



Digital images are firmly established in our lives whether they are created by dedicated cameras or those built into mobile telephones or i-pads. They can be clear, sharp and colourful to A4 size and larger. What hasn't changed is the range of their quality that still varies from cheerful 'happy snaps' to works of art. Our guest speaker, Guy, showed us ways to improve from one towards the other using a computer.

Naturally, to get the best results you need to capture the best image. What the camera does with what it detects makes quite a difference. Most of us are content for the camera to process what it sees into an image according to the Joint Picture Experts Group's agreed standard, indicated by a file name extension of *.jpg*. By doing this the camera has already discarded a lot of the information it initially noted in order to reduce the file size. There are other photographic file formats, but *.jpg* is most common for 'ordinary' pictures.

Serious photographers prefer to keep ALL the information then work on it using their computer software. Such an unprocessed image is called a RAW image and is much larger. Many cameras can take them. RAW images provide much more information to work with. As software becomes more powerful it is possible to go back to old RAW files and produce even better results the second time around. Whatever image you choose to work with, there are practices that can improve your results.

Guy suggests that when taking a group photograph you take several shots from the exact spot because there's always someone with their eyes closed or looking the wrong way. Editing software (ranging from expensive to free) allows you to choose the best overall shot and replace a turned head with a better one from another image (taken same time; same background; same lighting conditions) using the 'clone' tool. This tool can also be used to remove distractions from the background. (We have all seen trees or lampposts growing from the top of somebody's head.)

Other tools were used to adjust the contrast levels and increase or reduce the intensity of colours and even add colours – and interest - to old black and white photographs.

Lighting effects were tweaked; even horizons lowered using a layering technique that allows an attractive cloudy sky be added to, say, a landscape that has a blank sky. Even murky images can be enhanced to bring out details in shadows that would otherwise be unseen.

As with most things, more time, patience and concentration brings more satisfactory results: more practice brings the desired result more quickly and with less fuss.

Having shown the techniques, Guy then displayed a sample range of his results with large prints on both glossy and art paper to much admiration.