

Changes in Photography

Swanland



u3a learn, laugh, live

John Knox reflects on his contribution to photography in our u3a and how the work of Swanland u3a Photography Groups has changed over the last 30 years. It is no surprise that these changes have been driven by computers and Information Technology.

John Munson.



Kodak Instamatic

Like the majority of us in the u3a my first experience of photography was with a film camera. I believe it was with a Kodak instamatic in the early 1960's. In the early 70's I bought a single lens reflex camera (a Zenit EM, very heavy and built like a tank). I then enrolled at a local photography Night Class hoping to learn something about photography. Well, that didn't last long as they all seemed to be a bunch of old men primarily concerned with bragging about how much better their cameras were. (such as the Pentax ME super, which incidentally my Mother-In-Law bought about the same time and I still possess it to this day).

Having just got married and started a new career the photography soon came to an end until our children arrived which prompted a revival in my photography. At this time my Mother-In-Law was a keen photographer and always showing her many slides of holidays and family. As slides seemed to be a good way of showing others what you had taken that seemed to be the way to go for me, resulting in boxes and boxes of the things.



Zenit EM 35mm SLR



Pentax ME super 35mm SLR

As time went by family, work and another career change meant that photography was again abandoned until retirement in 2007. At this time, we had heard about Swanland u3a and signed up, initially joining the walking groups which I still attend to this day. Another of the Swanland groups was photography which I quite fancied, however for several years I tried to join but it was always full.

In the meantime, I was determined to pursue my interest in photography and found that a group in Skidby had an annual exhibition. I went along and was greeted by very welcoming people with a fantastic display of photographs. They persuaded me to join and I stayed with that group until about 2020 when Covid arrived. It was with that group that I learned what I know about Photography.

Now back to the u3a. It was decided in about 2011 to start a second photography group. I immediately enrolled and we had about a dozen members. Of course, when I joined the u3a and the Skidby group photography had undergone major changes since my earlier attempts. It had gone digital.

In the early 2000's I had a digital camera and the resulting photographs were grainy and of low quality. I was convinced digital would never rival film. How wrong I was. In 2007 when I retired, I bought a Nikon Compact Camera with a 10-megapixel sensor, the resulting photographs were seemingly good at the time. However, when seeing what other people were producing with digital single lens reflex cameras (DSLR) I soon found it was time to upgrade so I purchased a Canon 60D DSLR which served me well for several years and subsequently upgraded again later.



Nikon Compact



Canon 60D EOS Series

Members of the group mainly had DSLR cameras with interchangeable lenses or bridge cameras, similar in shape and size but the lens is not changeable but does have zoom.

These cameras generally had full frame 35mm sensors or the smaller APSC sensors, both capable of producing images good enough for printing large photographs for display.



Fujifilm Finepix S8600 Bridge Camera

What did we do in the u3a Photography group? Well, we followed a similar pattern to the original group, meeting in each other's houses once a month. Generally, we had a topic for the month, each member would take photos of their interpretation of the subject and present them for discussion at the following meeting. (Pictures were put onto a memory stick to show on a TV screen via a laptop).

Over the years we have had people with varying degrees of expertise and cameras. In true u3a style we helped one another with mixed degrees of success. Especially in the early years we did go out on some photo shoots around Hull, the Fair, Hornsea, Flamborough etc. however as the group changed and we all got older these outside visits dropped off.

At our review sessions some of our more informed members of the group would occasionally give instruction on various technical issues to do with technique, camera settings and photo enhancement with programs such as Lightroom or Snapseed etc.

In the early 2000's cameras were incorporated into cell phones however the small sensors and lens limitations meant that the photos were not suitable for any sizable enlargement.

Around 2008 Mirrorless cameras came to the fore, these had interchangeable lenses like the DSLR's but with slightly smaller sensors and no mirror, they are lighter and more portable also what you see through the viewfinder is extremely clear.



Panasonic Lumix G1 SLR

Panasonic and Olympus collaborated and introduced the micro four thirds system with more compact lenses. I bought one around 2015 and still use it today. Other manufacturers produced their own versions and with modern developments they produce extremely good results.

Manufacturers are constantly developing their products and Smart Phone technology has developed in leaps and bounds. Gone are the low-quality pictures of the early past. They now have multiple lenses to enable you to take wide angle, normal and telephoto shots, more efficient sensors, controls for altering the speed, aperture, sensitivity and ISO. As well as settings for scene modes such as night time, portrait, food, panorama, macro etc. and even a lens for your selfies. They have apps for editing and enhancing your photos, and of course you can share them with friends straight away. Eventually some of our u3a group did prefer to use mobile phones rather than a camera. The growth of smart phone sales has had an impact on camera manufacturers leading to some of them going to the wall.

The u3a group continued into the early 2020's about the time of Covid, but with declining numbers it eventually folded. In 2023 there was an attempt to start a new group, we tried to run a short course for beginners but with too few members it only lasted a few sessions.

There is now a new group with a handful of regular members that operates in the same way as previously mentioned and some that just like to turn up for a cup of tea and look at the pictures. Some use cameras, some phones it doesn't matter which you use - it's the results that matter.

John Knox.