

Our Town: Chippenham at Night

On the evening of November 27th 2019, the Our Town group took a photo walk around the centre of Chippenham. It had been raining and the Christmas lights had been switched on the previous Friday. Both provided opportunities to see the town in a new light and explore night time photography with just a camera or phone. The key thing is to have a play and enjoy... and bear in mind the following...

Some tips for night time photography outdoors

Opportunities – photography at night can give a different atmosphere to the same scenes shot in the day. Look for:

- Reflections – pavements and puddles after rain can reveal all kinds of detail; also look for how the river looks from the town bridge or the path alongside; what do windows, shiny cars etc reveal?
- Accent lighting – what's lit up at night e.g. key buildings like St Andrew's Church, the railway viaduct, hotels, trees etc. Street lights may also act as spotlights at night and Christmas lights may add a different dimension
- Moving lights – can add interest e.g. car light trails, fairgrounds, use of camera zoom on static lights, deliberate use (!) of camera shake
- Shadows – these can be striking, mysterious, or add an unsettling atmosphere
- People – slower shutter speeds means moving people may add striking blurred shapes or weird facial expressions
- Use of flash – remember that the light from a flash doesn't penetrate far at night, so items close to the camera will be prominent (often over exposed), and those further away may not even be picked up. Switching off the flash also prevents flare from reflective surfaces e.g. windows
- Avoid using the zoom feature (unless deliberately using it to add movement as mentioned above) as photos will be much grainier than daylight ones. Walk towards your subject to frame it if you can

No tripod? No problem! Think about:

- Is there anything around which could be used for extra support? E.g. lean against a wall, prop elbows on a wall, prop the camera/phone on e.g. a coat or jumper etc
- Stance – feet planted firmly, shoulder width apart and keep the knees soft; tuck elbows in
- Hold the camera/phone firmly to lessen shake, but not too rigidly as this may add some shake
- If using a camera, hold the lens underneath with one hand to support it
- Take the photo whilst exhaling to lessen camera shake
- Take multiple shots of each scene, just in case

NB There are usually manual settings or other options available on your phone or camera which are useful for night photography. These may differ depending on what you have and are best explored once you're familiar with your camera or phone's usual settings. There's plenty of guidance available online to help you.

After the shoot:

- Consider post photography options e.g. conversion to black and white. This can be particularly helpful for street scenes where the lighting has added a strange cast (usually orange), or for bringing out the contrast of shadows
- Share your favourite Chippenham at night photos on our Pewsham Belles Facebook Group. We'd love to see them!