

**Photographs & Text for the Railway Observer –
Summer 2023 An updated guide to submitting images
for publication Version 05-3**

**PLEASE NOTE THERE ARE MAJOR CHANGES IN THIS
SUMMER 2023 LATEST EDITION OF THE GUIDELINES
THESE ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN RED**

Introduction:-

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

On a number of occasions the RO Managing Editor has made it clear that we have probably reached the peak of our processing capability in terms 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 **150+** images submitted of which can result in approximately **60+** images being 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 both 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 to be used in the RO 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 using a process defined by our printers. The work will vary widely in complexity dependent upon the quality of the original images submitted.

Some photographs require minimal processing as their colour balance and exposure is almost perfect. However some photographs can be 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 negatives, prints or slides.

Digital cameras have come a long way since their general introduction 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 embedded software to allow the image to be automatically manipulated to provide a bright over saturated and high contrast image because that is what the manufacturer thinks the photographer wants to see. These defaults should be adjusted by trial and error.

It is suggested that the settings for Sharpness, Settings, Saturation and, 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 quality of 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 Phones and Tablets and the quality of cameras on these devices is increasing and will no doubt continue as the years go by. However at present the general standard of the resulting images is below that of most digital cameras. Therefore before submitting an image from a device 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 and TIF files should be saved at medium or high quality, usually levels 9 or 10 in Photoshop. RAW files should be converted and saved at the same levels before submission. Do not use the file abbreviation JPEG.

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 and /or Curves 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 2 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. 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 "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 Updated August 2023

The name of the image file is vital and we ask that you adhere exactly to the requirements set out 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.

File names need to contain the following information: -

***Photographer's name** – Start your file name text with **your surname in full followed by a space and your given name initial only.**

***Unique image number** – this can be from the camera or whatever you use preferably digits only excluding rambling prefixes such as some cameras generate (eg 3Y8A or 0R6A) IMG however can be left in place.

The name of the TOC - abbreviation if known.

Unit/loco number

***Location**

***Date**

Fields marked with an asterisk thus* must be present or the image will not be considered for publication and please ensure each field group is separated by a space.

Eg - Partlow K - 9157 GBRF 66745 Brundall 27 July 2023.jpg

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. To help you there are examples at the top of page 4.

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 **realtimetrains.co.uk**. 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:-

“Partlow K - 9157 GBRf 66745 Brundall 27 July 2023 - GBRf Class 66/7 No.66745 at Brundall on 27 July 2023 working the very first 6P52 12.13 Whitemoor Yard-Lowestoft Reception.The train comprised of 20 empty IOA box wagons. The train returns as 6H52 19:30 to Whitemoor loaded with imported ballast from Norway. Up to four trains per week could run with a ship into Lowestoft docks every 9 days.”

As you can see Keith Partlow provided a good level of caption information together with the original full and precise filename as a reference located at 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 2023 without the year. The time of the train in the format with a dot separating the hours and minutes e.g. 10.47.



Burdett S - NMT
43277 Worcester
02 August 2023.jpg



Davis R - FLHH
66567 Frocester 23
August 2023.jpg

In the examples shown 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 be greatly appreciated if this can be avoided by being more careful how captions are written.

Submission of Digital Images:-

Only 10 images per person per month. Ideally images should be emailed to roimages@rcts.org.uk as attachments. The number of images attached to each mail will 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 provider has limited Bandwidth there is a free alternative is wettransfer.com. DO NOT use Cloud services. If you prefer to use Memory Cards or Sticks can be used and should be placed in a plastic bag. Memory cards and sticks will be returned.

Images and Text Material - RO Features:-

The September RO will see the introduction of a new email postbox - rofeatures@rcts.org.uk to which all material both images and text intended for use as an RO Feature should be forwarded. Images for the RO depicting current operations only should be sent to roimages@rcts.org.uk as described in these guidelines.

Apple Computers:-

Currently the majority of image files arrive as email attachments in a Windows environment. However over the last few years we have received more submissions from Apple users and these instructions have now been revised to reflect upgrades in the Apple software.

In **iPhoto** and **Photos**, ensure a title box appears below your image :-

In **iPhoto**, in the View menu at the top of the screen, select Titles.

In **Photos**, in the View menu, select Metadata and then select Titles.

Fill in the title box with a file name as detailed on page 3.

Open the thumbnail then from the File menu at the top of the screen, select Export. In the window that opens, ensure that you select **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 and attach your image.

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. Please do not attempt to scan old prints. Send to the Image Editor using the Royal Mail Signed For Service. Advise by email the package contents and the Tracking Number. The items will be returned the same way. 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 Image Editor at 6 The Fairways, Convent Road, 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

This document can also be found on the our website. Open the home page and scroll to the bottom of the column headed **Railway Observer**. Then click the blue button "Submit Your Pictures," click the option you require and click OK.

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 a submission then email d.kelso@btinternet.com and it will be responded to asap.

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

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