

Practical Museum Photography

Training and Services



Simon Harris BEng (Hons) PGDip (Cons)
(07792) 408154

- <http://www.SHphoto.co.uk>
- info@shphoto.co.uk
-

Simon Harris - a resume

Simon's initial training was in Materials Science, the study of the structure and properties of materials. After completing a BEng degree at The University of Birmingham he worked in a laboratory of a large precious metals processing company, developing new alloys and carrying out vital research work on products.

Following a desire to move away from working in industry he decided to turn his photographic hobby into a professional endeavour and studied at Bournville College of Visual Arts whilst at the same time building up increasing amounts of work.



Despite starting his professional photographic career using medium format film cameras, Simon has now been working with digital cameras for a considerable number of years, and knows how to obtain the best results from this new relatively new and constantly changing medium.

Most recently, he has qualified in Conservation of Historic Objects at Lincoln University, which means that he is now ideally suited to work in recording historic objects and their environment. He has extensive experience in this field, having worked as a photographer for almost three years on a nationwide inventory project for The National Trust.

Training for museum professionals, students, and volunteers

Following a successful pilot programme of courses in late 2009, the courses described in this booklet are offered to help those working in museums and heritage to improve their skills.

Bespoke courses are also available - choose the elements that you feel you need from each of the courses and your desired objectives and I will work with you to develop a solution that is exactly right.

Techniques for Effective Museum Photography

A course that teaches the basic skills required for museum photography. Ideal for volunteers and staff. Should be considered as a foundation for any other courses in this photographic field.

Venue: Can take place at your premises or I can arrange suitable studio space in Birmingham City Centre.

Duration: One day, with time for refreshments

Materials included: Printed course notes

Cost: Variable depending on a number of factors such as location and number of people to be trained.

• Camera Selection •

Digital vs. film

SLR, "bridge" and compact cameras

Lenses

• Lighting •

Available light

Continuous lighting

On-camera flash

Electronic flash

Light modifiers (e.g. reflectors, diffusers, cubelite, etc)

Relative prices

• Other photographic equipment •

Tripod

Backgrounds - papers and fabric

Shooting tables

Little extras

• Recording the image •

Digital camera recording modes (RAW vs JPEG)

Downloading the image

Making adequate backups

Image renaming

Basic image processing

• Taking Photographs •

Select objects (ceramics, glass, textile, wood, furniture, large object etc)

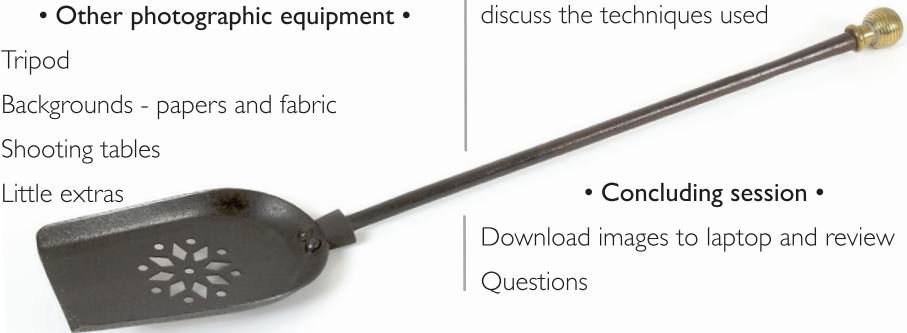
Set up lights (either using museum's own equipment or photographer provided)

Take pictures of the selected objects and discuss the techniques used

• Concluding session •

Download images to laptop and review

Questions



Photographing very small objects

Intended as a follow-on course to “Techniques for Effective Museum Photography”, this course deals with photographing objects in the 1-10cm size range. As many archaeological finds fall into this range, this course may be of interest to museums with significant archaeological collections.

Venue: Can take place at your premises or I can arrange suitable studio space in Birmingham City Centre.

Duration: One day, with time for refreshments

Materials included: Printed course notes

Cost: Variable depending on a number of factors such as location and number of people to be trained.

• Equipment for close-up photography •

Macro lenses

Diopter lenses

Lighting - the (financial) advantages of being small. Exploring the use of small flashguns to provide adequate lighting

Holding the camera

Little extras - reflectors, stands, cable release etc



• Technical considerations •

Depth of field. Physical limitations, calculating DOF

Multi-pop flash technique

• Taking photographs •

Coins

Archaeological/Geological/Mineral

Ethnographic

• Tips and tricks •

Choosing backgrounds

Eliminating shadows

Achieving critical focus

• Concluding session •

Download images to laptop and review

Questions

Photographing and scanning flat works

Intended as either a standalone course or as an add-on to “Effective Techniques for Photographing Museum Objects”, this course deals with digitising works that are predominantly two dimensional in nature

Venue: Can take place at your premises or I can arrange suitable studio space in Birmingham City Centre.

Duration: One day, with time for refreshments

Materials included: Printed course notes

Cost: Variable depending on a number of factors such as location and number of people to be trained.

• Equipment selection •

Flatbed scanners - choosing and using

Cameras and lenses - choosing and using

Advantages of the camera compared to the scanner

• Scanning with the flatbed scanner •

Demonstrated using an Epson GT7000 scanner

Simple constraints for scanning

Choosing optimum scanner settings

Using Hamrick Vuescan software as an alternative to the manufacturer supplied software to speed up batch scanning

Scanning transparent originals - plate negatives, film etc

• Photographing flat works •

Typically archive material such as letters, printed materials, invoice books etc falls into this category

Using the copy stand and setting up lighting

Lighting to emphasise texture - and to eliminate it



• Photographing paintings •

Oil paintings - particular considerations

Watercolours - particular considerations

Checking the camera is aligned properly

“Feathering” the lights - a clever trick!

Photographing a painting in-situ - what to look out for: Fixing awkward reflections.

• Post production work •

Correcting perspective distortion using Photoshop

Creating “line art” from photos or scans of archive documents

Making a PDF from your images - why this is better than a bunch of JPEGs

Resizing for printing

Photographing Ceramics and Glass

Ceramics and glassware are often perceived as being difficult to photograph - in reality they simply need a considered approach and one or two easily available extra pieces of equipment. This course introduces the basic techniques, which participants can then refine as they go on to photograph their own objects.

Venue: Can take place at your premises or I can arrange suitable studio space in Birmingham City Centre.

Duration: One day, with time for refreshments

Materials included: Printed course notes

Cost: Variable depending on a number of factors such as location and number of people to be trained.

• The Problems •

Why is glass so hard to photograph?

Reverse-engineering to arrive at some ideas for solutions

• Different types of light •

Specular reflections

Diffuse reflections

Transmitted light

Polarised light

Some pieces of special equipment that you might need

• Using reflected light •

Illustration of the main pitfalls encountered

Converting specular reflections to diffuse

Eliminate reflections entirely - at a cost

• Bright field lighting •

How the technique works

Using a shooting table where available

Working outside the studio environment

• Dark field lighting •

How the technique works

When to use dark field for best effect

• More techniques •

Lighting composite objects

Using a snooted light to emulate "true" darkfield lighting

• Processing images •

Adjusting brightness and contrast

Review of final images



Processing digital images of museum objects

Modern digital cameras produce very good images “straight out of the camera”. However, even with the best will in the world, some images will benefit from a little extra work.

Venue: Can take place at your premises or I can arrange suitable studio space in Birmingham City Centre. Internet access is ideally required for some parts of the demonstration - this can be replaced with screen captures if necessary.

Duration: One day, with time for refreshments

Materials included: Printed course notes

Cost: Variable depending on a number of factors such as location and number of people to be trained.

• Overview of hardware and software •

Mac/PC/Linux - the merits of each system

“Traditional” software - Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, PaintShop Pro

Online services - Flickr, Google Picasa, Photobox, Photoshop.com

Heavy duty tools - ImageMagick, ExifTool

Backup for your images

• Fix common problems •

Straighten and crop

Adjust colour

Adjust exposure

Adjust levels

• More sophisticated edits •

Remove the background from the image

Make composite images

Remove blemishes and marks

Add text

Make line art from document photographs

• Renaming conventions and metadata •

Renaming your images to avoid repetition of file names - developing a system

Metadata - “data about data” - adding description, copyright and other information to the image

The IPTC standards for metadata

• Save and print your images •

Resizing images for specific media

Choosing a format to save in

Creating a PDF - and why you'd want to

Making prints - on site, in town, and online

• Generating a revenue stream for your images •

Print-on-demand services for interested parties

Photographic print sales on-site

Short run digital publishing services



Other Services

Photography

If you wish I can undertake any amount of photography on your behalf. This could be imaging of collections, or creating images for guidebooks and multimedia presentations. Contact me for more information

Equipment consultation

If you are thinking of purchasing new imaging equipment then I can offer consultancy services to ensure you get the best tool for the job from the increasingly wide selection available. I can also assist you with installing and beginning to use the new equipment

Image Processing

If you have a backlog of images that need editing work, such as straightening, cropping, resizing or metadata adding, then I can offer bulk processing services.

Conservation work

Having conservation training as well means that I am also able to offer a range of services such as object marking, condition reporting and repackaging, which can often be carried out at the same time as photography is being undertaken.