

Saving your Time

*We are a photography group, not a website group. **That is exactly the point!** - what our site now does by itself, and the evenings nobody has to spend on it any more.*

Somebody said to me not long ago that we are a photography group, not a website group. They were right.

And if this last year the website has felt like the main event — if it has felt like a thing that gets **in the way** of the photography rather than out of its way — then that is fair, and it is on me.

So let me tell you what all of it has actually been for. Every hour any of us spends on admin is an hour not spent taking photographs. The whole of the last year, for me, has been about making this website ask for less of our collective attention, not more.

The aim was never just a better website. It was to let us think about admin less often, freeing up our time for Photography instead.

And it is not an attempt to stop anybody texting anybody, or to move our conversations off WhatsApp or Facebook. It will never replace the chat at the end of an evening, when somebody says “are you going on Sunday?” and four people decide there and then to share a car.

That is our group. Nothing I am about to describe touches it.

What I am asking for tonight

A quarter of an hour. Then I will stop talking about the website for a season — promise.

And I am **not** going to show you how any of it works. What I want you to leave with is simpler than that: **the hours of admin it saves you**. The ones that used to go on club admin, and what we get to do with them instead.

Nobody has to remember any more

Our new season’s events are entered **once**. The organiser — either Andrew, or from now on any organiser who wants to be added to the list — pastes them in as ordinary text and they become diary entries automatically. And to be sure, you are shown exactly what will happen before a single thing is written.

After that, each event lets our members know, all by itself.

An email to everyone, a WhatsApp to whoever asked for one, and a reminder the evening before — without anybody having to remember to do it.

The reminder nobody has to send

The reminder that actually fills our events with members has always been sent by a person, at six o'clock, on the right day, when they are tired and cooking tea.

It now goes out on its own. Most of the time somebody would have remembered — but it is the one forgetful time in ten that costs us.

Two channels, and everybody picks their own

Every member chooses how they hear from us. Three options, on one page, changed whenever you like.

THE THREE CHOICES

- **Email only** — as things have always been
- **Email and WhatsApp** — the email, plus a nudge on your phone
- **WhatsApp instead of email** — short notices only

WHY THE THIRD ONE MATTERS

- Several of you have said your emails vanish into a full inbox
- If that is you, the short important things arrive on your phone instead
- Nobody is moved without asking, and you can change your mind

And there is a safety net. If somebody has chosen WhatsApp instead of email and the message fails for any reason — **the email goes instead, automatically.** Nobody has to spot it or do anything.

Email reaches everybody. WhatsApp reaches whoever wants their phone to buzz. Neither one can fail quietly.

And one small thing several of you have grumbled about: staying signed in. Tick “remember me” once and the **site now keeps you logged in for months** — so you go straight to what you came for.

Everything else scrolls away

Now the thing I think matters most.

Facebook and WhatsApp are **streams**. They run one way. You post something, and within a day or two it has slid up underneath everything posted since. It is still there, technically. Nobody will ever find it again.

A group post is an announcement. It is not a record. Two days later it has gone under.

That is fine for our conversations — it is what those places are for. It is hopeless as the place our group keeps a record of what is happening.

Ask yourselves where you would look, right now, to find out what is on in October — or what we photographed last March. In a stream there is no answer. You scroll, and you hope.

The website does not scroll away. One address, always current, always in date order. And because the reminders come out of **that same place**, what arrives on somebody's phone and what is on the page can never disagree.

Move an outing from half seven to seven and the automated reminder carries the new time by itself. Post it by hand, and the message in everybody's phone still says half seven — and that is the one they act on.

And finally, Facebook — in one key-press

Putting an event in the Facebook group used to mean fixing the sharing picture by hand, copying the address, writing the words — and often still getting a bare blue link nobody clicked. A lot of effort behind the scenes.

It is now collected into **one button**. The headline, the words, the link and the photograph all arrive together, and you press paste.

And I want to be crystal clear, because this is not what you would expect: Facebook has let no website post into a group since April 2024. That last press is the maximum anybody is allowed.

The turners' contest now builds itself

Every couple of months I used to rebuild the contest pages by hand. Two sets — one for you, our members, and one for guests on the front of the site. Write the words. Advertise the contest. Open for entries. Close them. Advertise the voting. Open the voting. Close it. Count the votes. Put the results up. And write to everybody at each stage so they do not forget.

Each contest, each stage, a new page. Twice over.

The calendar does it now. The phases turn over on their own dates and the emails go with them. Nobody rebuilds anything.

Dozens of page-building sessions a year, gone. Of everything here, that is the single biggest saving.

The photographs came out of the shoebox

We had thousands of members' photographs on this site that almost nobody could see — and that were hard to find even for the people who could.

They are out now, and findable. Albums, galleries, carousels. Our own work proudly on the front page, rotating displays and live feeds from our groups. A member spotlight that changes itself every week, keeping the site fresh for visitors without anybody having to choose.

EXAMPLE TWO

Sorting a shoot, or a community event

Going through a few hundred pictures to pick the best used to be an evening at the screen. There is now a Lightroom-style screen for it — star ratings, pick and reject flags, **keyboard shortcuts**. An evening became twenty minutes. And an enjoyable one, for those involved.

Images Protected, without anybody remembering to do it.

Members always see clear, full-resolution pictures. Everybody else sees a watermarked, reduced copy — automatically, **everywhere on the site, on every picture**, for good.

Nobody has to remember to do it — which is precisely the point of doing it centrally rather than picture by picture, because the one we forget to protect is the one that walks.

None of that is possible on Facebook, at any price. Which is one honest answer to “**why do we need a website at all?**” — because a photography group that keeps its photographs somewhere it does not control is not really keeping them safe.

And every photograph is optimised on its way in, so the site stays quick.

6-in-10, and our shots in the shop

6-in-10 used to be a laptop, a memory stick, somebody wrestling with downloads, and half the evening gone.

It runs itself on the night now. Members upload beforehand, and the running order is randomised to keep the evening fresh. The pictures go up on the screen, they are discussed, and everybody is part of it.

Three screens — projector, phones, control panel — **in step, in real time**, and your upload page sits on your phone like an app.

And the new shop offers curated images and prints — upload, moderation, watermarking, and a live slideshow still to come — with no additional admin time for members, no separate image files or different resolutions to keep track of, and a source of income to benefit everyone **if agreed**.

What our organisers can finally see

Membership renewals come out as a printable list, in renewal order, ready for action or in time for a meeting. No spreadsheet, no back-tracking — just clear information.

Seventeen pieces of bespoke software are installed now, and one master screen saying which are running — so nothing can quietly stop working unnoticed.

SUMMING UP

Four objections, answered

“Why do we need a website at all? We have got the Facebook group.”

Three reasons I would stand behind. It is our public facing visual advert. Without it nobody outside the group knows how good we are— so anybody looking for a photography group in Bollington finds nothing without our website.

Facebook re-compresses every photograph you give it and never hands the original back. And we do not own our images on Facebook any more: the reach, the archive and the rules are Facebook’s to change, and they do change them — they closed the door on posting to groups in 2024, which is why I still have to press paste.

The Facebook and WhatsApp groups are where we talk.

The website is where we keep our images, our events and our archive safe.

“I don’t want more emails.”

Then don’t have them — that is what the choice is for. Take the WhatsApp nudge and let the email go. And **there is an unsubscribe on everything in the website**, anyway, as there **always has been**. If you think you are receiving too many emails, then you have not yet set your preferences.

“It’s another thing to learn.”

For members, nothing new to learn -at all — things simply arrive.
For whoever runs it, it is all on one screen, and much less work (and less time) than we do now.

“What if it goes wrong?”

It falls back to email, which reaches everybody, on its own and without anybody noticing. If the extra WhatsApp fails, the email still goes.

What I am really showing you

None of this changes how we talk to each other.

Keep the Facebook group. Keep the WhatsApps.

Keep the conversation in the car park at the end of a night.

Keep the spur-of-the-moment events.

What *has* changed is that running this club no longer quietly eats into somebody's evenings.

I would rather we spent that time out with our cameras — and with each other. That is all any of this is for.