



NEWSLETTER

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Are we now in a new “normal” mode?

This is now the third month that this newsletter proclaims that nothing much is happening, and it is self-evident that this will be the common theme for some time. But there are a few things to report to you, and a bit of research in the background suggests that things will never be the same in the world of camera collecting and even in the camera industry itself. But it may come as a surprise that a few changes that we might attribute to COVID-19 were already evident a couple of years ago and recent events have only accelerated those trends.

The most obvious trend in the industry is the very significant downturn in the manufacture of conventional cameras which is now less than 20% of what it was five years ago, and may be a lot lower than that in the recent couple of months as much of the manufacture in SE Asia has come to a halt. Further, announcements of new models which had been touted as recently as 3 months ago have now been delayed by many months and in some cases probably put on hold indefinitely as production problems increase, trade exhibitions to market those products cease, and conventional trade wanes.

One of the effects of the lockdowns is that some people have found time to update databases etc. Such an update process has occurred in what is becoming the universal reference for camera identification and value estimations – the on-line Collectiblend database, and new data has been added for the most recent years. An analysis of that database shows that classical cameras like Leica, Zeiss etc which showed steady increases in value up until about 2014, have been flat and even in decline since then when adjusted for inflation. The values on legacy lenses which led the growth values after the development of mirrorless digital cameras from about 2010, have also flattened as users realise that the emerging lens designs that are dedicated to the software systems in the new cameras are producing results that cannot be achieved using heritage lenses – no matter how good those lenses were when they were made.

This is not good for us as collectors who were treating cameras as investments, and there is some evidence that the market is flooding with quality items as owners capitalise on their “investments”. Large collections from deceased estates are increasing the flood.

But people have developed a habit of recording images in much larger quantities than previously and the emergence of the integrated cameras in computers, tablets and phones continues to dominate the market. More telling for the photographic industry as a whole, those integrated cameras are now almost universally better performers than the conventional cameras that

they are replacing, and in a few cases are outstripping the best of the professional digital cameras at prices that are dramatically lower. That is very evident in the new Samsung phone which was announced as a beta version in the UK this last month – see the item below for more detail. It is aimed at the professional market at twice the price of a conventional smart phone but half the price of an equivalent conventional camera. And those phones have a few advantages as well – inbuilt communications with cloud storage, email systems, super-light-weight, and probably above all, users need the phones today and the camera features come almost for free.

The emergence of the phone-camera has been one of growth that is maybe unprecedented. It started as a curious add-on with low resolution about 15 years ago, but by 5 years ago was emerging as a quality solution as the major developers like Sony, Zeiss etc started pushing the boundaries for lenses and imagers, and as the item below points out, the forefront of camera development is now focussed on the mobile phone as the most profitable platform. The volumes are now orders of magnitude higher than any camera platform that ever existed.

Corona Virus COVID19 – an update on the APCS position

Even as governments talk about relaxing isolation, the APCS is a group of older people that would be very much at risk if we were to become a COVID epicentre. Consequently, we will be more conservative in relaxing meeting restrictions for some time yet. Normality for us is now a period of cancelled and deferred events, with absolutely no certainty about when that will change, and every indication that the old normal won't be until late in 2020 if not into 2021, and may never be fully achieved. So the current list of changes looks like the following:

- **Members-only market and social event scheduled for 17th May – CANCELLED.**
- **The AGM scheduled for 21st June – DEFERRED to a date to be determined. (see below)**
- **The Members only Auction scheduled for 19th July – CANCELLED**
- **Members-only market and social event scheduled for 16th August – IN DOUBT – watch for announcements**
- **Public Market scheduled for 20th September – IN DOUBT – watch for announcements**
- **The program for the remainder of the year is now subject to new planning.**

Announcements will be made on the APCS webpage: www.apcsociety.com.au and on the APCS Facebook

page as well as in the newsletters. It is increasingly a case that we have to look after ourselves, and clearly, isolation is probably the best policy. This is new territory and at least for the time being we are feeling our way through it. To stay safe, we will curtail what we used to do to support our collections. Quoting the Manager of "Photographica" (USA):

"There are cameras to die for, but none worth dying for!"

The Samsung Galaxy S20 Ultra – just another phone or a whole new platform?

As this newsletter is being written, data is emerging about the capabilities of a new mobile phone from Samsung – their Galaxy S20 Ultra. It is feature rich – exploiting the 5G platform – but for photographers, this is a whole new world of what can be fitted in such a small package. A couple of commentators in the UK have had an early version of this new model in their hands and while some of their reporting has been full of wrong data or maybe it is typographical errors by people who don't understand photography, the details that are evident are extraordinary to say the least and probably mark the end of the pre-eminence of conventional cameras – even at the professional end (if that has not already happened!).

From a photographer's point of view the new system is based on a central 108MP camera aided by a couple of 48MP telephoto units all on the back of the camera. Various combinations of prism and lens systems have allowed a large format sensor to be included, pixel grouping to allow serious low-light performance, and a zoom lens. Some of the published claims seem a bit odd and maybe some questionable information out there, but the combination does allow 10:1 linear zoom features, full auto focus, mechanical image stability – all of use to the serious photographer. This is backed up with substantial image storage and a large high-resolution viewing screen (6.9" diagonal OLED 3,200 by 1,440).

As reviewed there are a couple of disadvantages and a higher cost. At 8.8mm thick it is a bit thicker than older models, battery drain is a major issue in spite of complex battery-saving options, and the cost is expected to be the equivalent of A\$2,850 for the highest specification version with 16GB of RAM and 512GB of storage based on the expected UK price. The camera – and other features of this device – are aimed at professional use, and time will tell if Samsung have got this right...

We may have to wait for a while to see and use one of these – it is 5G, and there are a few software updates pending to sort out a few teething problems. While the sample models available in the UK are real, we may have to wait for another model before some of the practical aspects of putting a lot of technology in a small package are dealt with at a price that the public is prepared to pay.

Buying and Selling Photographic Items

Events facilitating buying and selling photographic items are simply off for the time being globally, with no certainty of a change to that reality in the foreseeable future. Maybe techniques like eBay and on-line auctions will emerge that meet the expectations and requirements of collectors but it will take time for such techniques to emerge and for people to have the confidence that they are appropriate for our needs.

The APCS is now forced into a position of looking for alternative ways of marketing these goods. Ideas of on-line auctions etc have been contemplated but there are a few inhibitors against going down that path. The alternative of an extended Members-only Market is similarly impossible under the current restrictions.

An option exists to deal with items that have a specific value that is acceptable to the vendors – setting prices and listing the items in the Classified advertisements in the APCS Newsletter. The sale is then managed between individual members. The catalogue effectively becomes part of the newsletter and will have linked photographs of the major items.

A problem for many members is that prices and demand are highly volatile at the best of times and we will need to find a very special crystal ball to discover what the appropriate prices should be. Of course, there is the added complex issue that prices are usually determined by competing interest and knowledge of the condition of the items on offer. Buyers want to determine those details first hand and rarely accept the opinion of others. Price recommendations that are found in reference books and on-line are not reliable indicators for the present – they rely on historic reported data and there is plenty of evidence of manipulation.

For the APCS, the markets and auctions provide a major part of the revenue that allows the APCS to operate. We have resources that will allow a low revenue period for a while but eventually we will have to think again about how we operate financially.

Communication with members

A key issue in any communications with members that relies on electronic means is that we have electronic addresses for everyone. If your email address changes, please send an email to web@apcsociety.com.au including your name – so that we can communicate effectively.

We know that there are about a dozen members who have not provided us with email addresses – we will be contacting them by phone from time to time as a way of keeping them informed. The newsletter (including back copies) are available electronically from the Members' page on the APCS website. If you feel nostalgic you might download a few and read them. And before anyone complains – there was no "No.30" – someone could not count back in 2013!

The APCS AGM in June

The AGM scheduled for June is certain to be deferred, and even without rule changes can be as late as the end of October. There is no certainty that we will be able to hold a conventional meeting and we have some alternatives to consider. An obvious one is to run the AGM electronically. More about that in future newsletters.

We do need to fill a couple of committee vacancies ASAP, and to consider the election of all members of the Committee in the AGM process. Give some thought on how you could contribute and note that all members throughout the world can be part of the committee as we expect that all committee business will be on-line for this next year. Technology is coming to our aid and modern conferencing software will be used.

Fakes and counterfeits – news from China

We have commented on the existence of fakes and counterfeits of quality photographic items before but a recent case in China is an indication that things might be about to change. In a case brought by the Swiss firm of Alpa, a Chinese firm that was producing fake versions of one of their products has been told to pay Alpa damages resulting from the Chinese manufacture. The case is complicated but the Chinese courts found that the Alpa camera could be seen as “art” getting around the complicated Chinese patent laws that would otherwise not have supported the Alpa claim. In a maybe amusing twist, the interest in protection by the Chinese courts seems to stem from the recent emergence of Chinese copies of OTHER Chinese products!

Back Focus – current plans

There is a further delay in the production of the next Back Focus. This will now include the full annual report of the operations of the APCS for 2019-2020 and the current expectation is that it will be in your hands at the end of June. It will be a much larger issue than usual, making up for the loss of an issue in 2019 and a reduction in the number of issues in 2020. The full index is still being determined but will include a series of short presentations on interesting cameras that were shown to members at the February meeting, Part 2 of a series on cameras that were innovative, some shorter articles that have been received but not yet published, and a major article on the practical side of using classic lenses – reviewed now that very high resolution mirrorless cameras are available. This article summarises the performance of over 50 lenses with about 50mm focal lengths made in the last 120 years, predominantly for the same format as the latest digital cameras, including measured details on various degradations. Spoiler alert: Those results show that none of the classical lenses are better than the emerging new designs – even the cheaper ones – when corrected by the software in modern cameras.

Back Focus can't exist without good articles. Remember that we are a collecting society – write up your speciality and share your enthusiasm with the rest of the membership – you never can tell what might be hiding out there and current owners don't know what you are really enthusiastic about – it might bring you that elusive model or example that you have been chasing for years.

Membership renewals

It is now time to renew your membership for 2020-2021, and thank you to the members who have already renewed their membership for the next year. They become due at the end of this month and the fee of \$30 can be paid by a direct deposit into the bank account:

Account name: Australian Photographic Collectors' Society. BSB: 083166 – Account: 515315423 and be certain to put your name or membership number in the reference field.

Or you can send a cheque to the Treasurer
P.O.Box126, KANGAROO GROUND, VIC 3097

If any of your details have changed please let us know. Download the membership form from the website <http://www.apcsociety.com.au/membership.html> and include it with your cheque, or email the changes to the Treasurer or to web@apcsociety.com.au

Magazine exchanges

The APCS has magazine exchange relationships with other societies of like nature and in the past, copies were usually located in the APCS library. Modern trends towards having such items on-line allows us to make those copies directly available to you from our website.

The 2020 copies of “Snap Shots” from the Photographic Historical Society of New England (including the latest edition 2020-05) can be found at:

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSNE/2020-01_snap-shots_web.pdf

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSNE/2020-02_snap-shots_web.pdf

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSNE/2020-03_snap-shots_web.pdf

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSNE/2020-04_snap-shots_web.pdf

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSNE/2020-05_snap-shots_web.pdf

And from the Photographic Historical Society of Canada:

www.apcsociety.com.au/PHSC_NEWS_2020_04.pdf

Of course, we have permission from those societies to reproduce their newsletters – just as they can reproduce what we publish as well.

Auctions and Markets around the World

The APCS is not the only camera collecting organisation that has effectively gone into recess as a result of the pandemic. The effect of this on our hobby and interests is uncharted territory, and it will probably be quite some time before we discover what the result will be. We know that collecting cameras has been affected in recent times by a general drift away from collecting and towards trading – and there are several theories and opinions around what that should be.

A practical issue is that it will take time before a significant change is evident and there is little doubt that many collectors will be unlikely to trade while there is so much uncertainty. Consider your own thinking about this... What are you doing about your collection? What do you want to do? Is it time to divest yourself of your collection (or investment) depending on why you have so many old cameras?

Vendors who were planning to submit articles for the next auction have stated that they are prepared to wait out the crisis. That might be a common thought. However, that crisis may not be over for a very long time.

Classified Advertisements

You can place classified advertisements in these pages. Send an email to adverts@apcsociety.com.au including a JPG photo if you wish. Rather than include your name and contact details we can add an enquiry code and pass information on to you – then you can deal directly with the responders – your decision. At present there is no charge for this service. For the time being keep the text down to under 50 words per item.