

Photographs for the Railway Observer – Winter 2022
An updated guide to submitting images for publication
0123 Version 05 Final

Introduction:-

This new document provides guidance on the procedure for submitting photographs for possible inclusion in the Railway Observer. Collating, selecting and preparing images for publication is a complex and time-consuming process applying these guidelines will help to minimise the work.

Those at the recent Officers Conference will have heard the RO Managing Editor make it clear that we have probably reached the peak of what we can produce with our present resources and the co-operation of photographers is required to reduce the workload for the Image Editors. We now receive into the **roimages@rcts.org.uk** mailbox some 100+ emails every month with around 150+ images submitted of which approximately 50 to 60 images are published each month.

Please remember we are not a commercial graphics studio but just a group of volunteers doing our best to produce a monthly magazine which displays your photographs at their best and is the envy of other railway societies. We know this from letters received by the Managing Editor and from our printers when they are approached by other railway societies.

Brief Overview of Process:-

Upon receipt in the **roimages@rcts.org.uk** mailbox the images are extracted a few days before the monthly deadline into a folder and the associated captions are copied and pasted into a Word document for all the pictures received. This document is the means by which the images and captions are related and subsequently a caption is placed in the RO against the correct image.

The photographs are selected by the Managing Editor, listed and a draft magazine prepared for the Image Editors. The selected photographs are then prepared by the Image Editors for publication, a process defined by our printers. The work will vary widely in complexity dependent upon the quality of the original image submitted.

Some photographs require minimal processing as their colour balance and exposure is almost perfect. However some other photographs are real challenges and require substantial work to prepare the image for publication. Improvements made normally relate to the colour balance of the picture and the avoidance of excessively dark or bright areas. All photographs are then cropped and resized to suit the published size and printing requirements.

Cameras:-

These days almost all of the pictures submitted come from digital cameras only a very small number arise from scanned prints or slides.

Digital cameras have come a long way since their general introduction some 10+ years ago but it is necessary to ensure that the basic settings are in line with what is needed for railway photography. In most cases the default settings that come with a new camera are more than adequate. Occasionally we have advised members that their submitted images have taken on a colour hue or lost their overall colours and/or brightness. This is usually due to a change of the original default settings or a unnoticed change in the white point value. Resetting the defaults usually clears the problem. However in some camera models there is enough embedded software to allow the image to be automatically manipulated to provide a bright oversaturated and contrasty image because that is what the manufacturer thinks the photographer wants to see. These defaults should be adjusted by trial and error.

It is therefore suggested that the settings for: -

Sharpness

Saturation

Colour Balance

are set correctly and are occasionally reviewed and reset if necessary.

The other parameter which affects the picture quality is the ISO (speed) setting used. In general the lower the ISO value the better the photograph. Recent developments in digital cameras have improved the quality of the images produced by high ISO values and some photographs at ISO 3200 are perfectly acceptable, but Noise, the equivalent to Grain in high speed film days, can be very noticeable on pictures taken at ISO 800 or even 400. Such noise can be reduced during our image processing but is difficult to eliminate completely.

The exposure parameters of the image are embedded in the image file and so are available for inspection. In some cases these can be very unusual e.g. 1/1200 at f8 at ISO1600 used for a stationary subject resulting in a noisy image whereas reducing the shutter speed to 1/300 would have led to an ISO rating of 400 and a much better quality picture. Please be aware of the ISO settings you are using to obtain high quality images. The most likely default camera value will be no more than 200.

Occasionally we receive images from Mobiles and the quality of cameras on mobile phones is now rapidly increasing and will no doubt continue as the years go by. However at present the general standard of mobile phone pictures is below that of cameras. Therefore before submitting an image from a mobile phone please review the picture to consider whether it is of sufficient quality.

Digital Images:-

Receiving an image as near as possible to the actual scene recorded is the ideal but the inbuilt camera manipulation of images now makes this difficult to achieve. However we request that no manipulation of a produced jpg file is undertaken at all. If you are tempted to 'improve' the image before submission then please avoid any cropping, resizing/resampling and sharpening entirely, as these seriously affect the processing.

Jpg files should be saved at medium to high quality, usually levels 9 or 10.

Raw files should be developed into Jpgs with minimal processing.

The image editors are very experienced at determining if a photograph has been manipulated. They are also skilled at removing distracting objects in the images, so unless you think you can do it better then leave it to us!

Software:-

Although it may be tempting to manipulate an image before submission we urge you to desist. If you think you have to make an adjustment, if the image is particularly dark for instance, then please restrict this to a minimum. There may be a lot of detail in heavy shadow but unless you are confident in the use of Levels then it is better to leave it alone rather than lose it.

Although we appreciate that many submitters will be using some version of Adobe Photoshop this has now become an expensive proposition and loads your PC with a substantial amount of software features that are aimed at graphic designers rather than photographers. None of it necessary for image adjustment. Adobe Lightroom is an alternative option but Photoshop Elements will adequately handle all that is required. If you do not wish to spend large sums of money a very good alternative is Serif Affinity Photo but it will only run on a 64bit machine.

If open source software appeals to you the two most popular and highly respected packages are Gimp and Irfanview both of which will do everything you require. Another alternative we use is FastStone Image Viewer as a replacement for Picasa. This provides a great way to view a complete folder of images, print sets of thumbnails, make up a slide show. All of these software packages do not modify the colours or saturation of the original image file automatically.

Beware that many of the other "Free" software packages you will find on the web do modify the original image file and we see this in a number of images we receive from regular submitters where we have to remove large doses of red, magenta and/or yellow as well as heavy doses of saturation.

Image File Names

The name of the image file is vital and we ask that you adhere exactly to the requirements shown below. This is essential to minimise the errors caused by mis-crediting the photographer and attaching the incorrect caption. We try hard to get these correct but regrettably they still occur.

Filenames need to contain the following information: -

- Photographer's names – please start your file name with your name, given name and then surname. If you do not start the file text with your name then we have to do it.

- Unique image number – this can be from the camera or whatever you use or find convenient.

- The name of the TOC

- Unit/loco number

- Location

- Date

Eg - John Smith DSC_3009 Northern 195103 Balshaw Lane 14 Sept 2018

File names should be limited to a maximum of 60 characters as any more may not be visible and can cause problems with certain software. The file name should not contain the text describing the photo, this is for the caption not the file name. Also the use of **full stops, commas, forward and back slashes, and @** signs within a filename should be avoided as again this approach causes software problems. File names set up as the above example do not have to be edited by us.

Captions

Captions are the most time consuming part of the process and this is the area where we need your help. There are two problems, one is the identification of the caption with the image and the other is the level of information provided. On the one hand we receive the minimum of information, as little as one line of text, to captions with 10 or 12 lines of text. A glance through the RO will show that most picture captions run to no more than 4 lines of text although in some cases it is no more than one line. In this day and age we believe there is no reason why sufficient information cannot be supplied. There are numerous news groups and websites from which you can gather information to detail a caption starting with Realtime Trains. The first section of the caption should be the precise filename as used for the submitted image, ideally the filename should be directly copied into the email text to avoid transcription errors. A hyphen “-” with spaces either side should be used between the file name and the start of the following caption text.

Looking at an example:-

John Smith DSC_3009 Northern 195103 Balshaw Lane 14 Sept 2018 - New Northern CAF built unit 195103 had what is believed to be the first outing for the class on 14th September when it worked on test from Liverpool to Crewe and then ran trips between there, Warrington and Carnforth. The unit is seen at Balshaw Lane Junction on its second Carnforth to Warrington working.

As you can see John Smith provided a good level of caption information together with the original full and precise filename as a reference located as the beginning of the caption. This provides a complete link between the image and the caption and even if there was a typo in the filename they are still readily related. The date should be written as an ordinary number e.g. 14 September without the year and the time of the train in the format with a dot separating the hours and minutes e.g. 10.47.

Captions should be keyed into the body of the email text as a stand-alone paragraph with:

- no use of the Enter key at the end of a line,

- no use of the Space Bar to increase the space between words or sentences,

- no underlining or italics,

- no dots and dashes between words and please keep your fingers away from the Tab key.

All these extras have to be edited out to end up with what you see above and this all takes time.

In the example given above the image file can be downloaded straight into the image folder and the caption (starting with the precise filename) can be copied and pasted straight into the master caption listing without any editing. Editing these is a time consuming operation and it would greatly appreciated if this can be avoided by being more careful how captions are written.

Submission of Digital Images:-

Ideally images should be emailed to **roimages@rcts.org.uk** as attachments. The number of images attached to each mail should be limited to the capacity of your e-mail systems. Please note that **roimages@rcts.org.uk** is purely a divert In Box and no response will be received as a result of your submission. If you have a question or comments with regard to the submission then email **d.kelso@btinternet.com** and it will be responded to asap.

If your ISP provides only limited Bandwidth and speed an alternative method is to use the free version of **WeTransfer.com** but only use this for multiple images. DO NOT use Cloud services. If you prefer to use a CD for multiple images DO NOT send discs in Jewel Cases. Place the disc in a disc envelope and mail in a padded envelope. Write your name and the content info. on the disc with a suitable pen. Memory Cards or Sticks can be used and should be placed in a plastic bag. Discs will not be returned unless specifically requested and sufficient postage in stamps is included. Memory cards and sticks will be returned.

Text Material:-

On occasions we receive large numbers of images from individual photographers in a single month. These are usually the result of a special trip or holiday perhaps overseas. Review any copy of the RO and you will appreciate that at best the maximum number of your images that will appear on average is six in any one month. However if you are prepared to compose a report on the trip featuring the images then this will be welcomed by the Managing Editor. In this case it is necessary to send the report and the images to both **roimages@rcts.org.uk** and **observer@rcts.org.uk**. In the same way if you send reports to any of the RO editors and you have images illustrating the content of the report then send the report to the appropriate editor and to **roimages@rcts.org.uk** along with the images.

Apple Computers:-

Currently the majority of image files arrive as attachments to emails in a Windows environment however over the last couple of years or so we have received a number of submissions from Apple users and these have caused problems in downloading both the image file and the text. The way that Apple Mail operates makes life difficult because when sending an image it is embedded in the body of the email rather than attached to the email. The result being that the image appears often full screen width or larger rather than as a thumbnail. The message text and caption appear either above or below the image. When saving the image file to a folder the routine is quite different as the file name displayed in Save Picture is received as a string of letters and numbers which have to be replaced with a conventional file name. See the screen shot below.



The suggested file name has to be replaced manually for each photograph and so requires substantial time. To prevent this we would ask all Apple users to please use the procedure outlined below: -

In IPHOTO right click on your selected image and choose GET INFO.
Fill in the blank title box with a file name as detailed on page 1.

Open the thumbnail then select export from the File menu.

From the box that opens ensure that you have selected USE TITLE from the file name drop down box. Click on EXPORT.

The image can now be found with the title you have added under pictures in FINDER.

To email DO NOT USE APPLE MAIL use Gmail or any other web based email software and attach your image as you would any other file.

As for any other image submissions, please ensure that your caption text is contained in the body of the email as set out on page 3 of this document.

Non-digital images:-

It is very rare now for us to receive prints except for articles and features of historic interest. If you are submitting prints then they should be a minimum of 6"x4" (15x10cm) and should be on glossy paper. Wet process and professionally produced prints are acceptable. Colour prints from negative film produced by "fast process" high street stores are unlikely to be of sufficient quality. We can accept B+W, and colour negatives and positive colour transparencies of all film sizes. Please do not send old glass plate negatives without first consulting the Image Editors.

Send all material to the Image Editor at 6 The Fairways, Convent Road, Broadstairs, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 3EF. Negatives and transparencies should be placed in film envelopes, not in paper envelopes, and be individually labelled. Prints should be labelled on the back with the full caption details. Do not write directly on the back of the print. Film material, will be returned but prints will not be returned unless specifically requested and sufficient postage in stamps is included.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Guide and we hope you find the contents useful. If you have any questions or suggestions then please email **d.kelso@btinternet.com** The document can also be found on the website via the dropdown menu headed Society on the home page or at **www.rcts.org.uk/about/news/page.htm?id=rcts/ro_image_guide**

Finally:-

A reminder that **roimages@rcts.org.uk** is purely a divert In Box and no response will be received as a result of your submission. If you have a question or comments with regard to the submission then email **d.kelso@btinternet.com** and it will be responded to asap.

Mike Robinson, Managing Editor
David Kelso & Peter Hicks, Image Editors.

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