (in the light), developing liquid at the correct temperature was poured in to the tank, and agitated slightly for I think 6 minutes. That liquid was poured away and replaced by stop solution for a short spell, removed and then the fixer was added. Some minutes later and this liquid was removed and even saved for future use. Then water was flushed through the tank for quite a while to remove the chemicals, then one could open the tank and hang the film up to dry. To produce a print for exhibition one needed an enlarger, a darkened room, suitable sized dishes, more chemicals, several sheets of paper and loads of patience, just to obtain one good image!! If successful this was then mounted flush on a backing board.

Slide films then were invariably of low speed 10 or 25 ASA, 35mm films often Kodak or Agfa but still with either 24 or 36 exposures. Tripods were often essential. Another necessary item was an exposure meter, often a Weston to help decide what exposure you would use for a particular shot. If you were interested in taking close ups of flowers, of under about 18", one could obtain supplementary lenses to fit over the main lens. Calculations were then necessary to set the appropriate distance!! Once the required shots had been taken, the film was then posted to Kodak or Agfa laboratories. Often there was a wait of a week or more to discover the results. The shock began when the film arrived and when you looked through the slides, often to find that few were even correctly exposed or even in focus. How times have changed!! It's all automatic now. A slide projector was another essential item to see just what you had taken. For competitions the cardboard mounted slides were often mounted in glass, to save them popping.

There were more entries for slide competitions as the cost of films, paper, chemicals and the facility in ones home for developing and printing was often limited. It was I think due to lack of entries with prints, that we held some joint meetings with the Camberley Pictorialists. Alan Meeks was then a member of this group. He joined us a little later.

Cine was another of our sections and there was a regular monthly slot in the programme to update and improve ideas. Derek Elkins, now LRPS and George Pellatt were keen members here.

Twin lens reflex cameras were often preferred as a larger negative should give better images. These and even the basic single lens reflex cameras were rather pricey items and there was a wide range of options of the basic Kodak, Zeiss and Agfa cameras. I had bought a second hand Praktica 35mm Single Lens Reflex FX camera. Praktica and Zenith cameras came from East Germany and Russia and were frequently bought, as they were the cheaper options. This was before the Japanese almost took control of world camera production when some of the West German cameras disappeared.

Geoff Richardson then interested the club in a rather new idea which required two identical projectors and a tape recorder to provide the sound and control the inputs of words and music. The methods employed to control these projectors, to fade one slide and illuminate the other were originally often one's own construction (Alton Club had a novel unit). Later complete twin projector units with inbuilt tape recorders became available, but at some cost. Audio Visual sequences became part of the Club's scene. In Surrey other clubs were similarly intrigued with this new approach and Competitions were often held. Sir George Pollock F R P S hosted these events which we often entered. I well remember attending a talk in Dorking with Geoff Richardson, with the meeting discussing producing better A V shows. One speaker insisted that a sequence must have a good opening, a relevant middle section and a good conclusion. A good sequence should not be shorter than 10 minutes. As I had my 5 slide sequence with me Geoff then showed this. It was well accepted by a few

people present!! We are fortunate today that Mike Reed ARPS has assumed Geoff R's role with promoting A V in the club and around. I believe that Alf Tarry was the very first person to be awarded the L R P S by the Royal Photographic Society for Audio Visual!! He produced several rather lengthy sequences in great detail concerning the local area, especially Windlesham, Bagshot and Lightwater. Alan Meeks has recently revised these and converted them into digital DVDs. These are popular and sell very well at the Museum and Gallery. Alf had a fearsomely expensive set of tape recorders and upmarket slide projectors. He often was engaged to show a sequence in the normal programme and talk about its production. We recently met the late Ruth Smithers who read his commentary for these shows. I believe that he compiled an Audio Visual sequence on the Falkland Islands and even arranged for Sir Rex Hunt, who was the recent Governor of the Falkland Islands to record the commentary. This was taped in Alf's bathroom in Lightwater. Jeff Wagner produced a quite infamous A V sequence with slides he had taken over a few years, which he entitled "Is this Surrey Heath?" Surprisingly he decided to move to Kent shortly after!!

Open reel tape recorders were then a standard requirement but they are now history as are cassette recorders. Records turning at 78 rpm were replaced by 12" 33 rpm L P records which are now collector's items. Now we can either use CDs to provide the music content or digital recorders, or even download music from the internet.

I recall that Allan Foster when he was our treasurer suggested that the club should follow the restoration of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Work began in 1972 at Bath using volunteer labour. It was then when I started taking slides of the canal of the dilapidated locks at Bath and Devizes and have followed the progress of the renovation of the canal regularly up to the official opening in 1990 by H.M. The Queen. It is now fully operational and has been well looked after. I gave some illustrated talks to the club on its progress. Recently some of my old slides taken during the restoration in the early 70's have been used in a feature article in the K & A canal magazine "The Butty". We have arranged some day visits to the canal, particularly to the Crofton Pumping station. Our last visit coincided with a thunderstorm when we were in the building. When we drove to the pub in Great Bedwyn for lunch, it was through a few inches of water. After lunch we visited nearby Wilton Windmill on an ideal warm sunny afternoon.

When Ian Henderson, also Treasurer, was a teacher at Woodcote House School in Windlesham, asked if a member could take photographs of the pupils who were leaving that term. Alan Meeks offered and has continued with this project since and now comments that he has even taken photographs of the sons and some grandsons of those early pupils.

One item I will not forget was when the club made a cine film. This was when I lived in a flat in the old Sunningdale Nurseries and the stairs were considered very conducive to the appearance of the "evil" monster. I think this was played by Fred Moth. I'm sure the film is still somewhere in the archives. In another cine film Ian

Henderson took the role of a doctor. I expect that is yet another archive item.

We have had some quite famous photographers to give talks at our evening meetings. I recall Peter Grugeon from Reading, giving a talk on "Better Portraiture". He happened at that time to be one of the Royal Photographers and produced the now notable portrait of the Queen and Prince Phillip for their Silver Jubilee in 1977.

To raise moneys for funds, Jumble Sales were often held in the Church then in Southwell Road in Camberley, which was demolished some years ago. This would have been close to the Atrium. There was always a queue at opening time of a formidable number of seasoned purchasers who very swiftly collected what interested them, then haggled over the price. It was probably tactful to accept their valuation! These events did raise some useful funds.

Looking through my WACCC files I find that in 75/6 season The Photographer of the Year was Alan Meeks. He came second in the Print of the year competition and won both the Slide of the year and the Cine Competitions!! Recent comments overheard is that he never enters any competitions! He was very successful a while back. Another interesting article in the same file is the 1980 Membership List. Of the 32 members listed, only Mike Hillman, Alan Meeks and myself are still current members!! Another list of 1998 is rather different, of the 31 members listed 16 are current members. But the ensuing 15 years shows just how the club has grown and even some older members have rejoined.

We moved to the St Johns Ambulance Station in Wilton Road Camberley, due to the hire of the Windle Valley Day centre being substantially raised. This move was only for a short time. The one snag was their heating system was not capable of producing enough heat in the room until the time came for us to go home. That move did coincide with a rather cold winter.

An Interclub Cine competition was held at the Scout Hut along the A 30, London Road in Camberley when Jeff Wagner was their Scout leader. When we arrived to set up the room, there were many large heaps of gravel dumped in the car park to provide the base for their new car park. All that had to be scattered during the afternoon before the guests arrived.

Our next move was to the Lightwater Library, this was a great improvement.

One regular annual fixture in each programme then was the Bring and Buy evening. A variety of cameras, lenses and gadgets which were not required by one member, readily changed hands with some benefit to the club's finances.

The next move was to the Camberley Library. Access for an evening meeting was via the fire escape. That venue suited us for a few years until Frank Wickenden and Roy Devereux, who were regular members of St Paul's Church, suggested that we enquired of the possibilities there. That proved a very successful introduction. The club has grown such since, possibly due to the interest in digital photography, that our

usual St Christopher's Room has limited our membership and in recent years a waiting list has been implemented.

Around this time Mike Lindsay kept emphasising and cajoling the club that it should go digital. He was aware of the opportunities this new medium could offer. (Remember the highest levels then were one or two million pixels.) How all that has changed. Reluctantly the club began to take on this new and then expensive method of producing photographs, even in daylight. Would it last? As we still had a slide competition, those of us who had digital cameras had to convert their images back to slides. Gradually we accepted the ease of making all images digitally. We even had a club member, Chris Carne whose business was computers. I doubt if I was the only one who was grateful for his help in this field. One member who often had verbal spats with Mike Lindsay was Rob Speirs. He was well known for the work he did at Elmhurst Ballet School, when it was in Camberley. He took many photographs of the Dancers and I believe that he even kept detailed notes on Judges preferences!!

Another of the older club members was Bill Crumplin. He worked for some years as a boffin at R A E Farnborough. Whenever we needed something for cine, Bill would arrange it. He produced superb 16mm wide screen films using a special anamorphic lenses which he developed himself. He would show the films on a special 20 ft wide screen. He was also one of the U K's principal experts on 3D slide production and projection using equipment he had in the main designed himself. Special glasses were used to view the stereo images. He collected anything cine, particularly 9.5mm cameras and projectors. Bill was probably the last person to provide a 9.5 cine film processing service with orders from overseas included and all done in his garage at home.

One of our senior lady members, who we knew as a very friendly person and a keen photographer was Moyra Bond. We didn't realise until we read her obituary in the National newspapers that she was the best-selling author of the Bond Assessment Papers first published in 1964 and still in use in schools today. Some members even owned these books but were unaware that they knew the author. Her name was just shown as J M Bond so as not to deter possible buyers who might not want an educational book written by a woman.

Recently we have been shocked at the sudden demise of another old member John Evans, after a serious operation. He was a fine photographer and with interests in A V. He frequently visited Spain and was a very valuable host when a group of club members visited Spain when they stayed at Denia where the famous Spanish Festival "Las Fallas" is annually staged. He produced an A V of that event and many fine photographs of nearby Valencia.

Our members have come from a very wide range of occupations. They have included a Vicar, a Headmaster, several teachers, a Bank manager, aeronautical experimental scientists, a Probation specialist in the Civil Service. a Furniture remover, a Nurse, several departmental managers as well as bank staff, housewives,

some specialist photographers and a noted plant breeder and nursery manager.

We have had some highly proficient photographers in the club and one must mention Edward Mendell FRPS, ARPS, FRGS. He was an American who lived in Windlesham. He had travelled and photographed widely around the world and was often asked to address important International meetings. He also compiled some well illustrated books. He produced a fine public show for us, "A Walk on The Wild Side." at High Cross Church. In this he talked of the "Animals of Asia" and also of "West Africa" both aided by his fine colour photographs.

Quite recently we again hired the same Church Hall to stage a very well organised and very well attended talk by famous landscape photographer Charlie Waite. That proved to be a very instructive and profitable evening.

We have over the years made several day visits to the Watercress Line and I recall that on my first visit, the engine pulling the carriages was the famous L N E R locomotive Mallard, which was designed by Sir Nigel Gresley. As this was the fastest steam locomotive built, it could have only need a sight amount of power to move the train along those lines.

Another successful day visit was to The Hawk Conservancy near Andover. They then encouraged camera clubs to visit their collection of interesting birds. Quite a number of us attended and I still have some slides taken then.

We have had a couple of fascinating visits to The Magic Circle in London. You visit their museum first with all its historical associations and then you are astounded by magicians performing their tricks just feet away from you. One special memory was of Ali Bongo, one time President of the Magic Circle who helped Tommy Cooper in this dark art, who suddenly died shortly after our visit.

Judges are a very varied lot. Some can be very practical and helpful with their comments and some have even become frequent visitors. There was one person, who will remain nameless, who in a print competition some years ago, decried all our efforts and gave a lecture on what to aim for in a print, impact, graphic quality, a focal point, lighting to create shadows and pattern. Those I think were his main points. We met him only only the once.

In the years that I have been a club member there have been so many changes in the holders of the various Offices, but very few have retained their roles for more than a few years. There are just two exceptions which I must mention. Jeff Wagner is one, he was our Club Chairman for an incredible 27 years. The position of Secretary is another outstanding example. Since I joined in 1968, the list of Club Secretaries is of just five names: Mike Musgrove, George Wallington, myself, Mike Hillman, and Alan Meeks. Alan really has been instrumental in keeping the club going now for many years. I will conclude these random thoughts with a very special vote of thanks to Alan for all his efforts.

M. Clift. 26.11.13