



# SPS Newsletter

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Recognition

Well here we are again at the end of a Summer that has flown by, but haven't we had some gorgeous weather. So, here we are starting our new season in a few days' time with competitions and a Programme of speakers superbly arranged by Sue. I am sure our 89<sup>th</sup> year as a photographic society will be just as good as in previous years. Congratulations to John Leighton who has now taken on the role of President, you will find an introduction to him later in the Newsletter.

I hope you have all had a lovely time and managed to get away on some holidays. I had a super week in Northumberland in Monty the Motorhome and was delighted to be able to get out to the Farne Islands to see my favourite little birds, Puffins. They were gorgeous and all just arriving and settling down to nest. So watch this space you may well see one of my puffin photographs in a competition this year! I also managed to go to Derbyshire and Devon and have travelled far and wide gracing the fairways and greens of many clubs. And in a few days' time I will be celebrating a big 'O' milestone birthday, but you know what they say ... "You are only as old as you feel ..."

I am looking forward to curating the Newsletter again this year so don't be shy, send me some contributions. I'd love to hear what you have all been up to and where you have been visiting. A slight tweak that we are trying this year is to move to a bimonthly Newsletter, so let us know what you think.

And a plea on behalf of our Treasurer Sue.

*Subs are due on 1st September, £45 for the season, payable by BACs, Cheque or cash!*

*The door fee remains at £2 but should you wish to pay for the full season in advance its £54 please.*

*If you do pay by BACS can you let Sue know as she only gets a statement once a month and would hate to chase you after you have already sent the funds.*

And with her Programme Hat on, Sue has a space to fill on the Programme for a Members Night in January, February or March 2027 - if anyone is interested in finding out more and either sharing an evening or talking for the whole evening, on any subject of your choice please have a word with Sue.

Don't forget you can send me your contributions to my email address  
[172elizabeth@gmail.com](mailto:172elizabeth@gmail.com)

With my very best wishes

Liz xx

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## 02

### This is Me ...

*By John Leighton, President*

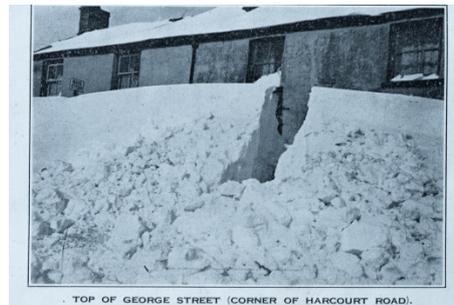
As we start another season of the Club we have a new President, John Leighton. Welcome John and I hope you have an enjoyable and successful year in office.

So, for those of you who don't know John that well, here's an insight to him in a quick fire question session.

#### Where were you born?

I was born at an early age in a Welsh town named Brynmawr which was then in the county of Breconshire (now Powys).

Brynmawr is situated at the highest point on the Heads of the Valley Road and therefore very cold in the winter. Images of the 1947 winter are attached showing the depth of the snow in the streets.



TOP OF GEORGE STREET (CORNER OF HARCOURT ROAD).



BEAUFORT STREET.



BACK OF "TOP SHOP" BEAUFORT STREET.

#### What were you like at school?

I attended Mill Street Secondary Modern School in Pontypridd, my favourite subjects being Physics, Maths, Woodwork and Geography.

#### How did you get into photography?

My interest in photography began when I was given a Brownie Model D box camera for Christmas at the age of 9. Little did I know at the time that some of the images I took would provide an interesting and emotional reference for some of my younger cousins many years later.

Since then there can be described as 2 main groups (film and digital) giving 4 main stages leading to the present day.



## Film Era

### First camera (film) Brownie Model D (Ilford).

Mainly used to take family pictures (B&W) and snapshots whilst on holiday. They have proved to be an interesting early record (1955 onwards) of some of my long-gone close relatives. One of my cousins who is much younger than me had never met or seen an image of her grandmother. Fortunately I was able to send her an image with other members of the family.

### Second camera (film) ILFORD SPRITE MK1

In my late teens I won a camera in a raffle organised by the Society of Radiographers. It was a plastic-bodied Ilford rangefinder with no focus but three aperture settings (F16, F11, F8). It used 35mm film and as slides were the in-thing at the time I was able to take colour and B&W photos.

This prize couldn't have arrived at a better time as I was ready to travel to Greece for a holiday to see my family. Together with my camera and a load of rolls of film (colour slides) supplied by my employer, I was ready for my holiday. The processing cost of the slides was not a problem as the cost was included in the price of the film which was free. I have digitised some of my images and have been able to share them with younger cousins.

### Third film camera (Chinnon CX film)

In 1976 I was motivated to purchase this camera by my colleagues and my interests developed into a wider range of subjects. We also had access to a darkroom where I worked, enabling us to develop our own films. I joined Rhiwbina Camera Club in Cardiff but due to the fact that I had a very busy life both photography and club membership came to a halt.

## Digital Era

### Cannon 350 D

In 2007 I won some money in a pub raffle (to the dismay of the regulars) and used the proceeds to purchase my first digital camera. I only used the jpg settings as I was unaware of the Raw format and image processing.

### When did you join Shirley PS and how did you find out about the Society?

I attended a short photography course on photography (Light 52) at Solihull Library in 2012. One of the members of that group (Len Harvey) had researched a number of clubs in the area and he recommended Shirley as being friendly and progressive. He was correct and we joined Shirley Photographic Society and I have enjoyed being an active member ever since.

### What equipment do you use?

I currently use a Sony A7iii camera and an Olympus OMD EM10 MK1 as backup and for street photography and travelling as it is very light. I keep promising myself a Sony 100 to 400 zoom lens! Maybe this year. I use Sony 90mm Macro, Sony 50mm f1.2, Tamron 28 to 75, Tamron 70 to 180 lenses.

### What are your current interests in photography?

My main interest during the past year has been photographing nature during my walks in my local fields and by the canal. Also still life, street photography and organised studio portraits sessions. I am fascinated by the options within Lightroom and Photoshop that enable us to create both artistic images or improve a scene such as a landscape. Frustrations occur when my settings don't behave the same as those on the YouTube tutorials, I am sure I am not alone in this opinion.



### What do you do in your spare time?

Besides photography, I have a number of interests ranging from keeping fit to art. I am a member of two art groups: Solihull Society of Arts and a small painting group where we meet on a Friday to draw/paint and drink coffee and eat cakes! Keeping fit includes walking and regular gym sessions at Tudor Grange where membership is free for grown-ups aged 75 and over!

In conclusion I am looking forward to our new season where we have an amazing programme organised by our very own Sue.

John

What did the snow say to the icy road?



Don't worry I have got you covered!

## 03

### Through the Lens ...

#### The Tragic Death of the Holiday Photograph?

I was reading an article recently about how the traditional travel snaps and albums have been replaced by the digital world of streams and selfies. I don't know about you but I love looking back through old photographs and albums and remembering happy places and people and it is such a shame that we very rarely produce hard copies of photographs any more. One thing I have done is embrace the digital world by creating photobooks with text etc. of the holidays I have been on. Not only do they create lovely memories but they are a nice thing to have on the coffee table.

In the good old days we referred to our photographs as 'snaps' as they literally were a snapshot in time of where we were and who we were with. Due to the cost of film and limited number of pictures we could take on a roll we were also generally more selective about what we took. In our digital world we often are guilty of taking numerous shots of the same image, I know I am. And do I religiously go in and review them and delete the ones I don't want, no I don't so I have thousands of images up there in the Cloud and always keep promising myself that one day when I have time I will go through them.

Generally there was no 'professionalism' to the image or ability to post-process it like we can today. Who remembers people with their eyes closed, shaky or unfocussed images or only getting half of the image you wanted, or as in my case I often had images of the floor and my feet! And the first thing we did when we got back from holiday was take our roll of film to the shop for processing, eagerly awaiting picking the photographs up a few days later and then showing them to our family and friends. Now we are living in a networked, Instagrammed digital world in which smartphones have largely replaced cameras and hundreds of pictures are taken daily that are rarely looked at and never printed or disappear shortly after posting. I wonder is it that we are losing our personal and collective history of holidays now? Did we also take more photographs of ordinary things or things that were really special and meant



something to us rather than images of food, quirky signs etc.? Also do we look at images in the digital world in a different way to how we would have looked at a traditional photograph. We probably thought more about the composition, light etc. back then but today all the software can correct that for us at the swipe of a finger or touch of a button. Are we really lazy picture takers now?

So if this piece has made you reflect on what you do with your photographs make a resolution to spend some time going through your photographs, printing some off and making albums. I bet you will enjoy it. And just think how many miles you may have scrolled with your fingers looking at images on your digital devices .... Probably as many miles as you have travelled on holiday!

# 04

## September

Here's a few reminders about the good old month of September.

- September used to be 'Septem'- the 7th month on the ancient Roman calendar. And then January and February were added and the name no longer makes sense
- In 1752, when the British Empire changed from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, we skipped 11 days of September, between the 2nd and 14th.
- The Harvest Moon in September is the fullest moon of the year.
- 1<sup>st</sup> September 1887, is when the world's first drive-in pharmacy opened. Located in London, this unique pharmacy allowed customers to drive up or ride horses to pick up their prescriptions without having to step out of their vehicles. And there we were thinking the 21st Century invented 'click and collect'!
- There are more pop and classic songs with "September" in the title than any other month.
- On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1666, the Great Fire of London started. The fire began at a bakery on Pudding Lane and lasted for four days, consuming over 13,000 houses and 87 churches, including the historic St. Paul's Cathedral.

### And special days to mark this month:

**1st September:** Back to Hogwarts Day (Harry Potter). Fans gather at Kings Cross Station

**2nd September:** 80 years since the document of surrender was signed by Japan (not officially VJ day- that's on 15th August).

**6th September:** Read a Book Day  and International Bacon day 

**8th September:** Star Trek Day 

**9th September:** International Sudoku Day (9th of September was chosen because Sudoku is traditionally played on a 9 x 9 board).

**13th September:** Roald Dahl Day and Stand Up to Cancer Day

**19<sup>th</sup> September:** Talk Like a Pirate Day



**21st September:** World Alzheimer's Day

**22nd September: Hobbit Day** - celebrate the birthdays of both Bilbo and Frodo.

**Autumn Equinox** (*Despite popular belief, the equinox is not always on the 21st. It changes date every year by 1 or 2 days*) 

**22nd-24th September:** Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year festival)

**26th September:** European Day of Languages

**28th September: Railway 200**  Celebrate 200 years of the modern railway.

## 05

### Is AI Making Us Lazy?

I have been playing with AI recently and have also discovered something called 'Co-Pilot' – it is amazing and frightening at the same time. Using it you can have an intelligent, adult conversation on any subject, it's really weird but you can see how if someone was lonely it could help them to have active conversations if there were no humans around they could talk to. It probably would help those shy of having conversations develop conversational skills and confidence.

Having seen Mick, Jolanta and others posting quite a few photographs of butterflies on their social media pages over the Summer I thought I would ask AI to write me something about butterflies. I asked it 'Tell me about Butterflies in the UK' and this is what it gave me in about 15 seconds flat. How impressed I was as it would have taken me ages to research and write the piece. Is AI making me lazy now ...? The other concern I have is whether it is telling me correct information or not, how do you know?

#### **Butterflies in the UK: A Glimpse into Britain's Fluttering Wildlife**

Butterflies are one of the UK's most cherished signs of Spring and Summer. With their delicate wings and vibrant colours, they bring beauty and ecological value to the British countryside, gardens, and urban green spaces. However, these remarkable insects are also indicators of environmental health - and in recent decades, their populations have seen troubling changes.

#### **A Diverse Community**

The UK is home to around 59 species of butterflies, including both resident and migratory types. Some of the most iconic include:

- Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*): A common garden visitor, known for its striking black, white, and red pattern.
- Peacock (*Aglais io*): Famous for its dramatic eye-spots that resemble a peacock's tail.
- Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*): Once widespread, now in decline, this butterfly is a familiar sight in gardens.



- Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*): Believed by some to be the original “butter-coloured fly” that gave butterflies their name.
- Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*): A long-distance migrant that arrives from North Africa in large numbers during warm years.

Some rarer species include the Duke of Burgundy, Silver-spotted Skipper, and Chequered Skipper, which are found only in specific habitats.

### **Habitats and Behaviour**

UK butterflies thrive in a wide range of habitats - woodlands, grasslands, meadows, heathlands, and even urban parks. Each species has specific host plants that caterpillars feed on, such as nettles for the Small Tortoiseshell and violets for the Silver-washed Fritillary.

Butterflies are cold-blooded and highly sensitive to temperature, which affects their flight and feeding patterns. Warm, sunny days are ideal for spotting them.

### **Threats and Conservation**

Sadly, around three-quarters of UK butterfly species have declined in the past 40 years, mainly due to:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by intensive agriculture, urbanisation, and infrastructure development.
- Climate change, which affects migration, breeding cycles, and availability of food plants.
- Pollution and pesticide use, which harms both caterpillars and nectar sources.

Organisations like Butterfly Conservation and The Wildlife Trusts are actively working to reverse these trends. Their efforts include creating butterfly-friendly environments, conducting annual butterfly counts, and promoting native wildflowers.

### **How You Can Help**

Even small actions can support UK butterflies:

- Plant native wildflowers like buddleia, lavender, and marjoram.
- Avoid pesticides and let parts of your garden grow wild.
- Take part in citizen science, such as the Big Butterfly Count, which helps track butterfly populations.

### **A Delicate Balance**

Butterflies are more than just pretty insects—they are vital pollinators and a key part of the food web. Their presence tells us much about the state of nature. By protecting butterflies, we protect the broader ecosystems they depend on and enrich our own lives in the process.

So there we have it an AI created piece of content. But have no fear I am not proposing that our Newsletter becomes an AI Newsletter any time soon. I can verify that all of our content is created by humans.



And although I cannot compete with those more competent photographers than myself here is a picture of a butterfly taken by my own fair hand this summer. Only problem I have had is that I cannot figure out how to get AI to tell me what type of butterfly it is ....! I think it could be a Red Admiral.



Why were butterflies not invited to the dance?



Because it was a moth ball!

## 06

### Behind the Scenes

Our first image and 'Backstory' this year is a stunning image and I think one that I will always remember as it was so striking. And, not being a snake lover at all, I am intrigued to hear how it was taken.



Hello, I'm Dave Cornish, and right now I'm at the end of my second season at Shirley in Group 1. I have been invited to give a little background to my snake picture "Emerald tree boa constrictor". When I first joined the Club I was hugely impressed by the members' landscape and nature images. The terrific locations, exotic creatures, birds, macro, insects etc, all superbly lit and pin sharp. After trying some bird, and insect shots of my own (*and not doing at all well*), I began to appreciate even more how good the club competition images are, and the skill and hard work needed to capture them.



In my first season I didn't have any pictures remotely close to being entered into these categories. So for this year I came up with the brainwave of trying my luck at the zoo. All the animals will either be in enclosures, pens, or cages etc. How hard could it be? Well, erm.....very hard actually. A lot of the outdoor enclosures have thick wire mesh, or murky glass to contend with. If and when the animals come out, they're certain to be facing the wrong way, or be half concealed by a bush with a man-made object right behind them. I then tried the reptile house, which I thought might have some interesting subjects to photograph. It certainly does, but the light levels are very low, and the reptiles are often in very busy artificial looking environments. Another problem with shooting through glass is the reflections you get: usually of yourself with your camera, but I was prepared ... let me pass on a great tip, and tell you how. There is an accessory you can buy from Amazon called a lens skirt. This is a soft collapsible silicone rubber cone that you put on one end of your lens, and then the other wide end gently placed onto the glass you want to shoot through. This should eliminate all reflections for you, as long as you position yourself fairly square on. There are different sizes, so please check you have the right size for your lens. It could also be useful for shop window displays, looking in, or out of cars, trains, buses etc. maybe aquariums?

So, after taking some lacklustre shots outdoors, and some okayish indoor reptile snaps it was time to see what the pictures looked like on the computer. Back home I quite liked the Boa in one picture but it was quite far away and had a terribly fussy background, so I started to crop in, and crop in, and then crop in some more and found I was left with a really nice "snakey" pose. After using Lightroom to edit the picture and accentuate the texture as much as possible I decided to make the print as large as I could, because I thought if I made it big for maximum "snakeyness" it would be a bit different from the other images.

On the Nature competition night the "Boa" did really well, and came 1st in Group 1 prints. Shortly after, I received more good news - the image was going off to the annual 6 way club competition as one of Shirley club's entrants. This year the competition was held in Bournville, and for anyone who hasn't been to one of these events I could really recommend it. To see all the top prints from our nearby clubs makes for a really good evening - tea, and biscuits too! Matched against such high quality work the "Boa" was one of the first to be eliminated. The judge for the evening, Dave Tucker, pointed out some areas that needed improvement, and I totally agreed with his critique. The trouble is how come it's so flippin' obvious to see these errors when it's too late!

Ah well it's all good fun, and a chance to learn a little bit as you go along. Let me leave you with this question ...

What do you get if you cross a snake and a lego set?

Answer: A Boa **Constructor!**



A woman tried to order an exotic snake online but was surprised to find that when the package arrived, it contained only feathered scarves.

Looks like the boa cons tricked her!



# 07

## Out and About

### Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire

*By David Venables*

An Enjoyable day out on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2025 at Hanbury Hall, a country retreat in the heart of Worcestershire.



The house and garden, originally a stage-set for summer parties, offer a glimpse into life at the turn of the 18th Century. Don't miss the original wall-paintings by Sir James Thornhill. Full of drama and politics, they show the birth of Georgian society.

The original formal gardens, designed by George London, have been faithfully recreated. They complement the relaxed later gardens, with orangery, orchards and walled garden.





# 08

## Competition Corner

### September Competition

Here's this month's little teaser.

A doctor and a bus driver are both in love with the same woman, an attractive girl named Sarah. The bus driver had to go on a long bus trip that would last a week. Before he left, he gave Sarah seven apples. Why?

So get your thinking caps on and send me your answer by email to:  
[172elizabeth@gmail.com](mailto:172elizabeth@gmail.com)

Closing Date for Entries: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

# 09

## External Recognition

*If any of you enter any competitions and get any external recognition then please drop me a line so that I can add it into the Newsletter. It's great to see what everyone is up to and the accolades they receive.*



***See you next in November 2025!***