

## My Town, My Future

## Meet a Local Photographer



**Mark Williams and Ruth Cull** with group in Stewart Park.

**Mark Williams** is a photographer with more than 30 years' experience, who works at Middlesbrough Community Learning (MCL) teaching ICT and photography workshops as well as running his own business. He has recently been running workshops across Middlesbrough, as part of the project **My Town, My Future**.

I asked him if he would tell us a bit more about himself and his own work. I hope you will enjoy reading his story and perhaps it will give you some ideas too!

**Francis Annett**

**Q** Tell us something about what you've been doing recently

**Mark** In 2016 I worked on a similar project which focused on particular groups of Middlesbrough residents, who had mental health

issues. Among these issues were concerns about leaving home, meeting other people and taking on new activities.

I share these to some extent, because a few years ago I experienced periods of depression. I would get my camera kit together in the morning to go out to work, but on many occasions just couldn't leave the house. With help and a positive approach, I've improved, and as a result can understand better where they're coming from.

In photography there can be several aspects which worry beginners and it's my job to help them overcome such problems.

*'Will I break this camera if I push the wrong button?'*

*'It's so expensive, I'm worried that I'll drop it!'*

Well no, modern cameras are very reliable and actually they're quite difficult to break. They also have broad straps to put round your neck, so you won't drop them on the floor!

Taken step by step the technology is there to help you, and as soon as you find your way around there will be positive results that you can see instantly. In the old days, you couldn't see your film results until the roll was developed. Then you couldn't change anything, except by starting all over again.

Nowadays you can see straight away what that shot looks like and you can do something about it immediately. Confidence from understanding the technology is just one benefit for group members. There's also the benefit of mild exercise as well as the opportunity and interest in working with other people who share your interest.

**Q      So what different activities have your groups been involved with this year?**

**Mark**      We're working with four groups a term – there have been students from Macmillan College, and for adults with differing abilities from TASC – the Teesside Ability Support centre. There've also been groups across Middlesbrough, from the town centre to Marton as well as in Acklam. All involved will probably agree that the technical side of photography is like baking a cake. If you follow the routine, you'll achieve consistent and pleasing results. That can be learned quite quickly, but the creative side isn't so easily taught.

**Q                      After the groups got to grips with the wonderful equipment (thanks to the funding), what are the outcomes?**

**Mark**      In the town centre we concentrated on the developments around the Library, MIMA and the Town Hall. There's a lot of change, but

there's also a lot of history. From Marton the group visited Stewart Park, while in Acklam members looked round Linthorpe Village.

Members have created a gallery of images, accompanied by creative writing, which can now be seen on the web-site of My Town, My Future at <http://www.mytownmyfuture.co.uk/tell-your-story/>

**Q That's a very interesting gallery of photographs and writings, well worth a look. How about telling us about your own experience of photography from the beginning? What was your first camera, for example?**

**Mark** I started when my older brothers used to take me out when they went fishing for the day up the River Swale. I was no good at fishing, but really enjoyed the landscape and the wild life in the countryside. So I began to take a camera with me and took quite a few pictures.

It was 35mm film cameras in those days. You couldn't edit the photographs as you can today in the camera itself, or on your computer. You waited until the roll of film came back with a set of prints. And you hoped they would turn out all right. I did some developing and printing of photos when I was at college. Although you can do quite a lot at that stage, today's digital technology gives so many more opportunities.

I was lucky to find a real bargain with my first serious camera. It's still my favourite and I bought it when the company, Mamiya, decided to shift its production away from still cameras and they sold off lots of kit at bargain price.

So I spent a lot of time in the countryside and what a wonderful area we live in! There's really no need to drive 200 miles to see a particular waterfall, when we have so much within a short distance of Middlesbrough, whether it's in the heart of the countryside or along the sea-coast. Not only is it cheaper and quicker, but you can easily revisit at different times of day or in different seasons of the year and see new possibilities to capture

**Q How do you go about using your own experience and sharing your enthusiasm with your students?**

**Mark** Where possible I use my own photos as examples. It's important to choose ones that allow student to explore analyse and dissect a photo. They can develop skills in reading a picture and see what might be improved. Because they're mine, people can be as critical as they want, and learn to be objective but not personal!

**Q     You mentioned your time at college – where was that and did it help you find a job afterwards?**

**Mark**        I was at Stockton and Billingham College and towards the end of the course my tutor was approached by staff from the Dovecot Arts Centre.

**[There's some background information about the Dovecot at the end of the interview.]**

**Mark**        I became involved when I was in the last six months of my course and my tutor at college volunteered me for a small project. The centre was being refurbished and they wanted plans for a dark room and the equipment that would be involved. I put together the information and thought that was all done and dusted. After it had all been fitted they offered me to take on the job of running the dark room.

I started this part-time and after a while I became full-time, when they asked me to be their projectionist as well. I loved the work and spent 10 years there. Along with everyone else I had to move on when the Arts Centre closed, to be replaced by Arc.

When I was working in the dark room I did quite a lot of teaching. Not something I'd ever thought of before, but I managed to get on with it quite well and found I liked it. So I went back to college at Stockton Riverside and completed the course for a teaching certificate. Now I've been a tutor at MCL for 16 years teaching forms the main part of my working life. In the world of IT and photography things never stand still for long, so I am a student myself most of the time. I like the constant pressure to update my knowledge and skills.

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Thanks to Mark for spending the time to share his thoughts with us. You can see more about his work at the web site below.

<http://www.photography-mw.co.uk/calendar.html>

**Francis Annett**

**January 2018**



## NOTES

**\*\* Dovecot Arts Centre**

1 Bishop Street,

Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1SY

Closed

Demolished

1 screen

100 seats



Viewing: **Photo** | Street View



Viewing: [Photo](#) | [Street View](#)

*Located in Stockton-On-Tees, County Durham. In the 1960's, re-development of the Bishop Street area produced Lindsay House, an office block with shops below and space for a small, 160-seat cinema.*

*The Lindsay Cinema opened in the early-1960's, but was short-lived, and closed around 1965.*

*Messrs Turner's Photographic took over, re-opening the cinema as the Turner Theatre, with film shows, mainly art-house and foreign language, three days a week. Those shows ended on 19th February 1977, although Chinese and Bollywood films played for a while on Sundays only.*

*On 12th November 1983, the cinema was re-opened, as the Dovecot Arts Centre. By this time it had 100 seats.*

*This closed for refurbishment on 30th September 1989, with "A Matter of Life and Death", starring David Niven and Kim Hunter. When it re-opened (date not known) it played films from Sunday to Tuesday.*

*This continued until the cinema's operation was transferred to the new ARC arts centre in 1998. In the mid-2000s, Lindsay House was demolished when the Bishop Street area was re-developed.*

<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/51020>