



The  
Royal  
Photographic  
Society

# Victorian Chapter NEWSLETTER

April 2008

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. Incorporated by Royal Charter

Editor: Ann Lanagan. Ph.9457 3233

email:alanagan@optushome.com.au

Secretary: Elaine Herbert. Ph.9866 3538

email: eherbert@alphalink.com.au

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## **APRIL CHAPTER MEETING: an Evening with Roy Robertson FRPS**

At our April meeting we had the pleasure of meeting Roy Robertson FRPS, Member of Council and Scottish Region Organiser, and his wife Barbara, who were making a short visit to Melbourne before heading off to Mungo, Sydney and Perth. The Committee had already spent the afternoon discussing RPS matters with Roy, and after a pub meal we went on to meet the rest of the Chapter at the home of Palli Gajree Hon. FRPS.

Several of our members had brought some of their work to show Roy, and it was interesting and indeed useful to get an outside perspective on this. Even those of us who belong to other photographic organisations tend to narrow their interests to what is going on in Australia.

After a slight hiccup in proceedings due to computer incompatibility, we were able to see some of Roy's own work, which is indeed totally different from anything any of us is attempting. Working mainly in black and white, Roy showed us Scottish landscapes ( some extraordinary trees) and a series of dancers in motion, featuring swirls of light with only the suggestion of a person among the pattern. He also showed a series of three scenes of the same street showing the changes that have taken place over the years, the only remaining feature now being the cobblestones.

It was helpful to those thinking of applying for Distinctions to have the criteria clearly laid out for us, from basic mastery of technique at Licentiate level through more advanced skills at Associateship to the demand for real individuality at Fellowship. Roy also emphasised the need to work on the best layout of the prints, as this is not merely incidental, and the need for would-be Associates and Fellows to have a written statement of their photographic intentions in their set of prints, the actual work then to match up with the statement.

A number of us have benefited from Roy's advice and we thank him and Barbara for making the time to meet the Chapter. Thanks also to Palli for the protracted use of his home and the organising of the evening.

Before the night was over we were able to see a beautiful audiovisual made by our newest Chapter member Barbara Butler, *Yuwara Welcome*, featuring aerial photographs of landscape patterns in northern Australia.

Ann Lanagan

## **CHAPTER OUTING TO BALLARAT**

On a rainy Saturday eight of us headed 109 km west to view the Ballarat 40th National Photographic Competition, then showing at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery. This competition usually draws entries of a very high standard, and this year we were additionally motivated to see it by the fact that our fellow-member Robert Morgan LRPS had gained seven

Acceptances, including several Merit Awards.

Unfortunately the layout of the exhibition did not enhance the photographs, which were arranged three- or four-deep in one room. Although some thought must have been given to how the prints would be hung relative to each other, the over-crowding meant that this planning was wasted.

There was some excellent work, but also some that was rather disappointing. The winners in each category (e.g. open colour, nature, photojournalism, etc.) deserved their awards: there was some beautiful flower photography by Jenni Horsnell, and some of Jim Wetherill's portraits of Gothically attired men and women were interesting and even alarming. Jim gave us a talk a couple of years ago on how he became involved in this subject.

The fact that this exhibition was not wholly satisfying was due more perhaps to its being a competition than to the lack of skill of the photographers. Producing work that is competitive rather than aiming for originality can be very limiting, though it obviously is not in all cases, as the best work displayed in Ballarat shows.

A bonus to this visit was the exhibition *Ocean to Outback*, a Travelling Exhibition from the National Gallery of Australia to mark their 25th Anniversary. This is a selection of paintings from early colonial days to the present, with works both familiar and new to us: landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes. There was a view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge under construction, by Grace Cossington Smith, a large Hans Heysen featuring his beautiful trademark gumtrees, and three Sydney Nolans that have escaped the retrospective of his work being shown at the Ian Potter Centre.

In all, this was a very worthwhile trip, enlivened also by one our usual sociable lunches.

Ann Lanagan

## **AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE?**

Bound in with a diverse lot of small publications ranging from *The Magpie* (a Friday Journal of Politics and Society) to *The Australian Musical and Dramatic Review* and *Coleman's Pleuro-Pneumonia Gazette* are five issues of what must be Australia's first photographic magazine. The volume is in the State Library of Victoria, filed under *Victorian pamphlets*, 470 series, Volume 3, SF 994.5.

Issues No.2 of December 1864 to No. 7 of April 1865 of the journal *The Photographic News of the Month* are in this collection. The first issue is missing. Each issue consists of four pages (slightly smaller than A4 size) one full page of which is devoted to an advertisement by Priston and Small, manufacturing photographic chemists and manufacturers of albumenised papers. Their premises were at 78 Little Collins Street East, Melbourne, between Swanston and Russell Streets on the north side. The publication was 'registered', presumably with the Post Office. and it was published in Melbourne. Under the heading "To Correspondents" is the notice:

*In order to extend the circulation of this publication as much as possible, the Proprietor requests all Photographers to forward their own addresses, and also those of any amateurs they may know of; but they must not depend upon the regular transmission of The Photographic News unless they remit amount of Postage in stamps.*

It seems that *The Photographic News of the Month* was published by Priston and Small as

an advertising hand-out. The second issue coincided with an advertisement in the *Argus* newspaper by the same firm offering for sale their ‘Albuminised paper, Collodions, Nitrate of Silver, and all Photographic Chemicals’.

Most of the of the magazine articles consist of reprints from ‘the latest European and American journals’ including *The British Journal of Photography*, *The [English] Photographic News*, *Photographic Notes*, *The Photographic Times*, *the American Journal of Photography*, *Photo Monatshefte* and *Photographische Mittheilungen*. This was a useful idea as few photographers would have had access to such a range of overseas journals. The unidentified editor presumably selected articles of interest to Australian readers. For example, the Wothlytype (a printing process invented by Jacob Wothly based on the light-sensitivity of uranium salts when in contact with organic matter) was covered in detail. This was probably because it offered a solution to the hot topic of the day – the tendency of silver prints to fade. However Wothlytype’s early promise turned out to be misplaced.

The tricky topic of making photographic enlargements on albumenised paper was discussed over three issues by Dr Van Monkhoven. Other subjects included the blurring of the negative image (which seems to have been caused by halation), by Major Russell. There was also a description of the Pantascopic camera — a panoramic camera in which ‘the lens rotated upon a pivot while the plateholder has a rectilinear motion at the back’ enabling the camera to cover 180 degrees, with ‘every fleecy cloud being rendered’. Given the limited spectral range of wet-plates the latter claim must have been over-optimistic.

Disappointingly for photo-historians the Australian content is meagre. Information about early Australian photographic societies is scanty, and there is nothing in *The Photographic News* to help us. There are however, a few contributions from Australian photographers. The December 1864 issue has a letter from Herbert Deveril of the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda, on the subject of Dry Plates. (Note 1)

It would seem that dry plates but little occupy the attention of the Australian photographers, and this is very surprising when we consider the success attending their use in England, and the difficulties to be encountered in this country in working wet plates away from home. The constant annoyances of dust and heat, the cumbersome cart, box or tent, as the case may be, with all the paraphernalia necessary, is enough to dishearten the most enthusiastic.

Deveril went on to discuss the tannin dry-plate process. and gave full details of the procedure he used for preparing plates for sale.

Perhaps the simplest and easiest is the tannin process of Major Russell, and to those who do not mind an exposure from 30 to 60 seconds the tannin plate is invaluable, first from their preparation being so easy, and next, from the great certainty and beauty of their negatives.

Deveril also experimented with the quinine process and claimed that “I believe that working with quinine is peculiar to myself”. The editor remarked “The proofs [prints] are evidently printed from an underexposed negative but possess great merit, and we shall be glad to hear further about the process.” (Note 2) Despite the editor’s favourable opinion nothing further seems to have been heard of the quinine process.

Issue number six reprints part of a letter from Mr S. Gibbons of Melbourne, originally published in *Chemical News*, advocating the use of ‘gelatine mixed with a hot solution of bichromate of potash’ and applied to light fabric as a substitute for yellow glass in darkrooms; and the same, mixed with lampblack as a coating for bottles holding light-sensitive

substances. Also mentioned is a ‘newly patented metallic slide’ by ‘Mr Frith, photographic artist, also of Melbourne, for facilitating the taking of what were known as “diamond cameo portraits”’. The report was reprinted from *The Age* newspaper.

Frith must have brought his invention into production, for an advertisement for ‘Frith’s metallic camera back’ appeared in the same issue. It was, of course, available from Priston and Small. The advertisement ran:—

*The New Cameo Photograph “The Templar”; a new and efficient metallic camera back with dark slide and screen, complete, for taking Diamond Cameo Photographs, four on one plate, in true register. Invented and patented by Mr F. Frith, 7 Collins Street, Melbourne ... is now ready, and will be forwarded, by first train or coach, to any Address, on receipt of £3.3s. Warranted in perfect order; and may be screwed or otherwise fixed to any Camera in ten minutes.*

Issue number seven, dated April 1865 is the last known to have survived. Priston and Small’s business may have been ailing, for in February of the next year it was up for sale, and this event would have brought to an end *The Photographic News of the Month*. (Note 4)

A journal supported by business interests was no more viable than the business itself. It was not until twenty years later that the next Australian photographic magazine appeared: a short-lived journal published in Sydney by the company Bray and Lichtner. More firmly based journals did not arrive until the *Australian Photographic Journal* began publication in 1892 and the *Australasian Photo-Review* in 1894. These journals were not independent either, the former being supported by Harringtons and the latter by Kodak. Nor were they free handouts. Truly independent Australian photographic magazines did not appear until after World War II. Priston and Small’s venture must be commended as a brave pioneering attempt in Australian photographic publishing.

Alan Elliott ARPS

## Notes

1. The dry plates mentioned here are wet-collodion plates which have been treated to enable them to be used away from the darkroom. Before the introduction of the gelatin-based dry plates in the 1870s, all dry plate processes suffered from poor keeping properties or low sensitivity — or both.
2. Herbert Deveril was a professional photographer based in St Kilda in 1864, and in Sturt St., Ballarat in 1866. He was in partnership with Thomas Flintoff in the Royal Arcade, Melbourne. in the 1870s.
3. W. Sydney Gibbons, 5 Collins Street East, and Frederick Frith of 7 Collins Street East, both of Melbourne.
4. *The Argus*, 28 February 1866. My thanks to John Davies ARPS for this reference.

## THE DECLINE OF KODAK

The move to digital has had a profound effect on the Rochester headquarters of Kodak. According to a report in the *Buffalo News* of 1 November 2007, Kodak has made drastic changes to its manufacturing complex. Buildings have been demolished and nearly half of the land has been sold. Only 100 of the former 212 buildings remain and Kodak Park has shrunk from 1,600 acres to 700 acres. The workforce is also contracting. The Rochester payroll is

now below 10,000, compared with more than 60,000 in 1982.

[Thanks to Alan Elliott ARPS for this information. At least there still is a Kodak factory in Rochester, unlike Melbourne.]

## **FROM YOUR SECRETARY**

### **Roy Robertson's Visit**

We had an excellent meeting with Roy Robertson FRPS during his visit to Melbourne a couple of weeks ago. There were two parts to this – a Committee Meeting during the afternoon and a full Chapter meeting in the evening, both at the home of Palli Gajree, Hon FRPS. For more about these meetings see the two separate items in this *Newsletter*. We are most grateful to Roy and his wife, Barbara, for making time to meet with us during their short visit, and to Palli for his excellent hospitality.

### **Coming up fast - our 2008 Exhibition**

It isn't long until July when our 2008 Exhibition will be held – and even less time to the **closing date for entries, 13 June**. See the entry form enclosed with this *Newsletter*. We are looking forward to getting entries from all over, as this year we're accepting digital entries on CD for projection during the Exhibition, as well as prints. We really do want to include our interstate members in our activities, and new technology is enabling us to do this much more readily.

For those who haven't exhibited with us before, don't be put off by the request for an "Artist's Statement" to accompany your entry. This is simply a short piece, say 100-200 words, giving a little information about yourself, your photographic interests and what you are trying to achieve with your photography. It will be displayed with your images.

### **Looking ahead – Arch and Mary Raymond are coming!**

We are very pleased to announce that two of our Sydney members, Arch Raymond FRPS and Mary Raymond ARPS, will be down in Melbourne during our Exhibition in July, and have agreed to be our guest speakers at the meeting with the Melbourne Camera Club on the evening of Thursday 17 July (that's the Thursday between the two weekends our Exhibition is on at the MCC). Arch will be talking about "Duochromes", an alternative process which he has developed – he'll be showing some hand-made prints as well as giving a CD presentation. And Mary will show us some of her images of Morocco.

We are delighted that two of our interstate members can participate in our activities in this way and we extend our warm thanks to them for their support.

This joint meeting with the Melbourne Camera Club is a great opportunity to fly the RPS flag, especially as it coincides with our Exhibition in the same venue. So please make a note of the date in your diaries and see if you can encourage lots of your friends to come along, too.

### **RPS Members' Survey 2007 – Detailed Report**

Stuart Blake has forwarded me a copy of the detailed report of the RPS Members' Survey conducted last year. A preliminary report was published in the *Journal* a couple of issues ago. This detailed report gives much more information on the breakdown of the figures, and also includes a very full list of Survey Comments – the "Any-other-comments-or-suggestions?" bit at the end of the questionnaire. It makes most interesting reading. I understand this detailed report is to go up on the RPS website soon, but I'll bring this copy along to our next meeting

for other members to see in the meantime.

### **RPS Digital Group Website**

I have just been advised by **Tony Healy ARPS**, our Sydney member who is on the Committee of the RPS Digital Imaging Group, that their normal DIG website is currently unavailable due to hacking and a temporary one <http://www.rps.org/group/Digital-Imaging/home> has been set up within the RPS website. This temporary one includes the acceptances for the DIG 2008 Exhibition, so our members might like to look at those – as well as heeding the warning to make sure that your virus protection is kept up to date.

### **New Member**

We extend a warm welcome to **Derek Hill LRPS**, of Thornlands, Queensland, who is a new member of our Chapter. We are delighted to have you join us, Derek, and hope you'll be able to take part in some of our activities even from a distance. And an invitation to all our interstate members – do make contact if you are likely to be in Melbourne as we'd be really pleased to welcome you to any of our meetings.

### **More links with UK Members**

Following mention in the February *Newsletter* that our new member, Barbara Butler, is keen to make contact with other AV workers, we've had an email from **John Long ARPS**, an active UK member, offering to get in touch with her. Many thanks, John – it is really good to have a response like this, and it underlines the great wealth of expertise that exists within the RPS. It is just a matter of tapping it!

### **And links with RPS in Japan**

We've had an email from our Japanese member, Sudo Hidesawa ("Hide" for short), thanking us for the *Newsletter* which he has copied to other Japanese members of the RPS Contemporary Group. Thank you for this, Hide – our fame is spreading! Hide mentions that he will be visiting Kyoto shortly and plans to see an exhibition of Elliott Erwitt's photography while he is there. He's given the website reference for this exhibition – <http://www.kahitsukan.or.jp/frame.html> — and although the text is in Japanese the images are universal. So members might like to look this one up too.

Elaine Herbert ARPS

Hon. Secretary, Victorian Chapter

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR MEETING WITH ROY ROBERTSON FRPS**

As mentioned above, we had a Committee Meeting in the afternoon of Monday 14 April to meet Roy Robertson FRPS and discuss with him a range of RPS matters. Roy is the member of RPS Council with responsibility for the Overseas Chapters as well as the UK Regions and RPS Exhibitions. Quite a workload, but it brings him into contact with members everywhere. This is the first time we've met with a current member of Council and it was a great opportunity for us to learn more about RPS thinking on a number of issues, and perhaps for Roy to learn a little about one of the far-flung Chapters!

We covered many topics during the afternoon, ranging from RPS activities in Scotland to ways we might raise the profile of our own Chapter; from detailed discussion and practical advice on RPS Distinctions to how we might try to attract younger members. And much more!

The Scotland Region has many similarities with our own Chapter: a widely dispersed membership with long distances in between. As Scottish Regional Organiser, Roy is supported by a number of local organisers across Scotland; they take responsibility for local RPS activities there, especially for ‘travelling events’ which go the rounds. Their Annual Exhibition is one such, and very popular. It basically goes on tour in Scotland for about a year, being shown at different venues organised by local reps. Of course, there are big differences as well as similarities between the Scottish and Australian circumstances, and not everything that works well there would work here. But all the same, it is very helpful to get an appreciation of how other RPS activities are organised at the local level, and our discussion may help other ideas to be generated.

We discussed a number of means we might adopt to raise the profile of our Chapter, both locally and for the overall RPS membership. These included greater use of our ‘page’ on the RPS website, more articles in the *RPS Journal* (we already have a couple in the pipeline for later this year), greater contact with other Chapter, Region and Group organisers, and more frequent joint meetings with other local Societies with overlapping interests.

RPS Distinctions were discussed at length. It seems that many of the matters concerning us here in Australia are also voiced by RPS members in the UK, and that a number of these also emerged in the recent RPS Members’ Survey. It is a big topic which we’ll probably cover in more detail in a future *Newsletter* as our thoughts develop, but it was evident that overseas members are at something of a disadvantage in not being able to attend Distinctions Workshops, and we need to find ways to help overcome this problem, working jointly with RPS in the UK to explore possibilities.

Attracting younger members is a problem everywhere. The ageing of the RPS membership was another feature which the Survey demonstrated. The RPS is, however, an educational charity, and has a role in supporting photographic education at all levels, including photographic colleges. Successful promotion of the RPS there is usually dependent on having strong staff support, and might be encouraged by arranging top quality speakers of particular interest to students, in their own venues. RPS Bursaries are also open to overseas students.

A number of other matters were raised: ongoing liaison with Roy as our representative on Council; current RPS priorities in the new Five Year Plan; the essential differences between UK Regions and Overseas Chapters; travelling exhibitions; public liability insurance; and so on.

It was a most productive and stimulating discussion, and there are a number of suggested actions which your Committee will now need to consider in more detail. We’ll keep you informed. But above all, we extend our thanks to Roy for making this discussion possible and for opening up our thinking and making us feel closer to the rest of the Society.

Elaine Herbert ARPS

Hon. Secretary, Victorian Chapter

## SOME CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

I’ve received notice of several exhibitions currently on in Melbourne.

- At the **Christine Abrahams Gallery**, 27 Gipps Street, Richmond (tel. 9428 6099), an exhibition of the photography of **Wolfgang Sievers**. This is on from 29 April to 24 May 2008.

- At the **Monash Gallery of Art**, 860 Ferntree Gully Road, Wheelers Hill (tel. 9532 1569), *Nathan Miller: Notes from the Mississippi Delta*. This runs from 2 May to 8 June, and will be opened in conjunction with a book launch at 3 pm on Sunday 4 May.
- At the **NGV International** (National Gallery of Victoria, St Kilda Road), *Body Language: Contemporary Chinese Photography*. It features large-scaled works by seven of China's most noted contemporary photographers. Until 18 May, on the Ground Floor of the Gallery.
- Also at the **NGV International**, another photographic exhibition titled *291: Photographers in the circle of Alfred Stieglitz*. From 2 May to 28 September.

Elaine Herbert ARPS

## HISTORY GROUP NEWS

With Elaine acting as editor of the Woodbury report and all the contributions now centred in her computer we have continued to meet in her home.

The principal activities at these meetings have been the editing of the text and discussing the presentation of the illustrations to accompany the text. We are in the final stages of this and consequently we were able to bring to the last Chapter meeting a mock-up of book as it will appear on publication.

This received favourable comments from those members who were able to examine it during a very busy meeting, and also from Roy Robertson FRPS, RPS Overseas Members Representative, our guest for the meeting, who took the opportunity of carefully perusing it and making useful comments. This was heartening for in the recent months of dealing with the fine details of this report we have sometimes commented we may be losing a sense of perspective.

A number of constructive comments were made on layout and these will be considered at our next meeting when the final editing will be discussed.

Max Melvin ARPS

## NEXT CHAPTER MEETING

This will be our annual Casserole Night, to be held at the home of Robert Morgan, 24 Park Rd., Surrey Hills (Melway 61 A2), corner of Oak Street, starting at 7 pm, on Wednesday 11th June. We hope to welcome some of our new members at this meeting. The theme for the night will be Travel, and your contribution may be photographic, musical, literary or in any other medium.

## NEXT DIGITAL GROUP MEETING

We will meet at David Williams's Heartworks Studio, 14 Gloucester Rd., Ashburton (Melway 60 F11) at **10 am** (note earlier time than usual) on Wednesday 7th May. David will give a presentation.

## NEXT HISTORY GROUP MEETING

To be advised.