

Mitcham Camera Club - A Short History

Mitcham Camera Club was founded in 1948 by a group of likeminded amateur photographers. They were Stan Hurkett, Anne Hurkett, R. Herbert, Joan Gillham, Mike Starks, E. King and J. Dixon, the purpose being 'the encouragement and study of still photography in all its branches'.

At the time of the Club's formation all the work produced was in the form of black & white prints. This was due mainly to the lack of other photographic media. Like most clubs at the time, this created a bias in competition for black and white or monochrome prints. It was only in relatively recent years that work in either colour prints or transparencies were thought to be of comparable merit.

Because of this, colour prints were not entered into the same competition as monochrome prints in the early years and it was not until the late 70's or early 80's that they were allowed to compete against each other.

These early years in the Club were times of great enthusiasm for photography and there were many club outings to places of interest to help stimulate that enthusiasm. The Club archives show outings to such places as Mickleham Priory, Arundel, Kensington Gardens, Crystal Palace, Kew Gardens, Richmond Park and of course the Guinness Brewery at Park Royal.

Unfortunately, during more recent years, club outings have become less frequent. Probably a sign of changing priorities. However, there have been some noticeable visits to Hastings, Leeds Castle, the Blue Bell Railway, Kew Gardens, some vintage / classic car rallies and more recently to Herne Bay, the South Bank (always a favourite), the British Wild Life Centre, the London Wetlands Centre and Capel Car rallies. All of which have produced some outstanding images.

During the late 60's and early 70's transparency work became more popular and competitions were introduced to further encourage work in this medium.

It is true to say that during the early years in the Club because of the lack of photographic laboratories, all the processing was done at home in the darkroom. This was not true when colour transparencies became popular as the chemical process was not readily available to amateur photographers and their work normally had to be processed at a film processing laboratory.

However, it was during this period that two members of Mitcham Camera Club, who were particularly innovative, devised and marketed a home processing kit for transparencies. These two were Tony Barden & Derek Fenton who between them were responsible for the home processing kits under the name of BARFEN.

Initially, the club met in one another's houses until the numbers grew to make it necessary to find an established meeting room. The Club's first known meeting place

(circa 1950) was at the Canons House in Madeira Road and one of the slide trophies, "The Canons Colour Trophy", is named after the venue. Membership rose steadily for many years, until the 70's when the numbers started to fall and by 1975 the membership was at such a low level the Club decided to move headquarters in an effort to recruit new members. The new premises were at the Community Centre on the Phipps Bridge Estate.

This move proved almost fatal for the Club and after two years it returned to the Canons to persevere. Membership by this time was down to the order of 12 to 15 with less than 10 active members. Things did not improve much during the late 70's and early 80's, but by the mid 80's the numbers suddenly started to rise noticeably.

During the next decade the membership fluctuated between 30 & 40, but with the transition of photography from film to digital it saw a loss of interest in membership and it started to fall again for a while.

Once the digital age became more accepted as a medium for photography the club saw a distinct rise in the membership, and it is hoped that this will continue.

Over the next few years, the Club participated in several promotional activities including exhibitions with the Merton Arts Council and at the Mitcham Carnival, also a special exhibition at the Fairfield Halls and an interview with the local radio station, Eclipse FM.

In 1996, a fire at the Canons House forced the Club to take emergency measures to relocate their meeting place.

A suitable venue was found at T.S. Benbow, the headquarters of Mitcham and Morden Sea Cadets on Commonside West, only a short distance from the Canons House. However, the redevelopment of T.S. Benbow made it necessary for the club move to the Pollards Hill Community Centre, South Lodge Avenue, Mitcham in November 2005.

However, this venue proved to be not quite suitable for the club and have now moved to their current venue at the All Saints Community Centre, New Road, Mitcham (on the borders of Hackbridge).

More recently, the club members have exhibited their work at Mitcham Public Library, The Pollards Hill Community Centre, All Saints Centre and at the Sava Centre in Colliers Wood as well as maintaining its presence at the Mitcham Carnival.

In 2010 the club held its most prestigious display to date over the August Bank Holiday in the Stable Yard at Morden Hall Park. This was a great success and brought in several new members.

Because of its success, during April 2015 the club held another display, that was mentioned in the local press and like the previous display at the Stable Yard also brought in several new members as a result. The club has now decided after another successful exhibition at the Stable Yard in Morden Hall Park to make this an annual event.

As a regular participant at the Mitcham Carnival the club's exposure has led to a closer relationship with the Heritage Centre at the local council which developed from displaying the Heritage Centre's work alongside our own at the Carnival to a supportive roll in the Heritage Centre's project called Merton Memories. It was at the two Merton Memories open dates that Mitcham Camera Club held displays of their work and gave talks on "Tips & Tricks" on photographic techniques.

This led onto the follow up open day in March 2015 "Merton Heritage Discovery Day" where the club displayed their work again and repeated the talk. In May 2016, Merton held the Carved In Stone event to commemorate the 1st World War and we again supported this with the taking of photographs around the borough of WW1 memorials and also have another display of our work at the Civic Centre.

The club has also developed ties to a local community group, Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage when they were asked to photography a local restoration event sponsored by the HLF. This has led onto a similar event with the local Council that is looking for HLF support to re-vitalise the Canons House and Park.

The club is a member of the F.S.L.P.S. (Federation of South London Photographic Societies) and compete in inter-club competitions in various disciplines. Over the years, Mitcham has had some successes in these competitions, the most recent being the winning of the Plate Competition for Monochrome Prints in 2010/11. Mitcham hopes to continue with this success.

Mitcham Camera Club is a friendly club and is still thriving well and eager to encourage new members to enjoy their photography whether it is with the new digital technology or the conventional film base. As each year progresses, the new age of digital photography has produced some extremely exciting images both in prints and now with the projected digital image (PDI) facility.

So, if you feel you would like to broaden your photographic skills then come down to our club and meet with us and become part of our continued success.

Prepared by W.L. and A.C. Hutchings.

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