



Recording Work Memories: the 60 Voices Project

Interviewee: Lynn Patrick

Lynn Patrick studied photography at Kitson College of Technology, Leeds, in the early seventies. Photography at this time was very male dominated, she was one of only three women on a course of about twenty students. After finishing college, she moved to Leicester to work for a photographic firm as a black & white printer. Returning to Leeds she joined the sales team at Dixons Retail selling camera equipment and met with a considerable amount of sexism as some male customers patronisingly refused to be served by her as she was a woman!

1977 Lynn joined the Medical Photography Department at St Luke's Hospital, Bradford. The team consisted of two photographers, Lynn and her male colleague. 1982 she joined the archaeological team as the site photographer at Pontefract Castle. The dig was under the guidance of the West Yorkshire Archaeological Unit and was part of the Government Manpower Services scheme.

1983 Lynn joined the staff as the photographic technician at Nottingham School of Art and Design, the only female member of staff. This was not unusual as, for the greater part of her working life, she would be the only female on a team and, at this time, photography attracted mainly men and very few women.

1984 saw Lynn re-enter the field of medical photography, joining the Medical Photography Department at the Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, as the female photographer.

1985 Lynn joined the Photographic Studio at the National Railway Museum (NRM) as one of two photographers. The advertised post attracted 230 plus applicants of which only eight were interviewed. The NRM didn't need a rail enthusiast; they needed an experienced photographer who was also technically able and, having worked in several aspects of photography since leaving college, Lynn brought a considerable amount of experience to the role. The NRM Studio was part of the large NRM curatorial team and came under the umbrella of Libraries and Archives. This would later become Knowledge and Collections.

During the first ten years the majority of Lynn's work was to photograph the museum's enormous 2D and 3D collections. Lynn also worked on location shoots, photographing the build of Waterloo International Station, construction of the Channel Tunnel, electrification of the East Coast Main Line and the manufacture of the Eurostars and Le Shuttles.

Three major events happened during Lynn's time at the museum, which changed the scope of her role.

The first was the privatisation of the railways (1994-1997), which meant the NRM Photographic Archive no longer held images of the contemporary UK rail network. Before this British Rail had in-house photographic teams who recorded the railways on a day-to-day basis and these images were eventually deposited with the museum. These teams were disbanded as the newly formed railway companies used commercial photographic firms for their images. This meant that any future changes on the railways would go undocumented and the official record of the railways would not be added to after this date.

The second event was the appointment of the new head of museum in 1994. He encouraged the NRM photographers to write a business plan and go out and tout their wares around the newly formed railway companies in order to shoot images of the modern railway for the archive. To write a business plan, having no previous experience of doing so, was a tough call. This problem was solved by Lynn's suggestion of writing an old-fashioned, hand-written letter of thanks, written to the Head of Railtrack Communication after the NRM photographers had come back to York from their location shoot on Railtrack Scotland's Forth Bridge, thanking her for facilitating the shoot. On receipt of this letter, they were invited up to Railtrack Scotland headquarters in Glasgow to explore with the Head of Railtrack Scotland Communication the commissioning of the NRM photographers to photograph the Kyle of Lochalsh Line to celebrate the centenary of its build. This became the NRM Photographic Studio's first commercial commission.

From the start of this commercial relationship with Railtrack Scotland the NRM photographers went on to work on many commercial commissions from the railway industry, which saw the NRM photographers working from the top of Scotland down to the French Alps, with countless locations between the two.

It cannot be emphasised strongly enough the NRM Photographic Studio's unique position in undertaking these commercial commissions from a related industry, in this case the UK rail industry, as no other museum photographers were doing this and, to Lynn's knowledge, are still not.

The third event was digital photography. Lynn experienced many changes in technology within photography during her long career. At the start she was using film, and wet processing and printing were the order of the day. A significant amount of time was spent in the darkroom and under red safety lights. This all changed with the advent of digital photography. It was a whole different ball game and it made photography much more streamlined in its process so, instead of the darkroom and rooms lit by the red safety light, Lynn spent a lot of her day, when back in the NRM studio, sitting at a computer and using Photoshop to sort and edit images, and inputting these onto the museum mainframe for storage.

There are so many highlights, too numerous to remember, that Lynn experienced during her 26 years working at the NRM, but she guesses one would be her suggestion to write that original old-fashioned, hand-written thank you letter which changed the course of the work the Studio undertook. Another concerns the Flying Scotsman, bought by the NRM in 2004 and which was restored in a workshop in Bury, Lancashire. The NRM photographers made regular visits over to Bury to record the work. Lynn remembers it being an amazing time, spending hours and hours in this dark, oily shed observing and photographing a steam locomotive being built before her very eyes.

Lynn took redundancy in 2011. For the next ten years she worked as a freelance photographer, undertaking commissions for Network Rail and other railway companies. With her former colleague, Lynn, has photographed and written two railway books, published by Amberley Publishing.

In 2024 Lynn has largely stopped freelancing and is concentrating on her own photographic projects.

Lynn has been a member of the CSRF for a while and has assisted in interviewing some civil servants for this 60 Voices celebration.