

# Not Of The Street

Men With Beards



Portraits and thoughts on the  
meaning and limitations  
of 'Street'.

by  
Kevin Shelley

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# Introduction

Welcome to this, my second eBook.

The first book “[Street Photography – A Personal Point of View](#)” was well received and was all the encouragement I needed to set me off on the path of wanting to produce more.

Sadly though and as is often the case when trying to cultivate the seeds of something as adventurous as writing a book, my mind drew a complete blank. It's at times like these I quickly realise the unnerving truth – I actually know very little.

Fortunately the one thing experience ‘has’ taught me is that if you want something badly enough, fate, luck, coincidence (or whatever you want to call it) will conjure up an event (or series of events) that will be all you need to set the ball rolling.

And that is exactly what happened very recently.

It began when Leica UK sent me one of their X cameras for [review](#).

Next and purely by accident, I stumbled across a web article regarding the upcoming UK Photography Show 2015, which was but two weeks away at the N.E.C. Birmingham.

‘Wow’ I thought. I’d in fact never been to a photography show and quickly visited the events website. Whilst there, I noticed the section called ‘Press’ and this got me thinking – “I run a website, it’s quite popular, it has camera reviews and various street photography related articles. I wonder?”

So with tongue firmly in cheek, I completed the Press Application Form and clicked ‘Submit’ – fully expecting within the next day or two to receive a reply along the lines of ‘Sorry your application has been unsuccessful’ and thus leaving me to enter the show as a regular visitor. Still, no harm in trying?

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Somewhat confusingly though, the organisers accepted my request, a tumultuous event that was to completely alter my original intention to visit the show for 'just one day'.

One day quickly became four. Polo Shirts were printed with StreetPhotographyBlog front and back. The Press Pass gave me free and unbridled access to the show, its exhibits and equipment, interviews, questions and even the Press Office. Here I could sit at a comfortable desk, drink and eat free refreshments, access the wifi and meet other (better-known and experienced) 'journalists'.

It was during this time and with the press pass round my neck that I reviewed the Leica X.

Now I'm not sure if it was something in the free pastries, the coffee or the air conditioning system but I did something completely out of character, both for myself and my photography – I began to ask passers-by if I could take their portrait. Not just any passers-by mind you, but those with stylish and eye-catching beards and moustaches.

A contributing factor in all of this no doubt was the Leica X, which I have [reviewed separately on the Street Photography Blog](#), and that is where the original germ of an idea for this book sprang from.

Thanks and enjoy,

**Kevin Shelley**







If the truth be known, the word 'Street' in Street Photography has grown to become something of a lumbering grotesque – a Ball and Chain, a Shackle, a Noose and any number of other restrictive metaphors that may spring to mind.

I should know, I run a website called the Street Photography Blog. Clearly – and in choosing the name – I have committed myself to pursuing and blogging about that one subject, Street Photography.

Now comes the over-used and over-asked question, “what is street photography?” Yawn . . . But bear with me.

What constitutes a Street Photograph? When is a photograph not a Street Photograph? Does it have to be taken on a street? What constitutes a street?

Many's a time I've been forced to ask myself those very questions, less so nowadays but not so long ago, these very questions brought me to my metaphorical knees, to the very edge of packing up photography for good.

The greatest contributor to this sorry state of affairs was that old favourite, Internet Forums. Post at your peril because scything and soul-destroying criticism is just around the corner.

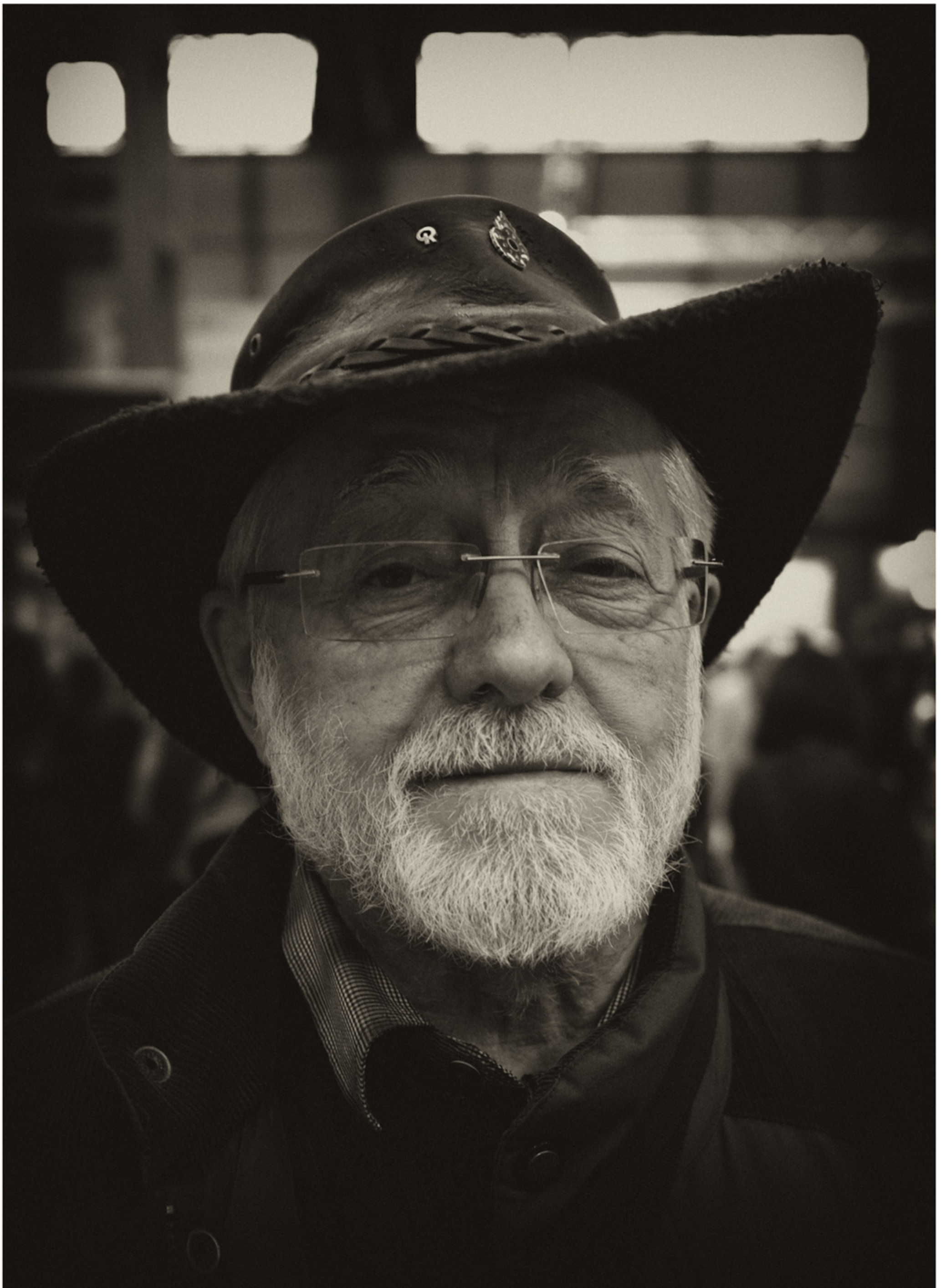
That's not to say that there's anything wrong with a good piece of constructive criticism – a few thoughtful sentences can only help to improve and strengthen the photographer's pictures and confidence.

However, when the comments are “Not a street photograph”, or “As long as you like it”, or even worse “Ok as a souvenir of a place you've visited”, these can (overtime) erode what little self-belief the photographer had to start with.

Which raises the question “What is a street photograph?”

Continued . . .





. . . From a purely historical point of view, a Street Photograph in its earliest days literally took the form of nothing more than a photograph of the Street – hence the name (clever heh?)

Necessity of course was the sole cause of this restriction as photographers, even from the earliest beginnings, wanted nothing more than to photograph people. The problem at the time however, was that the film emulsion speeds and technology were way too slow to be capable of ‘freezing’ the movements of people on the street.

To get around this problem, photographers would ‘stage’ scenes. One particular photograph comes to mind – the photographer (who I don’t recall) wanted to capture three ‘labourers’ as they went about their job, carrying sacks of grain, or wool etc. At the time and because of the extremely low film speeds available, the photographer was forced to ‘engineer’ the scene, thus arranging the three gentlemen in a line on the pavement, as though walking to their destination. Of course this required the subjects to remain as motionless as humanly possible, for several minutes. In fact, if the photograph was studied closely enough, you could actually see the ‘working men’ standing with their feet at an angle, in order to steady themselves for the duration of the exposure.

These setbacks lead naturally, along with the influence of studio portraiture, to the emergence of the Street Portrait – such as those presented in this book.

However none of these 15 portraits were taken on ‘the street’.

Which raises the next question, “Must a Street photograph be taken on the street?”

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. . . Must a street photograph be taken on the street? What for that matter defines a street?

Quoting from that online resource of the truth (factual or otherwise) Wikipedia, it offers the definition of Street as, “. . . a level patch of dirt, but is more often paved with a hard, durable surface such as concrete . . .”

It so transpires that the floor of the exhibition hall where the Photography Show was staged, was indeed made of concrete, albeit covered in carpet.

Wikipedia goes on to say, “. . . streets facilitate public interaction . . .”

I can safely say beyond reasonable doubt that a fair amount of ‘public interaction’ took place over the shows four days.

Further, streets can, “. . . encourage the exchange of ideas, and generally make the world a better place.”

I’m certain many ideas were exchanged at the show. As for making the world a better place, well it resulted in this eBook (yes, maybe stretching things a little too far?)

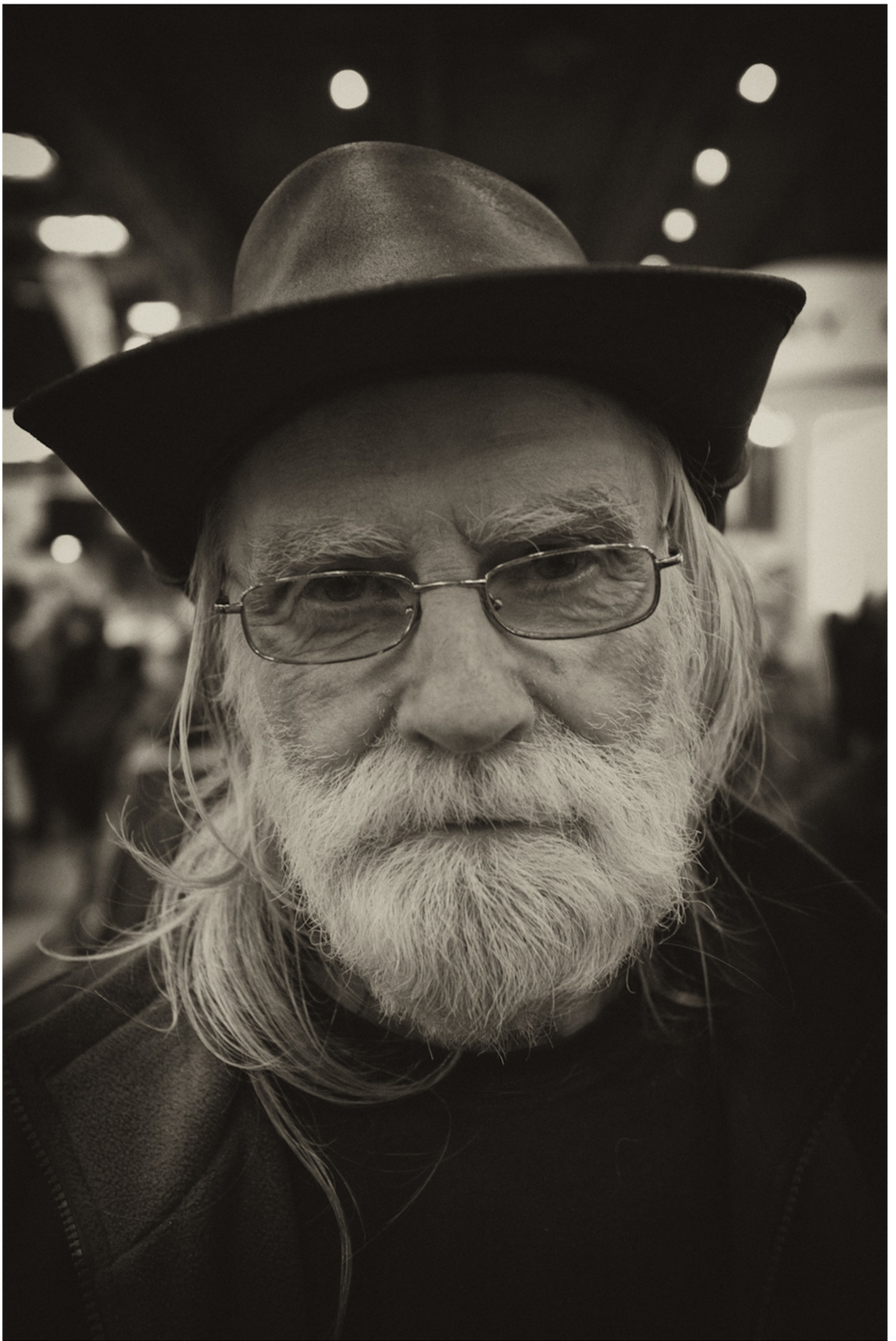
Of course there’s another obstacle to overcome when deciding whether photographs taken inside a building constitute ‘Street’ – the show hall had a roof.

Well fortunately I’d considered that eventuality – many streets and shopping areas, especially in modern times, are under-cover. Large shopping precincts such as ‘Liverpool One’, are an example. Pictures of people taken in these areas can readily be regarded as Street Photographs – of course leaving aside the legalities of actually doing so, which is another matter entirely and outside the scope of this eBook.

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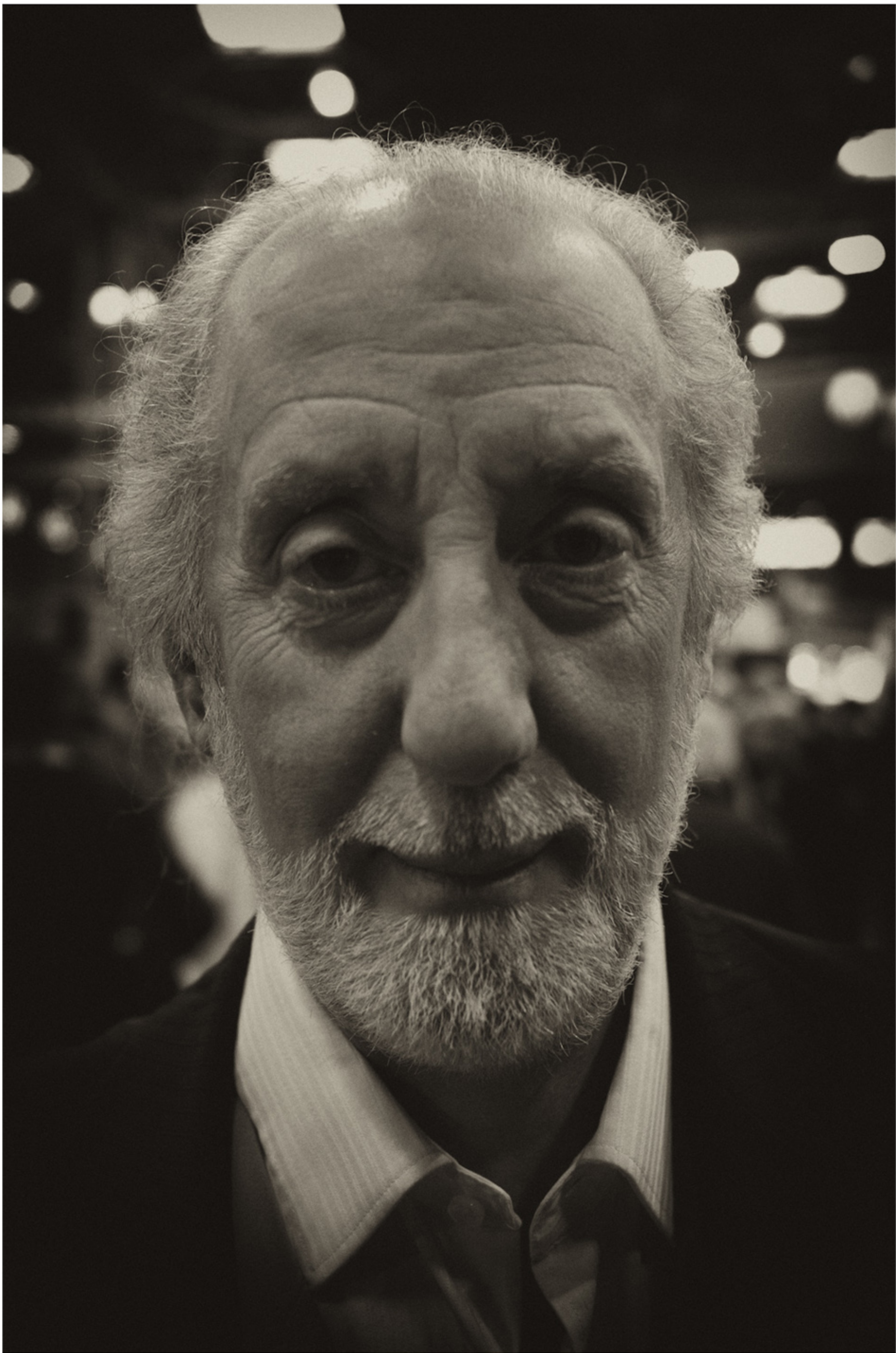


. . . I had no idea who the gentleman was in the following photograph, until after I'd taken it.

Turns out he was none other than Trevor Yerbury, a particularly famous and multi-award winning portrait photographer, from Scotland.

That he readily posed for me and then subsequently revealed that not only was he a Portrait Photographer, but that he and his wife were also keen street photographers, was simultaneously nerve racking, humbling and a lesson that you just never know who you'll bump into, or photograph . . .

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. . . One solution to this eternal problem (and argument) would of course be to change the name entirely, to something less specific – Urban Photography would be one suggestion.

Not surprisingly however, this has already been done and to great effect.

One such website determined to ring the changes is Urban Photographer of the Year (link at the back of this eBook) and it was a surprise to discover that they too had a stall at the Photography Show.

Here they were presenting the winners of their annual “Cities At Work” competition, the only requirement being that the photographs should portray just that, cities at work.

Whilst studying the winning pictures on display, I became somewhat confused when reaching one winning photograph in particular.

There amongst such images as a woman arranging a Jewellers Shop display, or Refuse Collectors at dawn, hung one photograph that I believed was at odds with the original premise.

It was a shot of three people making their way along a pedestrian crossing, the middle figure dressed in a Gorilla Costume.

At this point, the curator of the exhibition approached and I quickly questioned the photographs relevance to “City At Work”.

“It depends on your interpretation of cities at work” was his reply.

My suggestion that if you regard a city as one huge living and breathing entity, then the people in it are part of its ‘workings’, was met with a shrug of the shoulders.

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. . . Further, my observation that maybe the person in the Gorilla outfit was in fact a Street Performer, making their way home after a hard day being a Gorilla, also met the same fate.

Regardless, there was one good point raised during our all to brief conversation – that it depends on your interpretation - and which really brings the subject of this eBook to a head.

What is Street Photography? What constitutes a Street Photograph?

The answer's simple. Street Photography can be whatever you want it to be – there're no rules.

If someone wanted to call a photograph of baked beans on a supermarket shelf 'Street Photography', then so be it. Who knows, it could become a genre all of its own?

In a nutshell, who cares? I know for a fact that the resident 'Oracles' of the photography forums will continue to have a ready supply of fodder on which to examine and offer the benefit of their wisdom – regardless of what the photographer calls it.

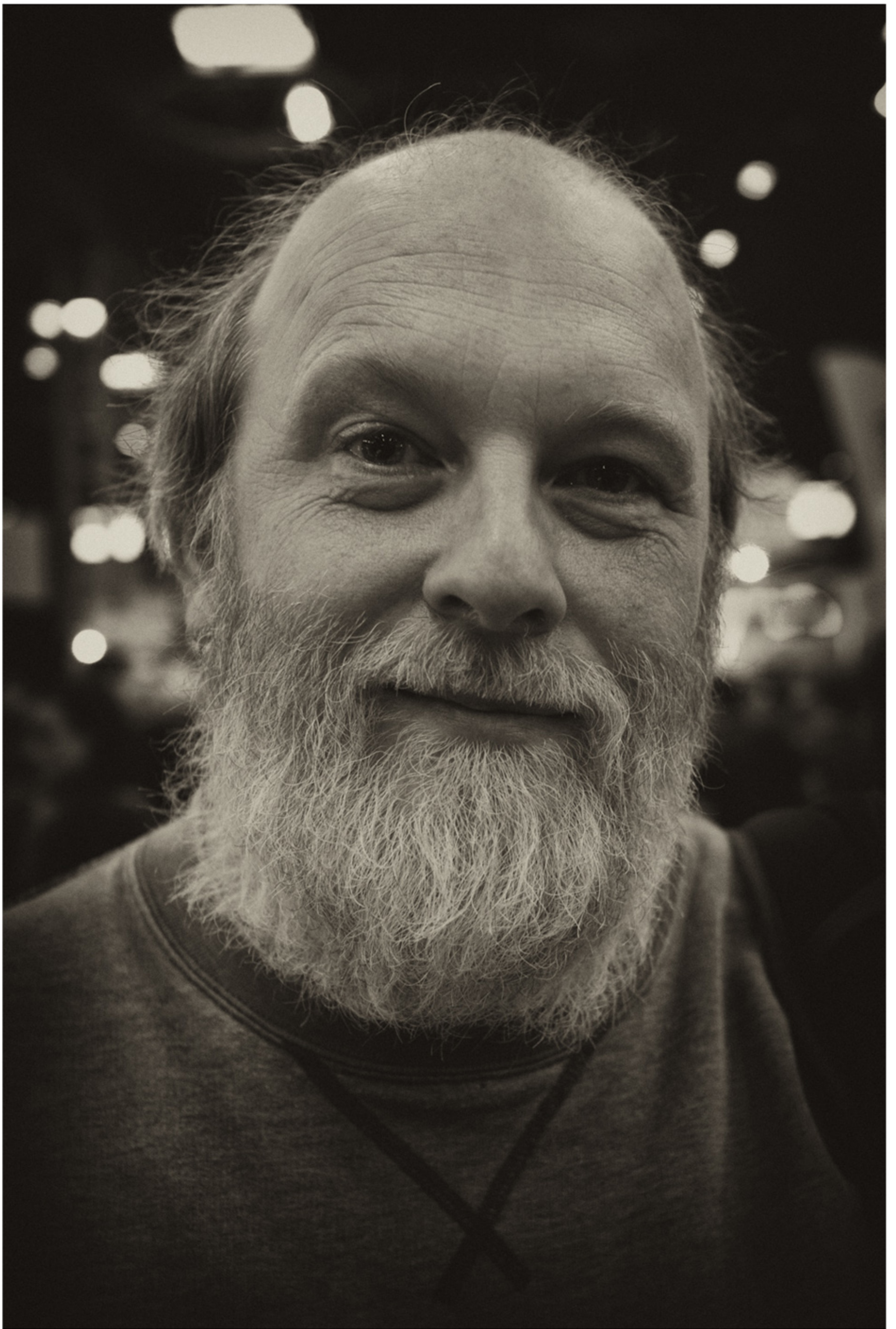
The secret is to have self-belief in your photography and your natural-born abilities to produce images that 'you' are proud of.

The law of averages dictate that if you enjoy a photograph you've taken, there'll be many others out there that do as well.









## Links to Web Pages Mentioned in the eBook

[Trevor Yerbury – Award Winning Portrait Photographer](#)

[Urban Photographer Of The Year Competition – Cities At Work](#)

[The Street Photography Blog – Website of the Author of this eBook](#)

## About The Author

I'm Kevin Shelley, a Street Photographer based in the UK. In fact I live miles from civilisation, slap-bang in the heart of the English Lake District. Here it could not be more possible to find an area of the country less suited to pursuing Street Photography.



This I turn to my advantage by ensuring that on each occasion I manage to visit towns or cities, I try to get the maximum 'bang for my buck' and capitalise on the time available.

Writing is also a keen hobby of mine. I upload my photography, camera reviews and various street related articles to the [Street Photography Blog](#), a site which I started in 2012 and which has grown to offer a wide variety of Street Photography related content.

I'm also a keen guitar player and for the last few years have been on a 'journey of discovery' in search of 'the Blues'.

As always, you can get in touch with me through the Contact Form on the [About & Contact](#) page of the Street Photography Blog.

Kevin Shelley

I couldn't end this eBook without including a portrait of Tommy, my ever faithful Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. Now entering old age, completely deaf, but still able to show the young dogs a thing or two, it was his ambition to be included in a book of portraits.



**THE END**