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The Sinar F enforces the photographer's awareness of light

Sinar F

A camera that taught the importance of planning and contemplation



Name Ian Beesley HonFRPS
About West Yorkshire-born Ian started his working life as a labourer and started taking photos in 1973. He won the Kodak Scholarship for Social Documentation in 1978

“In 39 years as a working photographer I have only owned five cameras, and I still use four of them. The one I lost was probably my favourite not for any technical or aesthetic reasons, but because it was my first professional camera. It was a Sinar F monorail bought with money left by my father, who died suddenly in 1975.

When I bought it, mum said: ‘Every photograph you take with it will be in some way a remembrance of your dad. It was my dad, a keen amateur photographer, who encouraged my interest in

photography. He taught me how to develop films and contact print them in our blacked-out bathroom.

One of the first images I took with my new camera was of The Strid, a famous beauty spot on the River Wharfe in the Yorkshire Dales. He had a fascination with waterfalls, something which I have inherited.

The Sinar introduced me to a new way of taking photographs. I could only afford three dark slides, so I had to think very carefully about each plate. It made me realise how important it is to research, plan and contemplate your image



ANCOATS

Ian Beesley, with poet Ian McMillan, presents Magic Lantern Tales an evening of photography from WWI veterans, along with poetry and songs. The event tours Yorkshire this autumn, starting on 25 September at Accrington Library. See more dates at uktouring.org.uk/ian-mcmillan

making. It enforces the photographer's relationship with light and photographic materials, something which is sadly lost in digital imaging. Initially I used the camera for landscape photography, but then started to use it for all my work and found I particularly liked using it for portraits. With a plate camera the relationship between photographer and subject is completely different from when using smaller formats. The sitting becomes more of a performance, the photographer does not hide his face behind the camera, and once the frame and focus is set, photographer and sitter can have face-to-face contact. It becomes more of a collaboration than a one-sided transaction.

The camera lasted for 36 years, held together with increasing amounts of gaffer tape, superglue and Blu-Tack. It came to its end in the winter of 2011 when I was photographing the waterfalls near Dovestone, on the edge of Saddleworth Moor. I slipped, knocking camera and tripod some 40 feet into the dark, deep pool beneath the falls.

A sad but strangely fitting ending to a camera that had helped shape my career.”