

DOING PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

“PHOTOGRAPHY CAN MAKE YOU CARE HOW THE WORLD IS RUN”

These are the words of a 15 year old who had been taught to use a camera at the Blackfriars Photography Project (BPP).

The project grew out of an idea by a local photographer in collaboration with Blackfriars Settlement for a one year experiment “to investigate the uses of photography in community development”. In

the early 1970s many young artists set up similar projects. They wanted to make art collaboratively, with and for communities, in ways that reflected local needs and culture.



Young photographers testing new cameras on the streets of SE1, August 1976
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project



A mobile photo exhibition on Peabody Blackfriars estate, 1973
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project



Housing conditions in Muntion Road, 1973.
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project



THREE YEARS AFTER RESIDENTS CAMPAIGNED TO SAVE THE CHEMIST ON THE NEW KENT ROAD (SEE PICTURE ABOVE), THE SAME PREMISES ARE TO BE RE-OPENED BY J. LENNY AS A PRESCRIBING CHEMIST. Last Christmas's SE1 carried a story about a chemist re-opening in Stamford Street. It seems we have to rely on Santa Claus rather than the Area Health Authority to look after our needs. Welcome to SE1 Mr. Lenny and a Happy Christmas & a healthy new year to all our residents.

Chemist campaign success. Cutting from SE1 newspaper No 27 Dec/Jan 1977, courtesy of Southwark Archives
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project



Housing conditions in Muntion Road, 1973.
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project

PHOTOGRAPHY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The BPP supported many local organisations and campaigns. SE1 Community Newspaper photographers used its darkroom, and drew on its growing image archive. Portable exhibitions informed residents about redevelopment plans.

Photos were evidence in efforts to rehouse tenants. Slide-shows with recorded sound tracks put the residents' point of view during the Coin Street campaign. Other work centred around racism, sexism, healthcare, drugs, green space, play space, festivals, schools, employment and more.

Young Photographer Groups

Young people 8 to 18 learned to develop and print their films in the Settlement dark room. These informal sessions, run by volunteers recruited through 'Time Out' magazine, grew into regular fixtures four nights a week.

In 1976 young photographers created a touring exhibition 'Doing Photography'. In 1978 they contributed to the 'Using Photography' exhibition featuring work by both young and adult users of the BPP community darkroom.

The photos form an important personal and social record of their lives and the neighbourhoods they lived in.

Doing Photography

Even before Richard Attenborough discovered Jacques Henri Lartigue, people have known that an eight year old child could take great pictures. Like music, the photographic bug can bite early. Paul Carter of the Blackfriars Settlement in East London is often something else.

The Settlement's exhibition of work at the Half Moon Gallery - called 'Doing Photography' and all taken by people between 8 and 17 years old - indicates the spirit of the group.

'That's why we're here, rather than to take great photographs,' Paul Carter told CAMERAWORK. It's fun and gives everybody a sense of accomplishment.

The photography club began at Easter two years ago, when 110 children from the Settlement went to summer camp. Some of them took Polaroids and wanted to continue when they came back to London. At first a few children came to develop a film one night a week, followed by more and more until Paul Carter had groups two, three and finally, four nights a week.

It became too much for one person to handle, so Paul Carter advertised in 'Time Out', and now has seven volunteers who help four nights a week. There is a waiting list six months long. Eight children come to the photography group each night. A third of the group are girls. Paul Carter would like more in the group and is willing to let girls jump the queue to join.

'They don't think girls can join, but everyone is welcome,' Paul Carter says. 'A third of the group is black which reflects the local population. Ages range from 7 to 17, although the older ones don't often get a job. They meet every weekday except Friday from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., although often they have not finished until 10 or 10:30 p.m.

Members can photograph what they want. Some come sitting by other children in the Settlement. Others photograph for the local tenant's association or record plays being put on by their schools. Two members have taken photographs for the Work Centre for Handicapped People.

Within twenty minutes, a new member at their first evening group, is taking photographs. Paul or one of the other helpers sets the camera and provides a dialogue. There is one hour of shoot, followed by developing and contacting with the assistance of a helper. The second time they go to the club, they produce two or three prints. The process is repeated again and again. Techniques are used for specific problems.

If a friend or relative asks them to copy a photograph, they are shown how. If they come to a dead end, a new technique is suggested. 'A problem needs a technique,' says Paul Carter, 'or a technique needs a problem. They know what they want to take pictures of.'

The club was set up with money from Kodak and the Arts Council. Paul Carter was awarded the Kodak Award for socially-committed photography three years ago. Since that was used up, the Inner London Education Authority has paid him £24 a week as a part-time teacher. (Paul Carter, of course, does a lot of other photographic work for the Settlement.)

Other grants have come from the Greater London Arts Association, London Union of Youth Clubs and the South London Union of Trades Councils. Two anonymous people have given £200 - other bits and pieces and an old 25-inch rotary plate have been donated. Members of the club pay five pence a week.

The club works in small groups of three or four members with a regular helper. The groups select themselves. There are occasional splits, but the great advantage is that everybody knows each other and many live in the same estate or block of flats. This means that they can share cameras and other equipment among themselves. They also always have a friend around to help.

At first the club used Zorki cameras but had problems with the shutters. Some were dis-

prol, and two were 'lost'. They now use Praktica L5 which are holding up well. There has never been any malicious damage, and no selling.'

As you can see from the photographs published here, others in the British Journal of Photography, and by coming to the exhibition at the Half Moon Gallery, the club is a great success. We all know that we really take photographs because it makes us happy. This group is vibrant.

PAUL CARTER INTERVIEWING BLACK-FRIARS YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP

Chris Baylis: I take more care of them now. I don't just go out taking any pictures. A lot of people have been asking me to take pictures now 'cause they think it's a good idea to go to photography class. I think it's good. I know how to take pictures more carefully now. Instead of just going out and just taking them and that. I know how to develop them now and that. It's good to watch them, you know, getting the picture on the paper. It's closer the way it comes out. It's more interesting. 'Cause when I used to take things, you used to just give them to the chemist and you don't know what they are going to come out like. But when you take films, it's interesting watching how the pictures come and what shading you're going to get on the picture and that. It's good.

Robbie Clark: Now when you take a picture, you know what it's going to come out like 'cause you know how to take pictures. You know that if you want a good picture, you have to get the head and feet in so you can see. Not have a head here and the rest all coming or something.

Paul Carter: What do you do with your photographs?

Teresa Stone: Well, when I go to I show them to my mum and dad and see what they think of them. They usually think they are quite good, and then I put them in my box and sometimes I take them to school and show me mates. 'Cause sometimes they're interested in what I take. Then often I just show anyone who's around.

Paul: Do you show them to your teachers?

Teresa: Some of them I do. You know, my tutor and that, but not all of them that I go 'round to see.

Paul: Do your friends sometimes say that they would like to go to photography class?

Teresa: Yeah. Two or three girls asked me the times and that. But I said you have to be on the waiting list. But they do want to come.

Paul: Do they think photography is difficult?

Teresa: Yeah, but they want to learn it.

Paul: We noticed that when photography club started and word got around that people could join, nearly all the people who asked to join were boys. You were the first girl to start. Do you think there is any reason why more boys were interested?

Teresa: Well, now girls are interested. At first only boys thought they could go. I don't think girls were interested at first. But now they've come to see the pictures and everything they're more interested. And also there's not many girls around here. Except 'round at Wilkes Row. There's more boys here.

Paul: Do you think that girls think that photography is something they can't do?

Teresa: No. I don't think that at all. Because girls think they are just as good as boys and can do anything. But you know it's harder for girls than it is for boys because they have got all the teachers. They all like boys and everything. Just girls on their own. I think there should be a few girl teachers.



Robbie Clark age 11 - 'Chris and I together'



Christopher Blackman aged 13 - This is a picture of my sister in the living room curling her hair



Danny Hayes, age 16 - This is my sister, Veronica. She had just come back from karate, and she said it was rubbish because her partner was hopeless, so she was just showing me what she felt like doing to her.



Teresa Stone, age 12 - 'In this photo my mum and my nancy, Jackie, are in my house posing.'

'Doing Photography' was first shown locally at the Waterloo Action Centre and then opened at the Half Moon Gallery before touring the country. Camerawork magazine and other publications featured their pictures.

Hundreds of photographers young and old were trained at regular BPP workshops. Some of their prints have found their way to Southwark and Lambeth archives, but most are hidden away somewhere.

Do you remember 'doing photography' with the Blackfriars Photography Project?

Contact us via the SE1 Stories website.



se1stories.uk/blackfriars-se1/your-thoughts