Hartlepool Judging Notes

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## Some General Comments:

A strong club performance, it has been tough to end up with a resolution on the top placings. The club seems particularly capable in the Nature category but there was also a nice line in the, frankly, weird. Inevitably the judge gets swayed by more subjective considerations in the final analysis.

It might be worth reminding members about the rules on image dimensions. A fair number were out sized in various ways, typically by applying the 1400 pixel width limit to the height.

It was a pleasure to see the images; very impressive.

# A Winter’s Walk

The low winter sun from the right does a fine job of illuminating the foreground, the path on the right and the hillside behind the small wood. I can see why the photographer was attracted to this scene and they have done a good job at capturing it. The foreground rocks and the path on the right create a strong compositional element, a triangle, with the path then taking the eye through the edge of the small wood. A second path seems to tempt us through the centre of the wood to the sunlit hillside beyond. So lots to interest the viewer. A very satisfying image.

# Angel

A minimalist approach to the Angel of the North that I like. The light hitting parts of the ‘face’ on the left is an attractive element. Decent decision to take the image into monochrome but the final result sits a little flat - it needs more contrast. The dimensions of the image are quite a bit smaller than that allowed, so if projected to fill the screen it will look soft. Viewed at 1:1 it is sharp. A thoughtful framing of the Angel.

# Badger – HC – Harry Brenkley

A crisply taken shot of the badger in what I guess is a late afternoon light. This adds a pleasing warmth to the image. Sharp in all the right places, the grass in the foreground and background supports the main element without getting in the way. What lifts this image above the average is the interest the badger is showing in the pink flowers, Red Campion (?), which are themselves crisply taken. Anyway, the badger definitely looks interested and that gives the image a chance of a narrative should the viewer take the opportunity. An excellent capture.

# Bath

A competently taken shot of a Bath landmark. Viewing the main element, The Crescent buildings, as a pattern shot it is the elements that break that pattern that become the subject of interest. So the one yellow door to the left of the image and the double pillars just to the right of centre. The photographer has captured the curved sweep of the buildings well, emphasised by the circumference of the green space in the foreground. Overall though, the subject itself is not really strong enough to shine in this competition I feel.

# Calm Waters – HC – Steve Burton

The first thing that strikes is the colour of the sky. A rather lovely peach, which indicates that the photographer has chosen the perfect time of day for the shot. Next are the two seabirds on the prow of the boat and the fact that the boat itself is sharp, with an excellent depth of field that softens the foreground and background (Coquet Island?) very nicely. So a lot going for a pleasingly composed image. What finally held the image back for me was the visual quietness of the boat versus the brightness of the foreground sea. I found that my eye kept getting pulled down to the bottom of the image and I had to work a bit as a viewer to fully enjoy the boat, the gulls and that lovely sky. Nevertheless, strong enough for an HC.

# Conway

The photographer has taken up a good position to capture the suspension cables, if they are such, of this bridge and the fortifications are nicely symmetrical in the frame. Such an approach creates a stable and solid image, appropriate to a castle. I enjoyed the interplay of the shadows with the bridge itself. On balance, I felt that the presence of the holidaymakers detracted from the image. The couple on the left facing us do rather impose themselves on the overall composition.

# Cygnet

The cygnet itself looks sharp and nicely detailed, with good definition on the feathers and drops of water on the bird. The lighting is quite strong and direct, which helps with the reflection but can overpower subjects such as this and there is some sense of that occurring here.The photographer has gone for a composition that was designed to include the reflection. My feeling is that the reflection is not really strong enough to support that approach and the overall effect is to leave all the main elements of the image sitting high in the frame. That then makes the image look top heavy and a bit unbalanced. This is not an uncommon result when the photographer is much taken with a reflection. Such images can require more compositional care than usual.

# Fairytale Beanstalk Tree

Well, this is an unusual tree and I can see why the photographer wanted to capture an image of it. I liked the light and dark dappling of the main trunk. It has the effect of breaking up the main outline of the central part of the image and adds some interest. The main issue I have with the image is that the foliage at the bottom of the tree is the most visually assertive element in the frame which, at one level, really makes the image about that foliage. That isn’t the intention of the photographer of course.

# Fire Engine Gauges & Stopcocks

Looks like the business end of a heritage machine. Apart from the dilapidated look of the various components I would guess that gauges do not measure water pressure in ‘lbf/in2’ any longer. If the intent was to document the workings of a vintage fire engine then I would say you have done a pretty good job. Lighting is good, everything is nicely in focus. There is perhaps some lens distortion affecting the stopcock on the left, but that is a rather minor complaint. I liked the various levels of corrosion on the metal surrounding the gauges. I wondered why they would have been affected differently. Good competent photography.

# Fishing at First Light – HC – John Bradley

Superb lighting on this Kingfisher, which shows off the colours of the bird extremely well. Good supportive background and all parts of the bird are crackingly sharp it seems to me. The photographer has left a touch more space on the right hand side of the frame, which was a good decision. Nowadays I think that nature photographers like to have their subjects doing something, so perhaps that is a small issue to think about. An excellent portrait of the Kingfisher though.

# Flexible Friend

I found this a somewhat disconcerting image. I don’t think I have ever been able to get my leg in that position and she has a rather serious, possibly rebellious, look on her face. The knot of limbs provides good support for her face and adds some tension to the image. Decent choice to put it into monochrome. Perhaps the border is a little old fashioned for what is a modern portrait. Perhaps the fingers of her resting hand look a little cut off by the extended foot. In a similar way, the top of her cocked leg disappears into some dark shadows and creates a visual disconnection between it and the rest of her body. Also worth noting that I, the viewer, have been put in a rather dominating position vis a vis this child due to the positioning of the camera. It is not a meeting of equals. So a complex image that you can tell I am having difficulty resolving. Its strength is that it is an unusual portrait, so works well from that point of view.

# Forties

Good capture of a local reenactment event. There might be an opportunity for some discussion on whether that is a valid US flag from the 40s, but that shouldn’t concern us here. I like the intensity of the middle singer, the photographer has captured that well. Overall the image is a little soft, even the Seatones sign could be sharper. I might have tightened up the framing a touch, there is a fair amount of clutter around the sides of the main part of the image.

# From the Swing Bridge

A well known position to take the Tyne bridges from and you have framed it pretty well. More experienced photographers who specialise in night shots like to leave some colour in the sky, so it looks a dark blue rather than black. It then becomes a late afternoon/early evening shot rather than a night shot. I feel that a similar approach would have benefitted this image. Technically, there is too much dynamic range in this scene for the camera to resolve successfully. So the lights on the quayside have blown, while the overall image could do with some more contrast.

# Ghostly Crossing, All Souls, London

The ghostly image of the person crossing the road in front of the church is a nice touch. I also like the visual relationship between the spire of the church and the BBC radio tower. Perhaps, in an ideal world, the telephone box wouldn’t be quite so tight to the frame on the left. Decent choice to move the image into mono. There is a good range of tones, though it could do with punching up with some contrast.

# Glasswing Butterfly

An interesting specimen and one I personally have not seen before. The see-through wings are fascinating. The general composition is good, the butterfly’s position within the frame is just right. I also like the fact that the butterfly’s ‘tongue’ creates a pleasing circular feature within the image. Perhaps the light foliage at the top right of the frame could be toned down a touch. The fact that the butterfly is not quite sharp held this image back in the final analysis.

# Grey Heron - 2nd Place – Harry Brenkley

Cracking shot of this Grey Heron coming into land (?). The bird is in a great position both within the frame and and in the attitude of its wings and the neck/head. All beautifully sharp with great detail. Really enjoyed the ‘toe’ just touching the water. Lovely support from the background. Even the border is nicely judged. Excellent nature shot.

# Hartlepool Lifeboat

An action shot where you definitely get the feeling that this boat is cutting along, intent on getting somewhere. The crew on the bridge look like they are focussed, the crew on the lower deck less so, suggesting that this is maybe a training exercise rather than a real emergency. The photographer has left a bit of space in the frame for the boat to move into. Quite an overcast/misty day but that is not a bad light for this kind of image. Like the large building on the upper left, just on the edge of visibility.

# Heart of the Tree

The lighting establishes the warm colors of the golden hour to good effect. The shapes created by the trees have been well seen and captured. Perhaps the sunburst, although well positioned, is a little strong in the context of the overall image and there is the usual risk of lens flare caused by shooting contre jour. That lovely light is really enjoyable though.

# Hidden Gem

A carefully composed image that works pretty well from the point of view of framing. Slow shutter used, of course, to blur the water and create a sense of movement. I might have preferred a slightly faster shutter speed to capture more of the sinuous threads that go to make up moving streams such as this, but that is just a personal observation. The upper falls just sit a little close to the top of the frame, the mass of water looks somewhat cramped. Good natural colours throughout and decent soft light. Good use of a tripod!

# Hongkong

The cloudy sky works very well as a backdrop to the broadly steel greys of the buildings in HK. I enjoyed the muted set of colours. Rather pleasing balance to the whole image, though I might have taken a shade off the left hand side. I liked the reflections visible in various of the buildings. It almost looks like you are seeing through the skyscraper just to the right of centre. Possibly a chance to add some presence to the image with some post-processing to lift the exposure a touch, but any change would need to be gentle.

# In Full Flow

A nicely composed shot, I like the way the water flows through the frame. I enjoyed some of the subtle colours in the waterfall. I have mentioned for an earlier image that I tend to prefer a faster shutter speed to develop a sense of ‘threaded’ water. Each fast flowing body of water might need to be treated differently but for me this flow is starting to get a little ghostly and losing some internal definition. I like to think that you would have taken a range of shutter speeds here and chosen the one you like best. In which case I stand corrected!

# Jack

You can’t really go wrong taking pictures of dogs, they are always completely natural and enthusiastic about whatever is happening. Apart from going to the vet maybe. Here Jack delivers. I think the choice of B&W was probably a good one, it depends a little on what colour that sofa was and whether black-coated Jack would have stood out a little more against a colour. Perhaps Jack’s tongue is visually the strongest element in the image, but what can you do? The image is on the small side, so if it is projected to ‘fit’ a larger screen it will look soft. It is nice and sharp at 1:1. Happy dog leads to happy picture.

# Janet’s Foss

Interesting waterfall as it splits, presumably across some outcrop of rock. There is also some interest in the middle ground with the light providing highlights in the water. I am in two minds about whether the foreground rocks add anything to the image, and on balance I would suggest not. If you did want them in then they probably need to be in focus, using a much greater depth of field than that chosen. The selected shutter speed falls a little between two stools, neither freezing the water completely nor allowing it to develop more structure as the shutter speed slows. So an interesting location and the lighting is about right. Could think about a polarising filter next time just to potentially control the light reflections on the surface of the water.

# Juvenile Red Kites - 3rd Place – Steve Burton

An excellent grouping of a magnificent bird. The chap at the bottom centre looks the most clued in one. Warm lighting from the left adds to the overall ambience and the range of colours on show look very harmonious and natural. I like the way the birds have carefully arranged themselves along the strong diagonal. Terrific image.

# Kingfisher – HC – Harry Brenkley

A very fine image. The kingfisher is tack sharp, the elements in the composition are nicely balanced and the sense of humour with the sign works extremely well. And that background is perfect for the shot. One of the main contenders for the top slots.

# Ladies

So you can make a group shot out of four, not everything has to be an odd number. The ladies seem to be fascinated by the photographer, so I wonder what they were wearing. The ladies come out very well in monochrome. The stray twig on the upper right is a touch distracting, I might have cloned it out. Check the size of the image for the next competition.

# Lakeside at Chatsworth

The few times I have been to outdoor sculpture parks I have enjoyed the experience. You have given us an example of a modern sculpture in a classic English landscape and it is of interest as a result. The image is a little dull, probably due to the weather conditions at the time, but it might have responded well to a tweak in post processing. I might have also considered cropping from the right with the aim of removing the bright sky at the top right corner, and possibly as far as removing the vehicles that are seen in the car park.

# Late Night Expressway

Decent technique here, using a slow shutter speed on moving traffic. Quite a good choice of location where the bend in the road ahead adds interest. I liked spotting the stops and starts of individual lines. There is also the effect that differing street lights have on the ambient lighting which, while worth noting, can just stop the image finally coming together. Once you get beyond the lights on the cars perhaps not quite enough to detain the viewer.

# Looking for the Winner

I was much attracted by the thought that has gone into this image. A still life can be a very satisfying scene to create but it is not always easy. If I am honest, I felt the consolidating narrative that would pull these items together in a satisfactory way was always tantalisingly out of reach. If we are looking for a winner of a photographic competition, I can see the relevance of the camera and Almanac, of course, and I might use the magnifying glass to peer closely at the photographs but the pocket watch and the Indenture documents? I am sure that if I was standing in front of the club at this point I would be getting lots of helpful suggestions from the audience! One other thing to consider is the lighting. For an image that is quite nostalgic, full of memorabilia, the lighting is somewhat direct. A softer, warmer light source might be the way to go. So apologies for not quite getting up to speed here, I would love to see some more of this kind of work.

# Magic of Spring

A nicely done image of bluebells, they do not always show up that well in photographs. I suspect that the image may have had the colours tweaked a bit, and the overall toning warmed up but it has been well done. The tree trunks work well to frame the eye’s path through the field of bluebells. There is a feeling that the top of the frame has clamped down somewhat on the image and perhaps we could do with slightly less of the foreground, but overall a successful capture of a spring scene.

# Middlesbrough Bottle

The sculpture of the bottle has obviously been placed in front of the modern building by the artist/architect, but it is down to the photographer to choose a viewpoint and subsequent treatment. The choice of viewpoint here is perhaps a little conservative but captures the essence of the scene. The choice of a monochrome image is a good one, though the image is a little dull. It could be perked up a bit.

# Orchid Beauty

A frame filling portrait of this orchid. The photographer has captured the colours of the orchid well. The depth of field is quite shallow but the focus is in the right place. Overall the lighting is a little on the dull side and it might be worth experimenting with other options to that used. The background, while unobtrusive, is not that supportive of the main image. It rather kills the impact of the whole image. So a theme worth pursuing in my mind but with some more experimentation with lighting and backgrounds.

# Paignton Pier Paddler

A pleasing use of a late afternoon light on the pier and a crisply taken shot. The sky is very attractive. Assuming the paddler continued on the same trajectory, a subsequent shot with a closer relationship between the paddler and the pier may have tightened the image up a touch. Quite a lot of foreground water as well. By including it the main interest in the image is pushed to the top half of the frame.

# Puppy Love

Aside from the rather obvious technical limitations of this image, the act of popping on an empty bowl of Muller rice on the head of a puppy seems wilfully bizarre. I will move on . . .

# Queen of the Moor - 1st Place – Bev Trainer

Magnificent! I have smiled each time I have seen this image and that tends to go a long way with this judge. I couldn’t help but think of a sheep-based am-dram group doing the Lion King. Technically superb with a quirky eye for an image. What could be better?

# Sage

An engaging piece of framing for this well known subject. Fills the frame nicely and I like the square aspect ratio. Good choice going to mono. I might have liked to complete the angle of the spar and the internal staircase on the very left of the image and perhaps the base of the image has been cropped a little. The building is not quite grounded.

# Scottish Coast

Lovely sweep of the bay has been well captured by the photographer. Pleasing colour in the sea. The scattering of white buildings is very typical of Scottish seaside villages and they are on good display here. The lighting is direct, the grass on the lower left is rather well lit, and the shot could have been more interesting as the golden hour comes in and the sun sets, assuming the houses are facing west! Couple of small points: the frame has chopped a lifebelt in half on the far left and there is some grubbiness on the image on the top left and top right corners.

# Sebastian – HC – Kathryn Waites

A lovely image that really captures this young man’s pleasure in playing the game of rugby. The move to mono has worked well. Sharp with a well controlled soft background. Very enjoyable.

# Shower Power

Good title. The framing of the rainbow and the pylon has been well done. The mono part of the image sits a bit dull, it needs a contrast boost. Colour popping the yellows is not that successful in my view. The global aspect of the colour pop has also highlighted the house and the hay bale, I was not sure that was the intention, apart from losing other colours in the rainbow itself. A monochrome sky with little variation is an absolute b\*\*\*\*r for showing up dust spots, and there is one such in the upper centre just by the rightmost cable.

# Staithes

Good competent shot of Staithes from a high vantage point. The jumble of houses creates a lot of interest and the depth of field is excellent. The sympathetic lighting works well. I also enjoyed following the river and then the road, taking me through the image. Not sure you need the border, but it is well controlled.

# Star Wars Trilogy

Creative! A huge amount of energy and fun on display so well done. Perhaps from a technical point of view I would point out that the lighting is a bit all over the place, hitting the main stormtrooper from the right, the large spaceship behind him from the left and then none at all on the small stormtroopers and the brown sphere on the left. Cutting all these elements out has been done well, though perhaps the flying ship on the left could have been a little tighter. There is a small green blob on view. All in all a good summary of the main elements of the Star Wars story, though where are our heroes!

# Steetley Pier

An interesting shot. I am of a mind that the sky has been added to another image of the beach and pier. Little hints in the edges of the pier and the fact that the stars are out of focus while the moving water in the foreground is sharp. Good creative idea that has a challenging technical aspect. The overall effect of the image is rather otherworldly.

# Steps to Penygent

Good composition with a decent depth of field all the way through. The rock at the top is very nicely detailed and the steps do a very nice job of leading us into the image. Bit of a dull day and perhaps the greens look a touch saturated but that may well be realistic. Your chance to return when the lighting is better . . .

# Sunflowers

A fun image that has a hyper-realistic feel to it. The initial impression is good and convincing and then I started to spot some tell tale signs of the front sunflowers being multiplied artificially. And I mean in the computer not by the farmer :-) But it is a happy picture so well done.

# Swaledale

Very nice location and composition. Strong depth of field and all the colours look natural. I enjoyed following the stone walls through the image. The sky and the lighting is just right. The presentation of the image is a little dull, some gentle post-processing would perk it up a bit.

# Temenos

A sculpture in the middle of Middlesbrough I have found out. Good range of tones in this monochrome image. Interesting sky adds to it. Some collapsing verticals with the lamp posts to the left and right. I like the relationship of this sculpture with the distant transporter bridge. Perhaps a step to the left would have centralised the bridge vs the sculpture but that is a small point. May be that move would affect the small circle and the pole behind it?

# The Crazy Ringmaster

Crikey! A striking image with the effect of reducing what is probably an attractive young woman to a pair of eyes and a tongue. That is the intention of the entertainer of course, so you are just capturing what is in front of you. The eyes are very well caught. Colours across the image all look very natural. The nose ring and the tongue are a bit soft, so a touch more depth of field would have been ideal. Hate to think what the circus is like if this is the ringmaster.

# The Entertainer

Not sure what sort of entertainer this is, perhaps not something to think too long about. She has hit a pretty good pose and the overall impression is of a confident young woman who knows what she is about. The hand at the top is slightly soft. Whether it was still moving when you took the shot I don’t know, but I do not find it a problem and the face is nicely sharp. Interesting tattoo. Backdrop is well controlled. Lighting is fairly strong and direct and there are a couple of shadows as a result. Not big issues but I did start to wonder if toning down the lighting in what I assume is a studio might have been a thought.

# The Experiment – HC – Angie Ellis

Another contribution from the creative wing of Hartlepool CC. I liked this. The repeating dead eyed faces are suitably chilling and then punctuated by the blue eyed face at the front works well. Creating a touch of recession in the three rows at the back would have been a small refinement, but the overall creepy effect is what is important and the photographer has captured that well.

# The Headland

I assume this is a late afternoon shot, but no matter the lighting works well here. I enjoyed the juxtaposition of the relatively modern suburban houses with those of a much older vintage along the headland, and then the industrial landscape across the river on the left. The two canoeists add a nice focal point. A competent piece of photography.

# Three in a Row

It is fun to compare and contrast these beach huts and that was the intention of the photographer, of course. Strong colours from each of them and even the numbers are individual. Decent lighting, could do with a slight lift in post processing to give some more presence.

# Time for a Dip – HC – Caroline Wray

The addition of the swimmer in this landscape is excellent, a very nice focal point. Having said that I wondered if it was a bit chilly. The fact that the swimmer has her back to us lends a certain anonymity to the scene, she is completely self contained. Lovely lighting on the distant hillsides and there is a small moon at the top which is a pleasing touch. I felt you could get some improvement in the hills at the back with a touch of contrast but that is a small issue compared with the overall vision.

# Wired

Great lead-in lines from the bridge cables leading to the US flag. They all come together nicely. So well thought out in terms of framing and positioning. Lighting works well here, I enjoyed the shadows across the base of the bridge. Is there quite enough here to compete with the best in the competition, probably not, but it is a competent piece of photography.

# York Reflections

The photographer has done well to get down low to take this shot, just what was needed. I like the fact that the shop lights are just coming on in the late afternoon, which add a lot of interest. Very nice reflections of a light on the stones on the left of the path. The main reflection in the puddle in the foreground is perhaps a little disappointing in the end. It is mainly the sky with some indication of the shops either side of the street. Not quite strong enough in my view to take this image to the next level. Lot to recommend the main image though.

# Young Men in a Hurry – HC – Steve Burton

Excellent idea for an image that has been well executed. Just that difference caused by the moving young men and the still, sitting older woman says so much and it is a great credit to the photographer for seeing the opportunity. As presented perhaps the image is a touch underexposed so could do with a lift in the computer. Not much. Perhaps a bit of noise reduction as well. A nice way to come to the last image in the competition.