

Pointers toward successful night time photography

{ 11th February 2020

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Including

- Fireworks
- Street scenes and buildings
- Fairgrounds
- Landscapes
- Moon
- Light Trails
- Reflections
- Painting with flash (Light).

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Challenges

- Exposure
- Depth of Field
- Camera shake
- Brightness extremes
- Pre-empting position
- Multiple exposures
- Colour balance
- Flash

Fireworks

Remove any filters

Use a tripod if possible

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Exposure

- Use long exposure. Use smaller apertures. Underexpose rather than overexpose. Use raw if possible.
 - 5 secs for a single burst
 - 30 secs for multiple burst (use a black card to cover the lens between bursts)
- Set camera on manual focus
- Check focus and exposure with the first few bursts
- Leave plenty of room in the image as you don't know where the burst will be
- Stand at right angles to the wind if possible
- Try including silhouettes of people against the fire glow
- Try to position yourself so that lights and buildings are not in the frame
- After each shot check the picture on the screen for exposure and focus

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Post processing

- Adjust each shot for exposure and colour saturation
- Set 'clarity' high
- Sharpen as required try using hard light blending mode
- Make up composites and position for a balanced composition
- This is the best time to include silhouettes and the fire



You need the right conditions and check the size of the display, some are more detailed than others! (Quality of Fireworks).



Camera on Tripod ISO 100 F16 for 5 seconds.



3 different Firework photos added to Ship Photo.

Street scenes and buildings

- People, buildings, shops, monuments, streets, traffic, reflections, fountains, markets etc.

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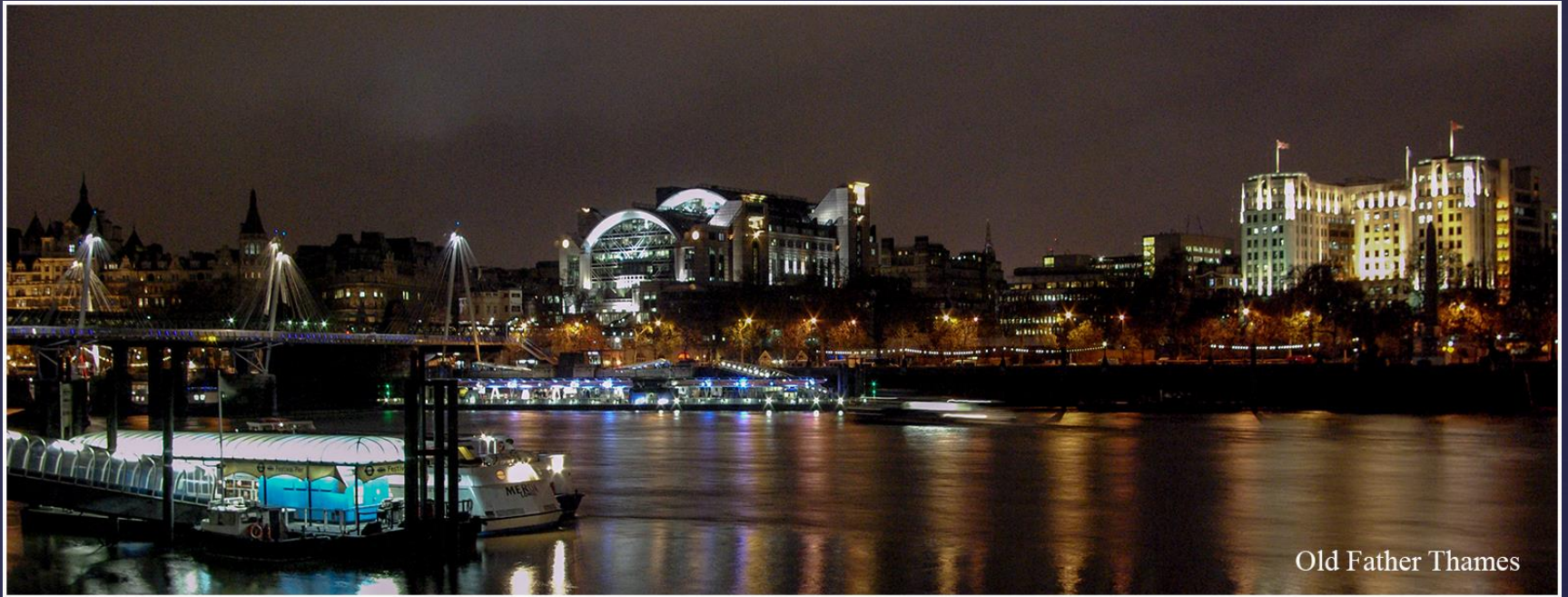
Exposure

Impossible to define but some guidelines

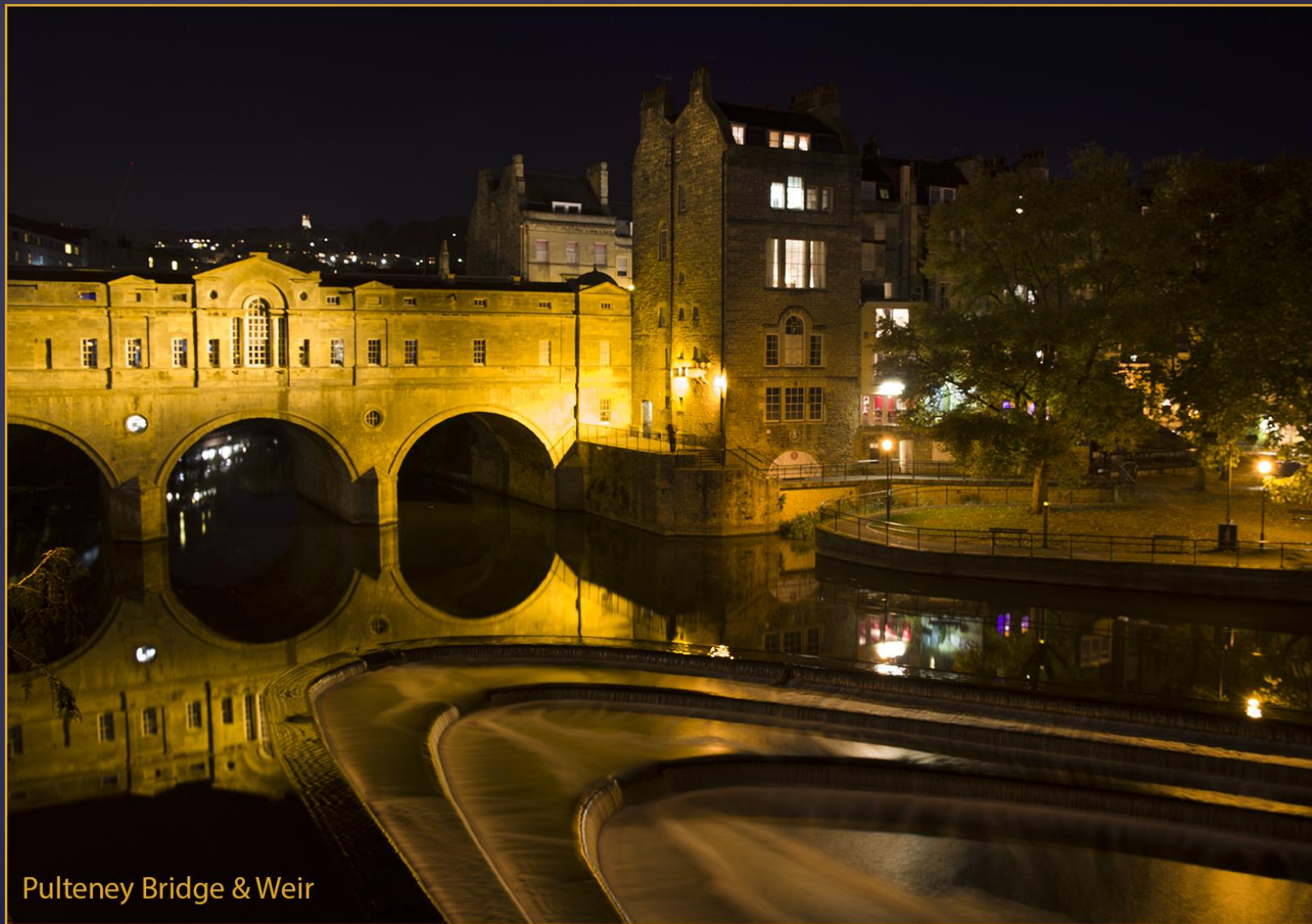
- Illuminated windows of shops make hand holding a possibility. Try 400iso f8 1/30th sec
- Streets: using street lighting need a tripod, expose for key features and let the lights burn out. Use trial and error. Also try bracketing and HDR
- Buildings: as for streets if illuminated by street style lights
- Floodlit buildings: try to position yourself so that floodlights are not in the frame then expose for the main parts of the building. Let the shadows look after themselves. Usually a tripod will be required, and remote release if available.
- Fountains: use trial and error but expose for the highlights and adjust with Photoshop
- Traffic: expose for the surrounding buildings and let the traffic blur and leave light trails. Best with traffic moving away from the camera
- Reflections: these always enhance night photos but can in themselves be the subject. Once again expose for the highlights
- Markets: this will normally require people to be included, either expose for the stalls and leave the people as blurs or use fill in flash and let the background look after itself. This latter approach requires a high ASA and slow shutter speed to expose for the background



Salisbury Market Square



Old Father Thames



Pulteney Bridge & Weir

The Moon

- Use a tripod and your longest lens, and remote release to reduce shake.
- The moon can be very bright do not be fooled. In a low pollution full moon situation the exposure will be of the order of 100iso 1/125TH sec, f16
- Remember the moon is not white it is a brownish grey
- Some cloud wisps helps the atmosphere
- Take moon shots and merge with night landscapes in Photoshop
- Typical UK low in the sky large moon start at 100iso 1/125th second f8
- Tend toward under exposure (no whites) and adjust in Photoshop



Picture on the left ISO 4000 F6.3 1/30 sec

Picture on right ISO 1250 F6.3 1/3200 sec

Remember you are exposing for the brightness of the moon!

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Light Trails

- This can only be done by trial and error for both the exposure and the shutter speed but starting points are possibly:
- Motorway bridge looking down on motorway 1/4th second f8 400ASA
- Fairground big wheel 1 second f8 200 iso
- Train at speed 1/4th second f8 400 iso



By adding some Bus light trails a more interesting and pleasing photo can be produced. (Obviously this is all personal preference, nothing is right or wrong).



Details in sky adds more context and relativity.

Fairgrounds

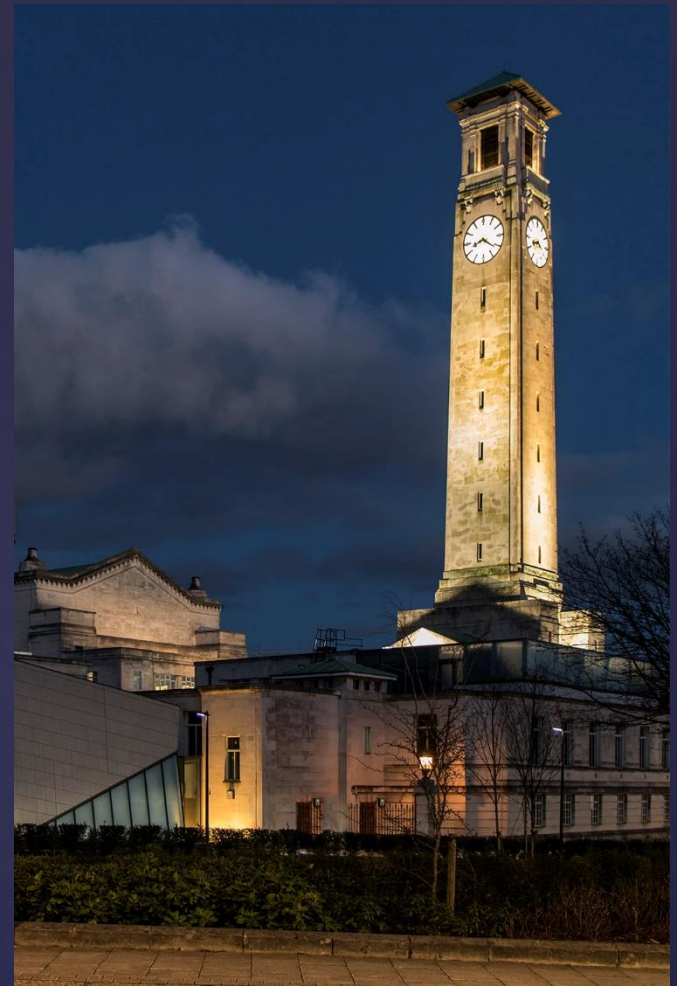
- Fairgrounds buzz especially at night so frozen images with flash do not capture the mood
- Lighting and people blur capture movement so manual exposure settings with longish shutter speeds coupled with fill in flash should be used to capture expressions
- Use similar techniques as for Markets
- Tripods are difficult to impossible to position due to the limited space between rides
- Use high ASA speeds to allow handholding
- Use structures against which you can hold the camera (not rides or music sources they vibrate too much)
- For blurred lighting some level of camera shake may not be a problem
- Try deliberate camera movement to smear the lights

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Landscapes

- Most if not all night time landscapes are taken with some level of light in the sky. The one common exception is when the landscape is illuminated by moonlight.
- Use a tripod and a remote release if available.
- Relatively high ISO (400-1600) but watch out for electronic noise
- Small aperture (f8-f16) and long exposures 1-60 seconds)
- Use trial and error to achieve an exposure to balance the features of the landscape especially when water and reflections are included
- If using moonlight for the illumination do not include the moon it will be far too bright. Try adding the moon in the post process activities



Just by waiting 60 minutes a completely different photo affect can be achieved. From a dull record photo to a more dramatic one, giving a sense of time (no pun intended)and place!

Painting with Light

- You need at least two people, good communications and a lot of trial and error. It needs to be done in an area with little or no ambient light.
- Establish where you wish to take the subject from and set up the camera on a tripod
- Choose a relatively low ISO (200) and small aperture (f8)
- Ensure that the flash is full charged
- Set the camera on bulb fire the shutter then re-fire the flash in a second position
- Check image for exposure and width of flash coverage
- Repeat until satisfied
- Now you have the exposure, the flash coverage and flash to subject distance
- Now decide which areas you wish to have illuminated.
- Making sure that the flash man is not silhouetted by his own flash trigger the camera on a bulb exposure and set off the flash at each of the predetermined positions.
- In between flashes cover the lens with a black card (do not move the camera in the slightest)
- Finally close the shutter

Bits and Pieces

Contrast

The brightness extremes at night vary from completely black to very bright. The ranges are way beyond our eye's capability to see detail in both highlights and shadows (and the eyes have a greater capability than our camera). This means that we will have to sacrifice detail both at the bright end of the contrast range and at the dark end. Remember that it is night time photography and in-penetrable blacks are normal

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Colour balance and hue

With any artificial lighting there will be colour casts. Sodium lamps are almost pure yellow, Mercury lamps have a green hue as do many fluorescent lights. Either accept them for what they are or try to correct in Photoshop or make the image monochrome.

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You have it easy

We use to have to wait until the film was processed and start experimenting again (unless we were lucky), that cost a lot of money

GO FORTH AND CAPTURE