

**Remarks by the Honourable Peter Underwood AC
Governor of Tasmania to open the Hobart Photographic
Society's annual exhibition,**

Mawson's Pavilion, Hobart Monday 5th

I am honoured that this is the second time that the Hobart Photographic Society has asked me to open its annual exhibition. However, I have to tell you that I am not the best person for the job because I am a complete novice when it comes to photography. I shouldn't be a novice for my father was a very keen photographer, but the keener he became the more obscure were his photographs to his teenage son. I found I just couldn't work up the same excitement that my father had for looking at black and white photos - for in those days it was all black and white - of spider's webs, the hairy legs of bees, an entrance to an ants' nest and like photographs. And when we got to colour slides there was no holding my father back. By then I was at the rebellious age and anything he was interested in I felt obliged, with the extensive and infallible wisdom of teenage years, to dismiss as being beneath me. It was a shame because in retrospect I am sure that there was a lot that I could have learnt from my father about photography and I now realise that had I been more tolerant I would likely have acquired at least a rudimentary knowledge of the art of photography and gained much enjoyment, as he did, from photography as his hobby.

Thinking about the past made me think how much photography has changed since 1839 when the first complete practical photographic process was announced at a meeting of

the French Academy of Sciences.¹ Once discovered the technology developed in leaps and bounds. In 1889 George Eastman, the founder of Kodak, changed the science of photography with the invention of the roll of film and made it possible for everybody to be a photographer. Who didn't have a Box Brownie? And the major developments in this and the last century have made the digital camera ubiquitous and frequently found in unusual places like the inside your telephone.

Now although it is a hackneyed expression it is non-the-less true that a picture is worth a thousand words, for a photograph is a picture that has the capacity to evoke an immediate high emotional impact. We all can recall top of the range pictures of that ilk; the Viet Cong soldier who shot his prisoner in the head at point blank range as they walked down a dusty road; and the crowd of people tearing down the Berlin Wall and the tanks in Tiananmen Square.

The power of the emotive content of a photograph is almost always directly proportional to the skill of the photographer. Sometimes it may be the subject matter. Sometimes it is a question of how the subject matter is arranged. Sometimes it may be angle of the shot. Sometimes it may be the light, or the time of day that the photograph is taken. Occasionally high emotive capacity of a photo may be a matter of luck, but mostly it is a matter of skill.

¹ "[Fixation des images qui se forment au foyer d'une chambre obscure](#)" (Fixing of images formed at the focus of a *camera obscura*), *Comptes rendus*, 8 : 4-7.

Reported at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_photography. Accessed 26th April 2014.

Recent technological advances in the science of photography have provided the photographer with assistance in creating photographs with high emotive content but it remains the case – as it has done since 1839 - that the emotive content of a photo depends on the photographer. This is the case even since the advent of photoshop where factors that increase the emotive content of a photograph can be added or adjusted after the photo has been taken - the emotive content still depends on the artistic skills of the photographer. Sometimes it can be done quickly, just as a water colour with a high emotive content can be created with a few swift and economic, but skillful strokes of the brush, so too a highly charged photograph can be taken in a second, but I think mostly the really good photos take time care and great deal of thought.

What charges a photograph with high emotive content calls for the exercise of individual subjective assessment. There are no objective criteria. I had a look at this exhibition this afternoon just after it had been mounted. There is a photograph here called French silhouette taken by Fran Adams and it spoke to me. It's quite a straight forward picture across a ploughed field to a line of trees, but for me there is something intriguing about the juxtaposition of the large flat rather dark field in the foreground and the exquisite tiny but very fine branches of the distant trees. Another one that had high emotive content for me was done – and I use the word advisedly – by Phil O'Halloran. It is called St Ives and the thing that made it so attractive to me was that it looks like a painting. Now there's the full cycle for you, but it was simply

fascinating – all the brightly coloured boats and houses in the background just made me feel good. I quizzed Phil about how he got that effect from an ordinary photograph, but his explanation to me sounded a bit like the ones my father pressed on me and my cognition shut down. However, it's still a good one for me and there are many more like it in this wonderful exhibition of work from experienced and learner photographers alike.

It's too late for me to revisit my father's photographs, but could I do so now that I am perhaps a little more mature I might find his photographs of spider's webs, bees' knees, and entrances to ants' nests to be rich in emotive content!

But I suspect that there is something else beside the art of photography that makes the Hobart Photographic Society so special. The stereotype membership of a Photographic Society is a small number of grey haired men and women who meet about once a month in a dreary former church hall and listen to a lecture about some aspect of photography. Well, I have recently spent some time browsing the Society's web site and it certainly does not give the impression that its members fit the stereotype to which I have referred. The website gives the impression that the Hobart Photographic Society is a modern, busy and active community group of people who share a common passion for photography. There are regular monthly meetings, but in addition to them there are various special groups such as the portrait interest group, the challenge group, the technical group and best of all, the Chit Chat group. There

are regular competitions, of which this is one, a monthly newsletter is circulated amongst members and there are regular "Club Strolls" the last of which was Anzac day where I saw some of you busy with your cameras at the Cenotaph. And I am confident that there was nothing staid about the activities of members who were photographed taking part in the 14th February Raw Challenge.

So as I say, I have the impression that the members of the Society are a supportive community group loosely bound by a common interest, and who look out for each other in a caring and encouraging way. You have been going for nearly 50 years now and I wish you all fine photography, warm companionship and good fortune for the next 50 years as I formally now declare open the Hobart Photographic Society's annual exhibition for 2014.