

ROWLAND ADAMS



BEHIND every successful business man there is usually to be found a sensible father, capable of harnessing a son's waywardness and immature ambitions (or lack of ambitions) and putting him on the road which could lead to fortune, and perhaps fame. Such a man was Captain Adams of the RASC who, after returning from the Second World War, put his son Rowland into an apprenticeship with the Liverpool photographic firm of Stewart Bale Limited. And it was an apprenticeship in the old-fashioned sense, lasting five years and producing a complete journeyman. The firm had an interesting incentive scheme which consisted of an extra five shillings a week for every stage of the IBP examinations that a youngster passed.

The principal of Stewart Bale in those days was William Pightling, who will be remembered by 'us old 'uns' as a former President of the Institute; so young Rowland was in good hands. He attended Birkenhead Technical College, and was fortunate in having as one of his tutors John Mills, head of the photographic firm of that name and also (although in more recent years) a President of the Institute.

At the Stewart Bale studio Rowland worked under Harold Goodfield, AIBP, whom he thought was too finicky for words but who taught him the virtues of patience when setting up a shot, and how to concentrate on getting the best possible picture in the circumstances existing. Rowland says that every picture he has produced since those days bears the imprint of Harold Goodfield's painstaking character.

From this very thorough grounding in photographic practices, Rowland went to the Royal Air Force for his National Service. There he experienced a new type and tempo of activity, for the RAF were taking completely untrained lads and training them to become 'complete photographers' in thirteen weeks.

Rowland did his National Service at Old Sarum, near Salisbury, and was there that he met Dorothy, then a nurse at Salisbury General Hospital. They were married in Bournemouth when Rowland was demobilised, and he started work in that town in the employ of a general practitioner. Then, in 1959, Dorothy and Rowland decided to set up their own business. They were living in a two-roomed basement flat which was small enough as a home, but really cramped as a home-cum-photographic business. Rowland's equipment at the time was an old Ensign Reflex, a halfplate field camera ('Toy stuff after the 10/12's at Stewart Bale', he says), and a flash gun which they bought on hire purchase.

Naturally, they undertook any type of work they were offered in those early days. They proved to be specially good at commercial work and weddings, and so decided to concentrate on these fields, to which end they opened a new office and studio in the adjoining town of Christchurch. They shared the building with other tenants, and as these left to find other premises, Rowland took over their space, which he now needed badly to accommodate the increasing work flow and the more comprehensive equipment.

They decided that one basic requirement would be to improve the 'image' of professional photography in Christchurch. The local photographer should not, they believed, be just someone to be called upon when needed and then forgotten again until a further need arose. Rowland spent a considerable amount of time in meeting people and discussing with them possible ways in which photography could help their business. He spoke to Rotary Clubs, Womens' Institutes; joined the Chamber of Trade, became a member of the executive committee, and later their President. He still serves on the committee, and is also a very active member of the Christchurch Round Table. 'Taking part in services to the community', he says, 'is a duty of every responsible businessman, and all professional photographers are responsible businessmen.'

Dorothy took time off to start a family (they have four lovely daughters), and then returned to the business as a receptionist and to carry out some of the finishing. Rowland started to take Dorothy to weddings as his assistant, and discovered to his delight that she was just as adept behind the camera as he was. In fact, her work was almost identical with his, which shows that Dorothy had been taking notice of Rowland's camera techniques and his handling of people at weddings, while she was acting as his occasional helpmeet, and was able to put her 'lessons' into practice.

Rowland has been a member of the Institute since his apprentice days, and is a firm believer in the smaller, more specialised types of seminar that Regions run from time to time. Until quite recently he was 'anti-colour' (photographically speaking, of course); but he attended the Brockhampton course run by the Institute, and became a convert to colour to the point where nearly all current wedding, portraiture and commercial work is carried out in that medium. Monochrome photography is employed only when the client specifically requests it, or where there would be no useful gain in information by printing in colour. He has a Pro-Lab which affords a two day service, which is in some cases better than photographers in black-and-white. His work in the photo-journalistic field is mainly for television and national magazines; but generally, assignments in commercial work, weddings and portraits keep his order books filled throughout the year.