

Imaging the Changes

John Henshall looks at some of the many changes which photography has faced and is about to face

The pace of development of digital imaging continues to increase exponentially. Yet much of the development is bypassing professional organisations because it breaks totally new ground in the uses of imaging.

George Orwell got the message right but the date wrong. His nightmare vision of 1984 was more than twenty years out. But his fiction is turning out to be fact in 2006 – and in ways which are nothing less than scary.

The United Kingdom has more cameras pointing at its population per capita than any other in the world.

It's all in the good cause of national security, of course.

There's no point in recording us unless you can identify us, though. And this is where national identity cards will come in. Never mind the actual cards we carry – it's the national computer database of photographs of each and every one of us which really matters. It's against that database that we will be monitored, using facial recognition techniques.

No wonder the government wants to spend billions on the project.

If you've got nothing to hide, there's absolutely nothing to fear, is there? After all, it's all about catching those villains, isn't it?

Have you seen and been staggered by the incredible resolution of the aerial photographs on **Google Earth**?

At the moment these photographs from space – available to everyone – are still images. Just key in your postcode and you'll find that the resolution is easily high enough to reveal you lying on the sun lounger in your garden with your next door neighbour's partner.

And this isn't even the military resolution version.

Already there is talk of your local authority spying from the sky to discover the new extension you use as a studio. Did you think it was well hidden round the back of the property?

And what about the new conservatory? Be aware that a higher band council tax bill could be landing on your doormat soon – completely computer generated after a comparison with last year's aerial photographs.

On 23 December 2005 *The Daily Telegraph* (www.telegraph.co.uk) reported that Britain will this year become the first country in which all car movements are monitored, logged and stored on a central database for two years. The system will use a seamless network of cameras.

Yes, it's another use of photography. "We find this idea to be disproportionate to any possible policing benefit and repugnant in itself," said *The Telegraph*. "Most of us would feel much safer with more police on the beat, offering a visible deterrent to criminals, rather than having technicians scouring hundreds of millions of our car journeys."

But here we enter the realm of politics and, as we'd like to believe, politics and photography do not mix. Oh no? Tell that to the government!

The Telegraph continues, "Scores of relatively junior and poorly paid clerical staff will henceforth have access to how all of us live our lives. What power over us this gives the computer operator; how intriguing it might be, at the end of a long boring shift, to check up, say, on the movements of an old girlfriend."

Of course the politicians will tell us that we have nothing to fear, that the system will be secure, that it will never be abused.

And indeed there is hope. Two CCTV camera operators in Liverpool have been sent to jail for 'voyeurism'. They used one of the council's CCTV cameras to spy on a naked woman in her own home, from the street outside.

Try telling **Walter Wolfgang** that the law will never be abused. He is the 82 years old man who was ejected by heavies from the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. He was denied

re-admission under the terrorism legislation. That's also legislation we've been assured will never be misused.

Although it didn't quite hit the headlines in such a big way, a well-known photographer had his camera seized by the police and his images deleted at that same Labour Party Conference.

His sin was taking photographs of delegates queuing for their passes. Obviously he was a security risk, in these dangerous times?

Not only was that photographer instantly recognisable but he was also a well-known Member of Parliament and indeed a member of the very same Labour Party whose conference was being held.

The photographer in question was none other than the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Photography and the Member for Great Grimsby – **Austin Mitchell MP**.

If Austin Mitchell has problems such as this, what chance can there be for the rest of us photographers?

Passport photography – an essential, if mundane, source of income for many High Street photo studios – has recently been subjected to increasingly stringent rules. It is said that up to eighty percent of passport photographs are now being rejected as being unsuitable.

Even when photographers take great care to ensure that the pictures conform to the UK Passport Service's template, some claim that their images are still being rejected.

The Passport Service says that the most common problems are eyes not clearly visible, unsuitable poses – such as not looking directly at the camera or with open mouth – 'enhanced' images and photographs printed on poor quality printers and paper.

The rules for children five years old and under have recently been partially relaxed but reports say that pictures are still being rejected.

The problem is that, when images are rejected – sometimes for spurious

or downright incorrect reasons – the onus is on the photographer to re-shoot free of charge.

A suspicious person might get the impression that the Passport Service is moving towards finding it necessary to set up its own centres for passport photography. That way, the compilation of a database of photographs of just about everyone in the country would be much easier to compile. And it would eliminate the possibility of fraudulent photographs – images which have been 'enhanced' digitally.

If this happens, studios which enjoy welcome income from passport photos will be left shooting photos for bus passes. I'm informed that this itself can be a nice earner in Scotland, however, where the devolved government has decided to give Scotland-wide bus passes to everyone over the age of 60.

Another problem for photographers in 2005 has been the risks attached to the inclusion of children in their photographs.

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, actually suggested putting up signs to alert parents of the dangers of digital photography. Presumably he did not consider there to be any danger from film photography?

Thanks to pressure from *Amateur Photographer* magazine and **Austin Mitchell MP**, who tabled an Early Day Motion on the subject in the House of Commons, the matter seems to have been quietly forgotten. But not until after at least one photographer had been arrested and his camera and computer taken away for investigation.

In assuming that every digital photographer is a potential paedophile, Livingstone fails to recognise that most affected children are abused by people already known or related to them.

Photographing children certainly can present dangers. When **Kevin Wilson** won the competition for the Phase One system last year, he sent in the original camera file, to confirm that his image had indeed been shot using a Phase One back.

I noted with interest that the uncropped shot included a woman in the background. I wondered if this was the mother of the child in the picture. Kevin confirmed that she indeed was. He was wisely taking care to ensure that he had proof that the parent was seen to approve of the shot.

Photographing a model portfolio for an eighteen year old girl, another photographer was probably the unluckiest of 2005.

The girl later claimed that a glass of water he had given her may have been drugged and that he may then have taken advantage of her.

Although that charge was dropped, the judge felt that some of his photographs had 'no artistic merit'. But the girl was one of those who posed herself, throwing pose after pose at the camera.

In the end it was the photographer's word against the girl's and her family's. The result is that the photographer is now spending a year in jail and is on the sexual offenders register.

Is this justice? People who beat up old ladies during aggravated burglary seem to get lesser sentences.

I have to admit that I spent a good deal of the Christmas holiday period thinking of the plight of that poor photographer, whom I have never met, and his family – wonderful people whom I have had the pleasure of knowing for many years.

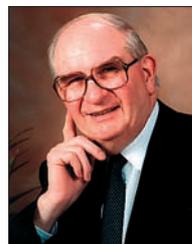
If you photograph members of the opposite sex unchaperoned the message must now be clear – do not do so unless you have a sophisticated surveillance system in your studio.

The latest digital imaging technology can help protect you and your reputation. Motion-sensitive CCTV systems, which record direct to hard disc, are now available for just a few hundred pounds.

For your safety, I advise you to install a suitable system in your studio. How sad that this now seems essential.

The year 2005 was a sad one for photography in some other ways as we lost a number of respected members of the profession.

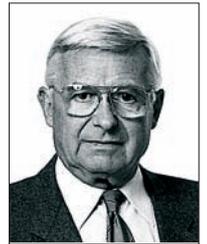
Frank Hatton died in June. Frank had been a key figure in the UK photographic industry since the 1950s, when he joined the Photographic Division of the well-established pharmaceutical organisation, Sangers, in Birmingham. When Sangers floated the photo business on the stock market as a separate company, Frank Hatton was appointed its chief executive and,



subsequently, chairman and chief executive of the public company.

In 1988 Frank became the first UK director of the Photo Marketing Association, putting the PMA firmly on the map in the UK. His broad benevolent smile, together with a voice which ought to have been heard on the Shakespearian stage, gave Frank a huge personal presence. Undoubtedly Frank Hatton was the first gentleman of photography.

Carl Koch, the Swiss photographer who designed his own view camera system in 1948, died in December 2005. The Sinar modular system soon became the world's best known large-format camera system. His motto was, "What can be done better shall be done better," and it is a tribute to his genius that even the earliest Sinars can still be updated with the latest digital backs.



Perhaps the biggest shock departure in 2005 was the untimely death of the ebullient **Lord Lichfield**. Patrick was a charming advocate of professional and digital photography. His down-to-earth enthusiasm will be greatly missed.

News from the photographic manufacturers was mixed.

Kyocera ceased production of the famous Contax brand which, along with Leica, powered the growth of 35mm photography early in the 20th century.

Agfa wavered, whilst **Ilford** had a wonderful renaissance with its specialist black and white products.

There were big changes at the biggest name in photography: **Kodak**.

CEO **Dan Carpe** retired, making way for an older man.

Kodak's professional services have been cut back severely. It had been the first into the professional DSLR field some fifteen years ago but production has now ceased. The company's future will not be an easy one.



Changes in photography have never before come so quickly as they do today. The new ways are exciting, challenging and dangerous but the opportunities for leadership are still there for the taking by the organisation which has the vision to recognise them and to grasp them.