

Watford Camera Club Events Report 2015 - 2016 and Portrait Special Interest Group

Events

Upon becoming Social Secretary I was keen to try and make social events fun as well as instructive. This was to encourage more members to get actively involved and to enhance our skills both individually and collectively.

At the time of writing we have had 14 events between since July 2015, 2 of which were repeated to cater for those who could not attend the first time around. They are as follows:

July: Box Moor Trust, with thanks to Elaine Rushton for providing access to the venue. This was reasonably well attended and we looked at both telephoto and macro photography.

August: Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. Well attended and we then went on to do some street and landscape photography. A fun day out, as these days always are.

September: Light Trails at Baldock, Hertfordshire. An outside instructor gave us insight into how to capture these images. Very well attended and was run twice to cater for the numbers.

September: A weekend in Paris. Despite initial enthusiasm only 4 of us ended up going. The weather was terrific and we all had a lot of fun. I even got a winning image of the Eiffel Tower from it! My thoughts are that this was a step too far as family and work commitments, as well as the cost involved made it prohibitive for many members. Should we do anything similar again?

October: Stag Rut at Bushy Park. Our annual pilgrimage was popular and another good day was had by all. A good lesson in wildlife photography as well as an early morning sunset. Only 1 idiot failed to capture stags rutting.

November: Gathered Leaves exhibition at the Science Museum. Another day in London but I never tire of them as there is always something new to see and learn.

December: A Woman's War at the Imperial War Museum. Fascinating insight into Lee Miller; American female war photographer.

January and February's weather dashed hopes of anything decent outside so I didn't arrange anything for these months. It was suggested that perhaps something else could be arranged. I'm happy to take suggestions for next year so that we have events to look forward to during the short days (my least favourite time of the year).

March: An attempt to practice light painting was aborted due to the rain and wind, so we went to the pub instead.

April: Superbikes at Silverstone. Thanks to Carrie for suggesting this and buying the tickets on our behalf. Despite Terri trying to dig a hole in the pavement with her head and

the freezing cold wind whistling through the stands we all got the opportunity to practice panning fast moving motorbikes. We all learnt something and had a good day out.

April: Early morning bluebells at Sarratt. Attended by around 10 of us, we got up at silly o'clock to walk to the woods. The bluebells weren't as spectacular as we would have liked but we all managed to get some good shots. Full English breakfast at the pub afterwards was well worth the early start. We practiced long exposures using a tripod as well as wide angle and telephoto shots to compress depth of field.

May: Sony World Photography Exhibition at Somerset House. Michelle is so clever that she arranged this event on the hottest day of the year thus far. This meant that I got my legs out and frightened the pigeons. The event gave us food for thought as we felt that many of our own images were comparable, if not better than those exhibited. Hopefully we can enter some ourselves this year. Lots of fun afterwards at Trafalgar Square, Soho and Covent Garden.

May: Whipsnade Zoo. We squeezed into 2 cars and had yet another fun day out. Some great shots and a perfect opportunity to practice photographing wildlife, albeit in a controlled environment. I believe that Bob went on the following Sunday but ended up as Billy-no-mates with regard to club members but had his family with him. As an aside, my wife and friend also came along and just mucked in with the rest of us, so these events don't have to be exclusively for members.

June: 1 lens challenge. An opportunity to explore how to capture images with just one camera body and a fixed length lens. A dozen or so of us took to the streets of London and wandered along the South Bank looking at the world in a different way. Unusual angles, landscape, portrait and street photography were the order of the day and some of the shots were stunning. We are now looking at making this a regular event, with the possibility of an award at the end of the year.

It was asked whether or not the challenge could run over a period of months and have the judging at a later date so that those who were unable to attend on the day to take part. My feelings are that the challenge should not be extended otherwise we are not comparing like for like; the idea is for everyone to be presented with the same conditions and the award should be given to the photographer who has the imagination and skill to capture the best image.

For the summer:

Microsculpture at Oxford University Museum of Natural History. Open until 31st October.
<http://microsculpture.net>

July: Hawk Conservancy Trust. A provisional date of 13th July was suggested but I am aware that many people cannot attend. I will try and arrange a date that accommodates the majority.

August: Travel Photographer of the Year at Greenwich. Suggested by Simon Peters. This event runs from 22nd July to September 4th, so perhaps an August event?

September 25th: Classic car rally at Champneys, Tring. A charity event. More details to follow.

For those that have not attended any of these events please try and do so. They are always a great deal of fun with a terrific group of people. Members of all abilities benefit from these days out as we are all happy to share knowledge.

Portrait Special Interest Group

After canvassing members it was decided to set up a special interest group to concentrate on portraiture, both in the studio and outside. We are fortunate to have the use of Alicia Grymel's studio in Watford at a very reasonably price and I'm delighted that she has now joined our club.

The first couple of occasions we used the club mannequin to practice setting up lights in a studio and experimenting with different set ups. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive so we then booked a professional model, Roisin, who had eyes to die for, spent a couple of hours with us at Alicia's studio where we put into practice everything we had learnt previously. This was also a good exercise in how to direct and speak to models as this can be a bit daunting if you haven't done this before.

The latest session was outside at some barns in Harpenden (thanks to Andy Lewin). We were lucky with the weather and had glorious evening sunshine. The venue was stunning and Andy pushed the boat out providing facilities for the models and refreshments for everyone. On this occasion we booked a male and a female model who threw themselves into the role with enthusiasm, providing some great opportunities for everyone to get some terrific Victoriana and Steampunk shots. Everyone had a really good time and were delighted with the models; they joined us for a drink afterwards and agreed that we would repeat the shoot.

I'm delighted that these events are well attended and I believe that everyone is learning a great deal. I know that some of our members have branched out on their own and starting booking studios and models themselves. This is what we wanted to achieve and if it raises the standard of our club's photography then it is all for the good.

I welcome any suggestions as to how we can move on.