

Club Meetings & Coronavirus

Wed 25th March

Last night, the Hay Camera Club held its usual meeting, despite the constraints of coronavirus lockdown. We had a great presentation from one of our members, Colin Lawrence, of images from various parts of the world, especially some very well observed street photography. The audience took part in a lively debate, interjecting comments, congratulations and applause as appropriate. Some members enjoyed a glass of wine or beer during the presentation.

Well, it wasn't quite a meeting as usual because it was done online by videoconference. This was our first virtual meeting and 13 members took part. Over the weeks to come we hope more will manage to participate and we are now lining up speakers and ideas for a lively and engaging calendar of events. It is a brilliant way to keep in touch, to remain close despite "distancing" and to continue to learn about photography.

In setting up the virtual meeting, I investigated a number of technological options. I wanted a system that was not too limited in the number of participants, which allowed us to meet for as long as we wish, was accessible to all members regardless of their computer equipment and operating system, and most importantly was free to use. Based on my analysis, we opted for the free version of Microsoft Teams. You can find more information on getting started with teams at <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/welcome-to-microsoft-teams-free-6d79a648-6913-4696-9237-ed13de64ae3c>.

If other Camera Clubs would like to use this system for virtual meetings, it is easy to do. Just follow the guide on the website to set up your Camera Club "Team". You can then invite members to join the team by adding their email address. Each member added will receive a notification email with a link to download the Teams App. The App is available for PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone, Linux and Android. All can be downloaded from here: <https://teams.microsoft.com/downloads>.

Once in the Teams App you can start a meeting and invite others to join in. If they have a camera and microphone they can see and be seen and heard. If not, they can still see the presentation and the other members and can take part using the associated text interface. Members can also keep in touch in between Club meetings using the app.

Some of our Hay members had a few glitches in the setup. You need to have a Microsoft account and to know your account password. You may also have to go through a security verification process which caused one or two problems. But in the end, everyone managed to get online, even if they are not techies. It would be good though if you have someone with some technical knowledge to take the lead and help others with any problems. There are plenty of help resources online, including a community support forum where most problems have already been answered (<https://techcommunity.microsoft.com/t5/microsoft-teams/bd-p/MicrosoftTeams>).

Other videoconferencing systems are available, including Skype (but the free version has limits on the number of participants) and Zoom (which limits conferences of more than 3 people to 40 minutes). Google Hangouts Meet (https://gsuite.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/products/meet/) is another option that looks fairly

straightforward, but you need to have someone with a paid G-Suite account to use it. Because of the coronavirus, Google has made this virtual meeting system free for such subscribers until July so if any of your members has an account, that could also be an option and looks very straightforward.

For me and many others I'm sure, our weekly Camera Club meetings are an important part of life that we would prefer not to lose. So, it is worth getting set up for virtual meetings. The feedback from members on our first one was overwhelmingly positive. One member said it was more "intimate" than the usual meeting in a hall in Hay-on-Wye. The only thing we really missed was Angela's cakes at break time. We look forward to getting back to those as soon as the lockdown ends, as it will. Meanwhile, good luck and stay safe and well – and keep taking photographs (I'm off to do some macro work in the garden).

David Bull, Hay Camera Club