

High Wycombe and District  
Camera Club

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THE FIRST FORTY YEARS  
1938 ~ 1978

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# How it all began

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## Proposed Photographic Society

Sir,—It is rather surprising that a town like High Wycombe should be without a photographic society. Many amateurs in the district feel that they are missing a lot by not being able to join a local organisation.

At the request of several of these keen followers of one of the most interesting and educative hobbies, I have decided to try and form a society. With this object in view, I approached His Worship the Mayor and several other prominent local men, who were all very enthusiastic about the scheme.

It will be necessary to obtain a permanent headquarters equipped with darkroom, etc., for the benefit of those who are unable to have their own dark room, and to enable the more advanced workers to help the beginners. We cannot do this, however, unless we are assured of a good membership. I have received promises of help from the Royal Photographic Society, photographic magazines, manufacturers and local dealers. It is now up to all keen amateur photographers in the district to rally round and start the club on a firm footing.

As it is a well-known fact that when a group of men get together they usually do more talking than acting, lady members are urgently required to keep them up to scratch.

Will all who are interested in photography (regardless of the value of their camera, whether 5s. or £50) please get in touch with me so that I can call a preliminary meeting to arrange details and select a committee.

E. F. HARMAN.

Highcroft, New Road, Booker.

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# A bright idea

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On 19th August 1938, the Bucks Free Press published a letter from Mr E.F. Harman of New Road, High Wycombe. It asked anyone interested in forming a camera club in the town to contact the writer.

About twenty people did just that and a fortnight later, on 1st September 1938 the first meeting of the High Wycombe and District Camera Club was held.

Here are some extracts from some of the replies to the Bucks Free Press letter:

'I'm writing to let you know that I'm very willing to support your meeting.'

***R. Rutland, High Wycombe***

'Success to your attempts to form a photographic club! Please count me in.'

***C.T. Mills, High Wycombe***

'I take it that the proposed society would be open to interested photographers in Wycombe and district.'

***A.J. Colville Aikman, Flackwell Heath***

'The district is full of keen young amateurs like myself and it is nice to know that at last we can get together for our mutual benefit.'

***S.W. Bennett, High Wycombe***

'As a frequent spoiler of much good bromide paper, I was very interested in your letter.'

***J.H. Francis, Hughenden Valley***

Many of these replies were written on postcards stamped with a George VI penny red and postmarked with the time as well as the date.

Some thirty people, including several ladies, were present at the Tudor Cafe in the High Street – above

the old International Stores – for that first meeting. Mr. Reg Rutland was elected chairman and he asked Ted Harman to explain what he had in mind. The only plan Ted had, having picked up photography at an early age from his father – he claims he was weaned on hypo – was for someone to form a club that he could join. However, the meeting had other ideas and elected him Treasurer and Secretary. A small committee was formed and Ted Harman was given a month to arrange a programme.

Within fourteen days, with the help of Amateur Photographer magazine, Ilford, Kodak and local dealers and chemists, the first six month's programme was prepared.

Mr Cyril Sweetland, a well-known High Wycombe photographer, donated a guinea, with the suggestion that it be used to affiliate the Club to the Royal Photographic Society.

The Club followed this advice and also elected Mr Sweetland President.

The subscription was fixed at 7/6d a year.

## Early days

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The Club was not the first photographic society in the town. The first lecture evening was devoted to a display of lantern slides taken by the original club around the turn of the century.

Here is the programme for the first six months:

23rd September 1938

General Meeting

6th October

Lantern Slides — taken before 1898. Loaned by Mr G.R. Bristow.

20th October

Demonstration — How to do your own developing and printing. Materials free by Messrs. Johnson & Sons. Rondinax Tanks loaned by Messrs. Agfa Ltd. Correx Tank loaned by Mr M.W. Keen. Development of roll film. 16 negatives of same subject with varying exposures and normal development to show characteristic curve and latitude of modern emulsions. Mr A.J. Colville Aikman.

3rd November

Criticism of Members' prints

17th November

Lantern Lecture. Night Photography. Loaned by Messrs. Ilford Ltd.

1st December

Demonstration. Flashlight. Materials by Messrs. Johnson & Sons.

15th December

Lecture. Camera lenses. Mr A.S. Lidiard.

5th January 1939

Exhibition. Amateur Photographer prize prints.

19th January

Lantern Lecture. Colour filters. Messrs. Ilford Ltd.

2nd February

A day in the life of an Air Force photographer. Mr A.G. Wood.

16th February

Lantern Lecture. Paper making. Mr A.J. Colville Aikman.

2nd March

Demonstration. Minature Photography. Mr G.B. Macalpine.

16th March

Lecture. Fine grain photography. Messrs. Burroughs Welcome.

The first few meetings were held at the Popular Hotel next to the old Technical School in Easton Street. The room cost 2/- a night plus 6d. for heating. After a few months, Mr John Mayes, Head Librarian, obtained for the Club the use of the Junior Library.

The summer syllabus for 1939 included several outings – to Hambledon, Beaconsfield, the Cotswolds, Marlow, Radnage and Great Hampden.

The first Annual Exhibition, judged by W.L.F. Wastell F.R.P.S., was held on 7th September 1939 after a very successful year. Adolf Hitler chose the same time to start a war but the exhibition was a great success.

## War years

# War years

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Not one to miss a trick, Ted Harman promptly volunteered for the Royal Air Force — as a photographer! He was accepted but put on deferred service until 1940 which gave a breathing space during which the Club could be put onto a war-time footing.

At this time, Stan Holbrook, then A.R.P.S. now F.R.P.S. and still an active Club member, joined the Club making his influence felt immediately by making the Club more exhibition-minded. The standard of the work improved dramatically as a result.

The war did not put a stop to the Club outings and on 27th May 1940, a 26-seater coach was hired for a trip to Chipping Camden. It cost £6 — or about 4/8d each.

When Ted Harman was finally called for service, the Club was well established but since he was fortunate — or astute — enough to be posted to No. 1 Photographic Intelligence Unit at Medmenham and since he continued to live at home, Ted was able to carry on with the life of the Camera Club.

Mr Keen loaned his studio on several occasions and W.A.A.F.s from Medmenham were conscripted as models.

Ted Harman's 'phoney war' could not last however, and he was posted to Italy. Miss G. Dunning took over the running of the Club until the end of the war.

In 1946, with old members and an infusion of new ones, the Club was able to hold another exhibition. Miss Dunning was able to use her influence as secretary to the Clerk of the Council and the Club was allowed to meet, free of charge, in the Rural District Council chamber. In such luxurious surroundings the



Club rapidly gained in strength, many of the Members then joining still being with the Club.

One of the difficulties of those times is illustrated by one of the rules for the 1947 exhibition:

'All prints must be mounted and, although hard and fast rules cannot be laid down owing to the shortage of mounting boards, members are asked to use light coloured boards . . .'

The first meeting of the High Wycombe and District Camera Club, 1st September 1938.



Still active members: *Ted Harman* (2nd row, 4th from right), *Miss G. Dunning* (next to Ted Harman) and *Bert Stroud* (behind Miss Dunning).

# Coming of age

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In 1948, Reading, Oxford, Newbury, Aylesbury, Amersham and Maidenhead clubs were invited to send a panel of six prints to compete for the High Wycombe Silver Shield at the Annual Exhibition. The Shield was won by High Wycombe in that year but lost to Newbury in 1949. It was regained in 1950 and 1951.

These clubs also got together to form the Bucks, Berks and Oxon Photographic Association, High Wycombe winning its first annual competition in 1950.

The programmes from the fifties included several 'modern' ideas including 'Fun with Electronic Flash', 'New Developments in Photography' and '35 mm Colour Slides'.

1952 was noteworthy for Ted Harman in his fourteenth year as Club Secretary – he was connected on the telephone, High Wycombe 872.

Theme subjects were introduced into Club print competitions during this year. They were: Texture, Within One Mile of the Guildhall, Christmas Spirit, Night Subject and Landscape.

In 1954, Barclays Bank moved next door to the Rural District Council offices and, for reasons of security, objected to the use of adjacent premises during the evening. Accommodation was obtained at the Wesleyan School in Priory Road which the Club enjoyed for several years.

The Club's 21st birthday was celebrated with a Coming of Age Dinner on 21st March 1959. It took place at Bassetbury Manor and cost 12/6d a head.

## Swinging sixties

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Stan Holbrook F.R.P.S. was President to launch the Club into sixties. The emphasis in lecture evenings was still on taking better pictures and Club Members numbered high amongst the lecturers. One of those that must have been highly entertaining was given on 20th April 1961 – ‘How do I do It’ by Len Rentmore.

A good question!

1962–63 was the Club’s Silver Jubilee year, with A.P. Biggs as President, and appropriately enough the Club Programme was printed in silver, on wedgwood blue.

The Silver Jubilee Dinner was held at the Swan Hotel, Pauls Row – where now the by-pass runs.

Ted Harman gave relatively few lectures on Club nights but he made one of his rare appearances on 31st October 1967 with ‘Colour and the Photographer’. In the same year, a small extra income was generated by the inclusion of advertising in the Programme.

The annual subscription at this time was 25/-.

In his 31st year as Secretary, 1969, Ted Harman rose to even greater heights with his election as President.

Meetings had been held in the Deeds Grove Methodist Hall since 1974 but through a contact at the High School, the Club was able to move to its most luxurious premises yet in the staff common room. The cushioned comfort made a welcome change from the hard church chairs and it was the envy of visiting clubs.

## Up to the present...

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The increased cost of the new accommodation meant a rise in subscriptions which were set at £2 in 1970. Inflation was staved off until 1973 when the subs jumped to £3 and again in 1975 to £4. The present level of £4.50 represents an increase of 800% in forty years.

The mix of lectures, competitions, outings and exhibitions developed over the years had formed into an accepted pattern by the seventies, designed to be of interest and use to all types of photographer. Membership rose to new heights, unaffected by the latest move to the Guildhall right in the centre of High Wycombe.

Now, in 1978, the Club has 84 members with an average attendance of about 60 at every meeting.

Photography in 1938, so far as the amateur was concerned, was monochrome — prints and lantern slides — but like all sciences, it has undergone many changes. Perhaps the most significant was the development of high-speed, laboratory processed 35mm colour slides which opened up colour photography to many people who previously had been daunted by complex procedures for producing their own photographs.

Even more modern, in amateur circles at least, are audio-visual displays of slides which fade and dissolve into each other, to the accompaniment of a sound track.

High Wycombe and District Camera Club can be proud that it is one of very few clubs that continues to excell in all fields of photography — monochrome prints, monochrome slides, colour prints, colour

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slides and audio-visual.

It was to improve Members' expertise in taking good colour slides that the Colour Workshop was formed in 1975, meeting at monthly intervals for practical and projection sessions.

But not only does the Club flourish, so does Ted Harman, now in his fortieth year as Secretary with some 1200 meetings and 80 outings behind him.

Two other founder-members, Miss G. Dunning and Mr Bert Stroud, are still active Club Members. And the Club retains its R.A.F. tradition with Squadron Leader John Cole F.I.I.P. now in his second year as President.

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## And beyond...

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Since Ted Harman's 'bright idea', the Club has always been run by the Members for the Members with the purpose of educating and entertaining. In many ways, the emphasis, as judged from the titles of lectures, has shifted somewhat from education towards entertainment. This has coincided with the 'popularisation' of photography to the extent that virtually everyone in the country must have taken at least one photograph in their life.

But Club photography, while open to everyone, is more than holiday snapshots. Competitions, within the Club and with other clubs, and the Annual Exhibition are the major means of advancing Members' photographic abilities.

And anyone who wants advice on any aspect of photography is certain to find a real expert amongst the Members who is only too willing to pass on useful information and advice.

Consequently, the life of the Camera Club really does have something to offer to everyone — beginners or advanced, amateur or professional. Above all, perhaps, it is a club that moves with the time while never losing its grip on the best of the past.



The Club wishes to thank  
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for printing this brochure.



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