

A Short History of Knutsford Photographic Society

The following account is adapted from a presentation given by Roger Hume (our oldest member) to the Knutsford Photographic Society in March 2018.

Early beginnings

The society began in April 1949 with a small group of enthusiastic local photographers. The main driver behind the creation of the society was Hal Whittaker - who ran a photographic shop on Princess Street in town. He might have felt a society would help create further interest in the art of photography and in turn potentially help his business. However Hal was also a very competent photographer and the opportunity to share this interest with the townsfolk was a main incentive. A room was hired at the then Cranford Café, directly opposite his shop, for a 'get together' of potential members to meet and discuss the establishment of a Photographic Society. This proved successful and 49 people signed up to the fledgling society at a membership fee of 1 Guinea.

A slow start ...

The initial enthusiasm was not maintained however and during the inaugural season only around a dozen or so people attended club meetings. Even the new club secretary left after getting married. During that first season the club met at the then Liberal Club on Brook Street, now a social club. Over the next few years, membership numbers remained in the mid-teens and the club moved to the Old Town Hall which was then the home of the Knutsford Youth Club. The society was based there for many years up to the mid-1960s. The club then moved to the Tatton Room at the Civic Hall.

Popular events and increasing membership



In 1972 Alan Roberts (of the Roberts Bakery family) and a club member suggested a move to the gallery above the company's 'Anne's Pantry' shop in Canute Place. This was an ideal room for the display of prints - Alan Roberts had a long standing interest in art. This period and venue saw the establishment of the popular annual prize giving and the opening of the print exhibition, now established as a traditional event in the

town. During the 1970s the club membership numbers slowly increased towards the higher

30s, with the annual subscription being increased to £3.50. It was in 1977 that 2 of Knutsford Photographic Society's longest standing members joined, Roger Hume in 1977 and Walter Jones (who has been treasurer since 1993) in 1979.

No steady home



The gallery above the former Anne's Café in Canute Square

After 13 years at Anne's Pantry gallery the use of the gallery by the shop staff for storage meant the club was under pressure to move to an alternative venue. Initially a move to the Knutsford Leisure Centre was arranged. However during the years 1985 to 1994 a number of different rooms were used and club members became unsure on a weekly basis where the next meeting would be held. In general, the Attic, the Music Room or the Snooker Room were used. For two seasons 1994-96 the next home was a loft room, now demolished, at the rear of the White Bear Inn.

However being an L shaped room was a major problem, projecting around corners did not work! Annual subscription was now £8.50. It was during the 1980s that a number of current long-standing members joined; Sue Heath, Carol Sparkes and Fred McDowell who all joined in 1982. In 1988, Jane McHarry and Jean Emsley joined (Jean becoming club secretary in 1993/4).



Rear of the White Bear Inn, room now demolished

The next and longest held venue was the Stanley Centre based on the Community Hospital Site. It proved ideal for 14 years from 1996 to 2011 having good storage space, car parking and good catering. With the advent of digital photography members numbers steadily increased although sadly, the room became too small. When the threat of the site closure was announced it was time to seek more suitable accommodation.



The Stanley Centre, Bexton Road Knutsford

There followed 2 years of searching for a suitable venue; the first place tried was the St Johns Wood Community Centre which appeared to fit the bill with suitable rooms available which the club settled into. However, difficulties were encountered and reluctantly it was plain a more welcome home was required and the Society returned to the Tatton Room at the rear of the Civic Hall. It was an ideal location, centrally

located, with parking, tea making and storage facilities – with a perfectly sized room for the 2012/13 season. Once more difficulties arose when the whole complex was leased to a cinema group and the hiring costs became uneconomic for a small society. Finally however, a welcome base was found in the form of the Unitarian Chapel school room on Adams Hill – which has been the society’s home from 2013/4 season onwards.



The school room of the Unitarian Chapel – current home for Knutsford Photographic Society

Changing Photographic Trends

In the early years of the society there was almost total reliance on monochrome prints - with most members either having dark rooms or access to dark rooms. Other, larger clubs even had dark room and printing equipment available in club premises ! Early presentations were, therefore overwhelmingly of printed monochrome pictures. Exhibitions of prints in both monochrome and colour continued with colour starting to dominate from the 1960s onwards. The slow transition to colour did not totally kill monochrome printing however. With local firm Ilford being a leading film processor and producer of mono film and papers. Several Ilford employees were members of both the Ilford club and Knutsford Photographic Society, a trend continued even to this day.

Progressively the introduction of colour film and in particular positive material meant that projecting transparencies (slides) became an accepted and increasingly popular form of presentation. This medium began to dominate club night presentations for club members and visiting lecturers alike, from the mid-1950s until the advent of digital photography. Digital cameras are now completely dominant, but recent trends now include the use of smart phones and tablets to take pictures. The ability to digitally process pictures has

meant that the early days of dark rooms and photographers developing their own pictures have now become widely available for all.

Some notable events

Knutsford celebrated its 700th year charter in 1992 with many organisation staging events. The Society decided to run an open photographic competition in conjunction with both the Knutsford Guardian and Macclesfield District Council. Much work meant the society was able to get over £1000 sponsorship from local businesses for a variety of prizes. Following selection the prize giving ceremony was held at the Civic Hall with civic dignitaries, sponsors and prize winners present. During the 700th Celebrations Knutsford received a visit from HRH Princess Margaret and the society were invited to put on an exhibition of local work and the then President and Vice President Roger Hume and Sue Heath were introduced to Her Royal Highness.

To celebrate the Millennium (year 2000) Macclesfield Borough Council initiated a photographic campaign to record life throughout the borough. All camera clubs were involved and a number of KPS members volunteered. Rural shops, schools, local service vehicles and utility workers were amongst the activities recorded and subsequently a CD was produced with copies sent to all borough schools and other public bodies. The CD was shown to a number of places (such as retirement homes) by the club using digital equipment purchased with support via a grant from the Lottery following a successful application by the Treasurer, Walter Jones.

Influential Members

During the early years of the society, Hal Whittaker and Fred Done were important and successful members. Later Tony and Sandra Church added much to the clubs' running and quality of work. Peter Whitney had numerous club roles and as a keen astronomer produced superb moon shots using self-made, technical/astronomic equipment. Geoffrey and Beryl Gardener for many years hosted annual summer garden party evenings. As keen walkers Geoffrey insisted Beryl wore a red anorak to add a splash of colour to his landscapes !

Alan Mitchell who's trophy is fought for in a triptych competition annually was a valued past club secretary and with his son constantly strove to create new photographic techniques in pre-digital times. He also initiated the drawing up of the clubs constitution. More recently several members have greatly served the club, Walter Jones has served for many years as the Hon Treasurer, Jean Emsley for years was the club Secretary and Peter Spooner who joined in 1990 and has supported the club for so long with organising the club Annual Exhibition at the Library, providing yearly Photoshop talks, maintaining and setting up the digital equipment weekly and for many years being a regular room key holder.