Notes from the 19th September Meeting.

It turned out to be another rather animated session as we explored the theme of "Alternatives to Photoshop".

Picassa

Brian Dunn looked at the enhancements to Picassa that are available in Version 3. The ability to retain a history of edits and then to undo them was a minor revelation and provided a near LightRoom experience. Allan Ferrier provided this rather elegant Wikipedia description of the process:

In Picasa 2 and earlier versions, changes to pictures made in Picasa overwrite the original file, but a backup version of the original is saved in a hidden folder named "Originals" in the same folder as the original picture (.picasaoriginals on Mac OS X).

In Picasa 3, changes to pictures made in Picasa are saved to a hidden file picasa.ini in the same folder as the original picture. This allows multiple edits to be performed without altering the original image. Viewing the picture in Picasa or using the Picasa Photo Viewer will apply modifications on the fly, whereas viewing through other programs (such as Windows XP's Photo and Fax Viewer) will display the original image. Changes can also be made permanent using the "Save" function, where the original file is backed up in a hidden folder .picasaoriginals located in the same folder as the original picture and the modified version is written in its place.

Mike Hender franticly tapped away and confirmed this information was correct with the additional observation that a Saved modified version, whilst locked in terms of History, can in fact be "unsaved" whereupon the History and the ability to undo changes becomes available again. This facility does not equate to Photoshop's flexibility of creating and modifying layers which are then retained in a ,psd file for subsequent revision but it is a significant Picassa enhancement.

The other much improved aspect that Brian demonstrated was the Collage facility. Earlier version had a very useful, simple to use, if somewhat inflexible capability. With Version 3 it is possible to adjust almost every parameter of the photographs – position, size, aspect ratio, separation, grouping etc. – this enhancement would make it an obvious free choice for creating Collages.

If you chose to install Picassa you are advised to select the "look in My Pictures only" option to stop it spending hours building a rather arbitrary database of your images and existing folder structure (assuming they aren't all kept in My Pictures, if they are move them first!). You can migrate you images over in a controlled way later.

Portrait Professional Software

Mike Hender demonstrated the stunning automatic retouching capabilities of Portrait Professional. Whilst some of these effects are possible using Photoshop, the algorithms used are based on specialist knowledge of facial features. We thought most people would be hard pushed to achieve the same excellent results manually.

Selecting a standard profile and then enhancing it with the detailed controls seemed to be the best way to go.

Information on this product can be found at: http://www.portraitprofessional.com/ where you will see some examples of how the software can be used to do more creative effects – look out for the B&W conversion - than just make you look younger. The "Studio" version integrates with Photoshop - *"Run this easy photo editing software as a Photoshop plugin, and you can touch up your portraits quickly and easily without having to run separate programs. PortraitPro Studio also handles RAW files directly, keeping your images in the highest quality"*.

The GIMP

John Brewell looked at another free editing program – The GIMP which has many of the features of Photoshop including Levels whist providing what seemed to be a rather more user friendly interface. As one would expect with a free program the development work and bug fixes are ongoing.

Check out http://www.gimp.org/ for more information.