

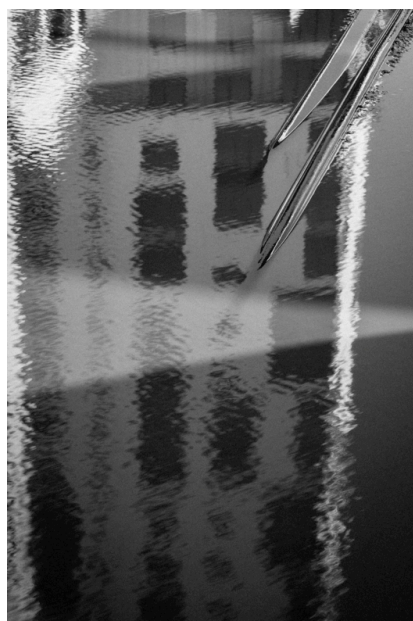
# concept

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THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY

**CONTEMPORARY  
GROUP**

e-newsletter



Fragments 4  
From Contradictions  
© Peter Ellis LRPS

**Welcome** to the first 2016 issue of **concept** the e-newsletter of the Contemporary Group.

A Happy New Year to all our members and hopefully 2016 will bring lots of promise in terms of our contemporary photography (and lots of good reading in our newsletter!).

Exciting things are already happening this year with a contemporary exhibition at Fenton House in Bath. Nigel Tooby FRPS exhibits **Eye Spy**.

We also have a new custodian of the Portfolio Box Scheme, Duncan Unsworth. Duncan takes over from Anne Crabbe. Our thanks go to Anne for all the work and effort she

has put into making the Portfolio Box such a successful scheme.

Volunteers are essential in providing the many activities of the Contemporary Group and at present we need a new Webmaster, If you are interested there is more information about this on the last page.

On the sub group front it is good news that the Scottish Group is now active again and hopefully, if all goes well, there could be a Thames Valley Group in the near future.

On New Year's Eve I photographed the Viking Fire Festival held in Flamborough Yorkshire. I seemed to be one of the very few with a traditional camera and I was surrounded by hundreds of phones and tablets. BBC2's programme What to Buy and Why, shown on Friday 15th January included a comparison of compact cameras with phone cameras and for most things the phone camera came out on top! There you have it. It was *Dorothea Lange* who said "A camera is a tool for learning how to see without a camera"

Christine Pinnington LRPS  
Editor

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# Eye Spy

## Nigel Tooby FRPS at Fenton House

Eye Spy is a series [originally] of 18 pieces created in 2014 for homeless charity Simon on the Streets (SotS) to provide images for their 2015 calendar and to raise awareness of the plight of the charity's service users. Nigel is artist in residence for the charity and is a member of the Society's Contemporary Special Interest Group.

Mainly photographically based, the series avoids the usual cliché images of the destitute in crisis situations and instead opts to show life through the eyes of the homeless and dispossessed. Accordingly, the work is devoid of the homeless themselves. It places the viewer in the role of the service user to show some of the experiences endured by the people to which SotS is committed to work.

Taken together, the work is moving, hard-hitting and in parts very distressing. It gains its power not just from the images themselves and the mode of presentation but crucially from focussing on what is seen as opposed to indulging any obsession with the one who is seeing.

Eye Spy was exhibited in Harrogate in October 2014 at the launch of the 2015 calendar generating much needed funds, as well as significant all-media publicity, for the charity and its invaluable work.

Simon on the Streets work exclusively with the hardest cases, often those for whom the established agencies have failed and for this reason they eschew traditional state funding and its 'targets'. They are independently funded and this allows them the freedom to take as much time as is needed to gently recover their clients from the very furthest margins of destitution.

During 2015 one further work was added to the series. Jamie Ross is designed to show the results of the charity's work. Whilst many clients are lost to hypothermia, violence and suicide, Jamie is by no means alone in being rescued and re-established into mainstream society. Jamie Ross balances the harsh reality of the series, declares a strong message of hope for all those on the very margins of society and stands testament to the very successful work of the charity.



Untitled SotS No 4  
© Nigel Tooby FRPS

This series, now of 19 works, is exhibited at Fenton House in its entirety for the first time.

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*"This is the first time that we have had an installation of this kind at Fenton House (RPS HQ) and it is certainly generating debate. Nigel has used his photography to convey a hard-hitting message, as well as focusing attention on the charity, in a unique way visually. His mode of presentation, which includes an image on a concrete slab and a rolling film on screen as well as framed prints, engages the viewer very directly. There is a real sense of a story unfolding as you move around the exhibition and the unusual viewpoint of the images draws the viewer in and does not fail to provoke a reaction and an emotional response".*

Lesley Goode, Exhibitions Manager, RPS Bath

**The exhibition runs from 15th January to 26th February 2016.** Opening hours: Monday - Friday, 9am - 4.30pm (Closed Bank Holidays). Address: The RPS, Fenton House, 122 Wells Road, Bath, BA2 3AH  
Contact: [exhibitions@rps.org](mailto:exhibitions@rps.org)

## Green Shoots at the Scottish Contemporary Group



Following several attempts to restart the Scottish Group a successful meeting was held on 22 November at Edinburgh Photographic Society. An enjoyable afternoon was spent looking at members' work and giving advice by all members. The relaxed atmosphere enabled everyone to contribute without feeling overwhelmed by speaking in front of a formal meeting. The next meeting will be held at Edinburgh PS on 3rd March 2016 between 1 & 4pm. All members of the Scottish Group are welcome. Please bring your prints and ideas.

For further information please contact David Fells LRPS at [davidfells111@gmail.com](mailto:davidfells111@gmail.com) or by phone 07563756137.

### **Congratulations go to Tony Bramley FRPS**

Tony recently gained his Fellowship in the Conceptual and Contemporary category. The panel's concept being 'Transitional Photography through Geometric Abstraction - Suprematism'.

More of Tony's work will be featured in a future newsletter but his panel can be seen on the RPS website and will feature in the March issue of the RPS Journal.

Well worth a look.

## **New Sub-Group – Contemporary Thames Valley**

Interest has been shown by some members in the formation of a Contemporary Thames Valley sub-group. We already have active groups in the Southwest, Northeast, Northwest, Scotland and East Anglia. We are keen to encourage the formation of groups in other regions of the RPS and to this end we are appealing for those who may be interested to initially contact our Secretary Peter Ellis.

These groups operate autonomously but obviously need someone to act as a coordinator/contact point so please indicate if you are able to help. No committee, just a get together of like minded individuals to discuss images and projects and perhaps work on a joint project.

Contact Peter here; [wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com](mailto:wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com)

# Contradictions

## An Orwell Narrative

Tom Owens  
The East Anglian Contemporary Group

The East Anglian Contemporary Group was brought together by the suggestion of Stewart Wall, and ex-Ipswich resident who had noticed the transformation of the docklands upon visiting family after a few years absence. It was decided at the outset that the people invited to join this group would be by open invite and totally inclusive regardless of affiliation or ability. Enthusiasm and free thinking were deemed important.

The initial suggestion was based upon the Ipswich Wet Dock but the effect of docklands at the mouth of the Orwell have had a profound effect upon how the transformation has happened in what was once the largest wet dock in Europe. We are now exploring the docklands of the Orwell as a group.

The group is made up of amateur, professional and ex-professional photographers and artists who use photography. One of the dilemmas we face is that none of us wants to be fitted into a box of conformity and the brief is open to make images that reflect the viewpoints and interests of the photographer or artist. The other dilemma, both our strength and weakness, is that we are all lone-wolf type image makers. We do not wander around in packs apart from one location that I'll explain later. Rather, we shoot when we want to and when conditions or events conspire to make it effective. To this end we are operating an open book that we will gather in chapters of work soon to edit into a narrative of sorts. We don't know if we will produce a book but a collaborative book project would be interesting if not difficult to edit as we all have very individual styles. Obviously there is nothing new with this problem. Like most things in photography it has been done before.

We had a recent meeting of active members of the group and the very nature of what we are facing in terms of a brief surfaced as 'Contradictions' and this is now our working title.

Everywhere we look we are faced with contradictions. The construction of the Wet Dock was one of the first Acts of Parliament that Queen Victoria signed and it opened just 6 years after the dawn of photography. It is reputed to be one of the most documented docks in the country. One of the obvious contradictions we are faced with is access. The original Act gave public access to the Common Quay so for years the public could stroll in and out of slings of cargo being loaded or discharged into carts or railway wagons. Then there are new aspects to the dock where the freedom to roam is not permitted. The port operators refused our request to document aspects of the commercial operations, yet the Provost of UCS facilitated our access to the top of one of the University buildings on the dock to give us a high level vantage point. This is the only place where we as a group work together when making images as we have to work in a group of two or more for health and safety reasons. The last section of access requires a 14 foot vertical climb and all equipment has to be hauled up and lowered on ropes. We have done this just twice so far.

We are trying to get involved with 'Photoeast', an international photo event that will take place in May/June this year. We think exhibitors are all done and dusted but whilst there is still hope we will keep pressing for space as it will be focussed on the Wet Dock for the inaugural event.

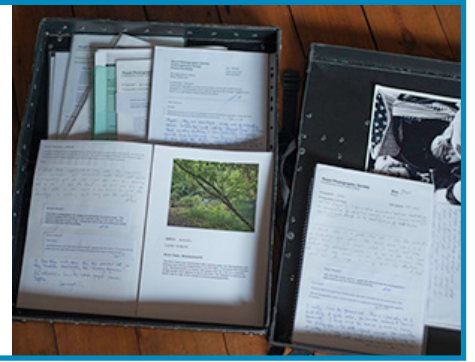
'Residential'  
© Keith Locke



Wet Dock Panorama  
©Tom Owens ARPS



# The RPS Contemporary Group Postal Portfolio Box Scheme



The RPS Contemporary Group Postal Portfolio Box scheme has been running for over 25 years which is a testament to its success. Much of the continued success of the scheme should be attributed to Anne Crabbe who has been running the scheme for 10 years now. Anne has now decided it is time for her to step down and so it is both with excitement, and a little trepidation, that I take on the mantle of running the scheme. No doubt all the current and previous members of the scheme will join me in thanking Anne for all the work she has done over the years.

The Postal Portfolio Box scheme now has three circuits of 10 or 12 members in each and a set of 4 or 5 boxes attached to each circuit. As the boxes go round their circuits each member puts in their work, which is usually up to half a dozen prints or a book of a new or ongoing project, together with a brief statement. Importantly each member also critiques the work put into the box by the other members. When the box returns to a member they add new work but leave in the work that they inserted in the previous round so that all the members get the chance to read what has been written about all the work. Thus each member has two pieces of work in a box at any one time – one already critiqued and one waiting to be critiqued. It seems to take just under a year for a box to travel around a circuit. Most members find using services such as My Hermes and Collect+ works well to send the boxes to the next person in the circuit and keeps the cost down. Currently the scheme is limited to members in the UK including Northern Ireland.

From a personal perspective I have found the box scheme both surprising and enlightening. My initial surprise was not only the variety and quality of work inserted but also the time and effort required to do it justice. In an age where most photography is consumed in a glance before clicking on the computer mouse to the next image the box scheme encourages one to slow down and look more carefully at images. Having to write about the images certainly makes me spend quite a time looking at the work in the boxes and as a consequence read more into the images than I might otherwise have done. Getting comments back on my own work has been very interesting. Most of the comments I have received have been largely positive frequently with pertinent questions and useful suggestions. However, if I did put some poor images in the box I would expect to be honestly told I had. Reading how other people react to your work can be enlightening and surprisingly varied (occasionally completely contrasting) but then everyone has their own opinions. Recently I received a box into which I had put some images from a project that had stalled a couple of times. The comments I received made me think about my original parameters and change one of them completely - my project is now flourishing and much better thanks to the box scheme. As I recently read that to be an artist you need to be both critical and open to honest criticism.

Every couple of years members from all three circuits meet together for a residential weekend (a report of the one held last year was in a previous edition of Concept). Not only does this give the chance to put faces to names but also to meet the members of the other circuits. Apart from the socializing it was great to see the work from the other circuits as well as images I had already seen from the circuit I belong to but with the chance to talk in more depth about the work.

As I take on the task of running the scheme I would welcome any ideas and suggestions as to how to progress the scheme in the future.

Duncan Unsworth  
[duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com](mailto:duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com)  
07740 051519

## Contemporary Group Journal experience on [www.issuu.com](http://www.issuu.com)

The RPS Director General has recently suggested that RPS Regions, Groups and Chapters use an RPS subscription to the general publication website [www.issuu.com](http://www.issuu.com) to upload their publications.

The Contemporary Group has been uploading the Group Journal Contemporary Photography to [issuu.com](http://issuu.com) since November 2012. It is placed on this service 1 month after printed copies are posted to Group members. To date there have been 13 Journals uploaded, with reader numbers as follows:

- Autumn 2012 778
- Winter 2013 282
- Spring 2013 94
- Summer 2013 213
- Autumn 2013 743
- Winter 2014 460
- Spring 2014 179
- Summer 2014 124
- Autumn 2014 228
- Winter 2015 213
- Spring 2015 66
- Summer 2015 279
- Autumn 2015 444 to date

Reader numbers show considerable variations across issues, but have settled down to an average of around 250 per issue.

An analysis of over 500 Journal readers in the 6 months up to February 2015 showed 55% from the UK, 23% from Europe (East and West combined) and the remainder from countries all around the world.

### Followers

Readers of Issuu can choose to 'follow' a publisher. That means they are notified of new publications from them. There are currently 48 readers who have chosen to be followers of the Group Journal. 13 are from the UK, 13 from Europe, 8 from Mexico and South America, 4 from the USA and 10 from other countries around the world.

### Conclusions

The geographic spread of Readers and Followers indicates that many of the Group Journal readers on Issuu are unlikely to be members of the RPS and that [issuu.com](http://issuu.com) has enabled a much wider outreach than was originally expected to be the case.

Contemporary Group members receive printed Group Journals, giving them a permanence, as against on-line versions. Group members however have the opportunity to point others to the Group Journal by suggesting they visit [www.issuu.com](http://www.issuu.com) and search for Contemporary Photography. Note that, as [issuu.com](http://issuu.com) is a general site for publications, there will, of course, be other publications that show up from this search, but Group ones can easily be found.

Brian Steptoe FRPS, 12 Jan 2016

## The North East Contemporary Group Meeting

14th November 2015

Patricia Ruddle, the group's organiser asked for a volunteer to write about the meeting, and we had dead silence ...I volunteered to write about the afternoon's meeting. So where do you start, myself not being a man of the written word, and looking at the last meeting's report, (by Christine Pinnington), a lot of detail ... Well that's the formal bit ... now we need some detail:

The meeting was held at the Royal Oak in York with 12 members in attendance. Janet Cook was first to present her project The Sky Boatyard. A series of images was projected on this mini project, outlining colour, shape and texture of boat bits and bobs. The story was about the owner, but not the normal view that you may expect from a photo journalistic article on a boat yard but trying to go beyond that. Images of deep shadows, discarded paint cans and rags, a silhouette of the owner through the window of his vehicle. Words do not give the images justice, and it is hard to describe the colours and the feeling of this project. A single image would tell you nothing, a series tells the story.

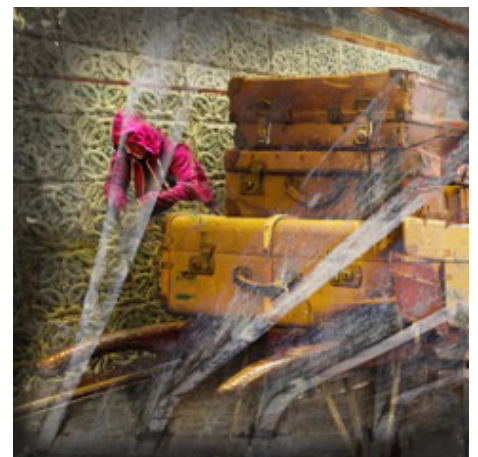
Peter Bartlett brought along set of images which looked like his family holiday snaps. Taken when he was on holiday, the story behind these images is of people taking photos. The human element, a group of people all facing away from you, completely involved in getting that snap. And then one person is looking in the opposite direction. What has she seen? Me? Or just another random snap? One of the best images (in my opinion) was of a young couple - he was holding out his selfie stick trying to capture yet another snap of them both, but the look of boredom and "don't want to be here" on her face - it's not just another selfie.

Ken Phillips is still working towards contemporary and being a keen camera club man, was describing and debating comments on his images from various judges. A judge is every part of club photography and beyond. It makes every photographer keen, hungry and ambitious to chase the holy grail of photography - that trophy or gold medal. Ken showed some really good images and one particular image was of a young girl sitting in a wheel chair with a hand out holding the handle of an adjacent cycle. This was a very moving image, sadly not appreciated by the club judge.

Gordon Bates presented his project on badly maintained and sited art work. There were some great images with good composition with lines and colour. One in particular was a steel square tower, not large but slender with four-coloured panels which were lit at night. Two shades of red followed by two shades of blue. The tower was situated on the boundary of two counties. But like most of the photos, this art piece was not maintained. It no longer was lit at night and it was showing signs of neglect. Another piece was an outline of a train made in steel. Its location was to the side of a major retailer shed. Weeds had taken over around the art work and the paint was peeling. Finally the last image was the one that we discussed the most. This was in the centre of a mini roundabout. It was sculpture above road level, of a pit pony, man, woman and child. With a back drop of a miners' terrace house. The overall project portrayed a different angle on art work and although this was work-in-progress I am sure there is a lot more to be said and seen.

My own presentation was a small AV. It was not intentional to have AV, but I had made this for another presentation. The work was entitled the Margate Project, Margate being a seaside town in south east England. It was mainly served by tourists from London's East End and became a very popular holiday spot, similar to Blackpool or Skegness. The town was a very prosperous town in its heyday but like many, could not survive the down turn of cheap holidays abroad. The project shows the down side of a holiday town, boarded-up buildings, peeling paint, a run-down town trying to revive itself. There was a large number of images shown and the AV finished with its 'seedy' sound tracks. It's a project in progress.

Graham Evans presented his project on Berwick-upon-Tweed. Again, a different angle on the down turn of a town's prosperity. The images shown were not just of empty and boarded-up properties but of the To Let signs and shops closed up and run down. One particular image was of a poster on a boarded up area asking for artists to paint the boards -



Traveller

“please call this number”, but even the vandals or spray painters couldn't be bothered. Maybe it was new and they had not got round to it yet. One image was of a sign on an old shop saying something like Berwick-up-on-Tweed cockles, another saying this branch is closed, “Nearest branch 20 miles away” !

David Edge showed a project about a small joinery manufacturing base. Again the images portrayed a different angle to what we expected. The images depicted men working with their hands in the joinery shop, carrying out day-to-day duties. The angle of approach was the concentration on the men at work. In their hands and eyes. So it was not just a joinery shop where things were made. The angle was to show the concentration via environmental portraiture and good camera art to convey the project.

Finally Neil Wittmann brought along his successful A panel in the Conceptual and Contemporary category. All I can say wow! Very different. You may think it was a visual art panel but no it was contemporary. Very deep and creative in its approach. It was hard to follow that, but I would recommend you to have look on the RPS website Galleries.

Unfortunately we then ran out of time. So at the next meeting we look forward to seeing some of Nigel's Tooby's recent work. We also look forward to seeing projects from Graham Low and Elaine Gosal-Tooby.

**Neil Whittman's Panel will be featured in more detail in the February newsletter.**

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## **Gathered Leaves: Photographs by Alec Soth**

**Coming to Bradford Media Museum**

This exhibition is currently on at the Science Museum in London (reviewed by Brian Steptoe in the October newsletter) and moves to the Bradford Media Museum 22 April – 26 June 2016.

This exhibition presents his four signature series – Sleeping by the Mississippi (2004), Niagara (2006), Broken Manual (2010) and the most recent, Songbook (2014) – and highlights his remarkable career and distinctive vision.

<http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/planavisit/exhibitions/AlecSothGatheredLeaves/About>

## **Photobook Bristol Weekend** 10-12 June 2016

Speakers include:

**Ken Grant :: Mark Power :: David Solo  
Laura El-Tantawy :: Amak Mahmoodian  
Dragana Jurisic :: Martin Parr :: Krass Clement  
Yumi Goto :: Ivars Gravlejs :: James Barnor  
Mariela Sancari :: Ania Nalecka.**

These are a very international set, from the U.S., Japan and several European countries. In addition to speakers, there will be book sales tables from about 20 Photobook publishers. Local artisan food is provided, there is a barbeque on one day, a bar open during breaks and the Saturday evening usually ends with music and dancing, for those staying up late.

There is a lower price booking rate applicable until the end of January.

For more details.

**[e: photobook.bristol@gmail.com](mailto:photobook.bristol@gmail.com)**

Photobook Bristol Festival  
Southbank Club  
Bristol BS3 1BD

**<http://www.photobookbristol.com>**



## Vacancy for a New Webmaster

We are in need of a new Webmaster. The task is not onerous but needs an understanding of IT. The Webmaster would work under the guidance of the committee ensuring events, blogs and other news items are kept up to date. You would be expected to attend committee meetings once or twice a year. If you feel that you would like to contribute to the Contemporary Group in this way please contact our Secretary **Peter Ellis** at [wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com](mailto:wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com)

## What's on

### 7th February - Contemporary South West Meeting

Dartington, Devon. For address details contact Rod Fry FRPS.  
[rod@rodfry.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:rod@rodfry.eclipse.co.uk) tel: 01803 844721

### 3rd March - Scottish Group Meeting.

Edinburgh PS between 1 & 4pm

Contact David Fells LRPS at [davidfells111@gmail.com](mailto:davidfells111@gmail.com), tel: 07563756137.

### 19th March - Contemporary North East Meeting.

Venue to be announced.

Contact Patricia A Ruddle ARPS.

[patriciaruddle@btinternet.com](mailto:patriciaruddle@btinternet.com) tel: 01904 783850

### 20th April - Conceptual and Contemporary Distinction Assessments for ARPS and FRPS.

Fenton House, Bath. Applicants and observers may attend the Associateship assessments.

ARPS enquiries [arps@rps.org](mailto:arps@rps.org)

FRPS enquiries [frps@rps.org](mailto:frps@rps.org)

Deadline for contributions for inclusion in the February issue is 20th February 2016.

News, reports, reviews, publicity, profiles, images, in fact anything of interest in the contemporary world. If you have any contributions you would like to have included, please email to:

[photopinni@btinternet.com](mailto:photopinni@btinternet.com)

*Christine Pinnington LRPS*

*Editor, concept*

*the e-newsletter of the RPS Contemporary Group*

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