

F.J. Mortimer and his photographic awards

by Ron Cosens

Francis James Mortimer, CBE., FRSA. (Hon), FRPS., was born in 1874 and died in 1944 in tragic circumstances. In between he was deeply involved with, and very influential in, the art and science of photography both in the UK and around the world. This is borne out by the wealth of literature that bears his name both as author and editor plus the hundreds of images published, many of which won him awards in the UK and internationally. He also gave many fine lectures to professionals and to amateurs alike.



F J Mortimer.

Biography

Francis was born in 1874 in Portsea, Portsmouth. In the 1881 census he was a six year old scholar living at 10 Ordnance Row with his father Francis Mortimer (senior) who was a dentist, and his mother Clara Ann Mortimer. Also in the household was his older sister, also called Clara.

It is said that Francis senior was an active photographer and sailor - this was to become a very important influence on Francis junior and his choice of photography as he grew up. By 1891 the family was still living at the same address but Francis junior, aged 17, was an articled clerk to a solicitor; in 1901 the family unit of four people was exactly the same.

By the time he was twenty Francis had developed a deep involvement in photography. By 1897 he was winning medals for making lantern slides followed by many other medals for landscapes and portraiture from clubs and associations in the UK. By 1904 he was competing abroad and won medals in South Africa, Ireland and the USA. The majority of his medals were won in the period 1900 to 1914 but others date later up to 1938.

Francis became a member of the Royal Photographic

Society in 1904, eventually achieving the post of President. He was a keen supporter of amateur societies in the UK and abroad, notably in New South Wales, Australia. Just one example of this was on the 20th February 1905 when he gave a lecture on Marine Photography to the South London Photographic Society.

On December 9th 1905 Francis married Lavinia

Romer, a spinster, in Clapham, London. He was said to be 29 (should it be 30?) and she was 25. Sadly Lavinia died sometime before 1931, when Francis married Mrs. Lucy Embling, a widow of Ashley Manor in Portsmouth, and they were together until Francis died.

Francis was elected to the Linked Ring in 1907 and by 1908, at the age of 34, he was editing the Amateur Photographer magazine.

In May 1909 a report in Photography magazine stated that



The silver badge presented to him as President of the Photographic Convention of the UK.

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Masthead of the AP in 1928.



A special metal plaque struck to note the twenty first London Salon of Photography in 1930.

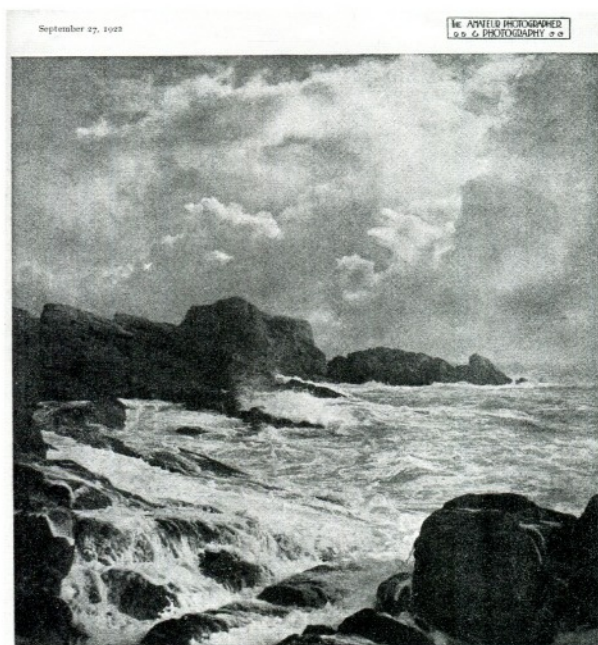
"The Royal Photographic Society has now a one man show of bromoils by Mr. F J Mortimer. This is the second time Mr. Mortimer has been thus distinguished, and we congratulate him upon the appreciation which his work is receiving."

He was a leading figure in the formation of the London Salon of Photography in 1910 and by 1912 he was also editor of Photograms of the Year, an annual review of the

world's pictorial photographic work. In 1913 Francis presided over the Photographic Convention of the United Kingdom and was presented with a silver badge to commemorate the occasion.

He remained as editor or art editor of the AP and editor of Photograms of the Year until his death in 1944, and this experience must have provided him with a vast amount of photographic knowledge.

Over the years he acted as editor or joint editor on many technical books including, amongst others, the Dictionary of Photography (1909) and the Modern Encyclopedia of Photography (1937). Mortimer was also, at one time, president of the prestigious Camera Club (founded 1885)



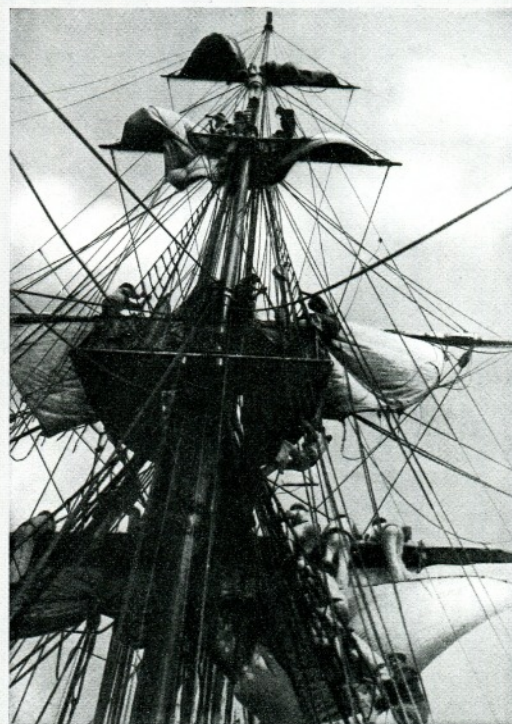
STORM CLEARING OFF. From the London Salon of Photography now open at the Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, 24, Pall Mall East, London.

Mortimer, F J Storm Clearing Off, AP 1922.

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Mr. AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER
No. 6. CINEMATOGRAPHER 5

October 5, 1927



TOPSAILS. (From the London Salon of Photography, now open at the Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, 24, Pall Mall East, London.)

Mortimer, F J Topsails Amateur Photographer 1927.

Mr. AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER
No. 6. CINEMATOGRAPHER 5

January 25, 1928



TOILERS OF THE FIELD.

By F. J. Mortimer.

Mortimer, F J Toilers of the Field Amateur Photographer 1924.

and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. A man of compassion, Francis J Mortimer used his good name to take evocative pictures of the military in WW1 which he felt could be used to raise morale in the forces and at home.



BATTLE

(From the London Salon of Photography)

By F. J. Mortimer

Mortimer, F J Battle Amateur Photographer 1935.

The London Salon of Photography that Francis had helped to set up in 1910 commemorated its twenty first exhibition in 1930 and a special metal plaque was struck to note the occasion; and one was presented to Mortimer.

Francis was honoured with a CBE in the Honours List of 1942 and in 1944 the Royal Photographic Society honoured him with their silver RPS Progress Medal for important advances to photography.

In 1944 Francis died as the result of being injured during a German bombing raid on London. He was on his way to work at his editorial offices. He was 69 years old and left an estate valued at £2,513-7s-2d.

Images and awards

This is an area of his life which is most interesting. Francis Mortimer took many pictorialist photographs, very often with a nautical theme. He had a simple self-converted waterproof camera and went to sea in the most difficult conditions to secure some of his winning photographs. He was said to have tied himself to the mast when the seas got rough. He also took pictures with a military theme and sometimes made images of ladies ranging from the delicate to women in factory clothing. He was a master at combining negatives and at using bromoil.

Many of his excellent images were published in the photographic magazines in the UK and, most interestingly, they were submitted to competitions and exhibitions around the world. Francis was extremely successful in this aspect of his life and won many awards during the period 1897 to 1938, especially in the period 1900-1914. A tiny selection of his published images is shown here.

In 2003, Mortimer's awards were offered for sale at

Christies but did not meet their reserve. I was lucky enough to hear of this and was able to buy them from the owner. They have been treasured ever since - albeit hidden from public view.

The awards consisted of 111 medals, twelve plaques and one unusual silver goblet. Most are engraved with his name but some of them are not. I do not think that this constitutes all of his collection; perhaps someone can tell me. It definitely does not include his silver Progress Medal from the RPS which was awarded in 1944.

A full, detailed list of his awards held is shown at

<http://www.cartedevise.co.uk/photographers-category/biographies/m-r/>

Some of the more interesting awards are shown over the following pages.

Gold awards were special, even in the early 1900s, and Francis received at least seven hallmarked gold awards for his photographic competition entries - see two of them over the page.

Mortimer also won at least 22 hallmarked silver medals - four examples are shown over the page.

In addition, Francis won at least twelve awards in the form of plaques - see some examples over the page.

Of course he also won many bronze medals.

All in all a wonderful achievement and a great source of research into the design of photographic awards in the early 20th century.

Acknowledgements

If you can add to this information about Mr. Mortimer and his awards I would be delighted to hear from you on 01751 477749 or ron.cosens@btinternet.com

I would like to thank Michael Pritchard for starting off this story in 2003 and Marcel Safier for his recent research, including the census returns that he kindly provided.



*This silver goblet is inscribed
AZ 1910 EVI
BUDAPESTI
NEMZETKOZI
FENYKEP KIAL-
LITAS which
was translated
for me by the
Hungarian
embassy as
"International
Photo
Exhibition,
Budapest -
1910"*



Cape Town Photographic Society Cecil Rhodes Memorial Gold Medal for most artistic picture, awarded to FJM 1904.



Birmingham Photographic Society silver medal 75mm diameter awarded to F J Mortimer



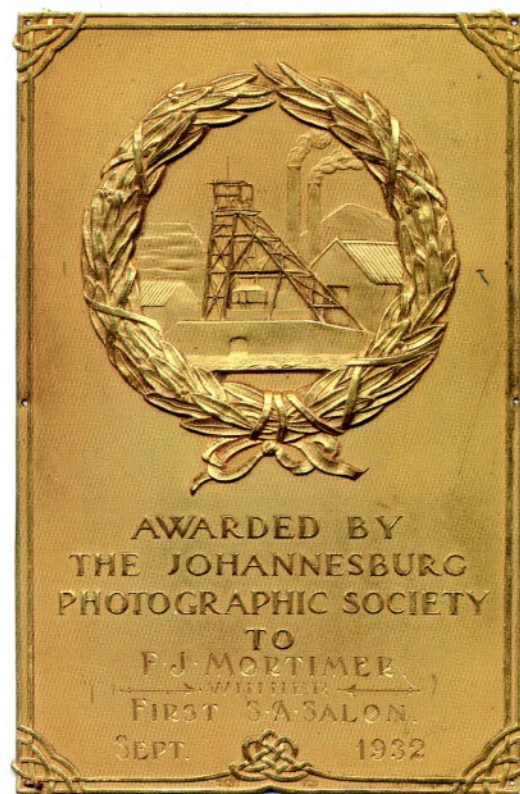
Silver medal from the Southsea Photographic Society 1902.



Silver medal from Photography magazine 1903.



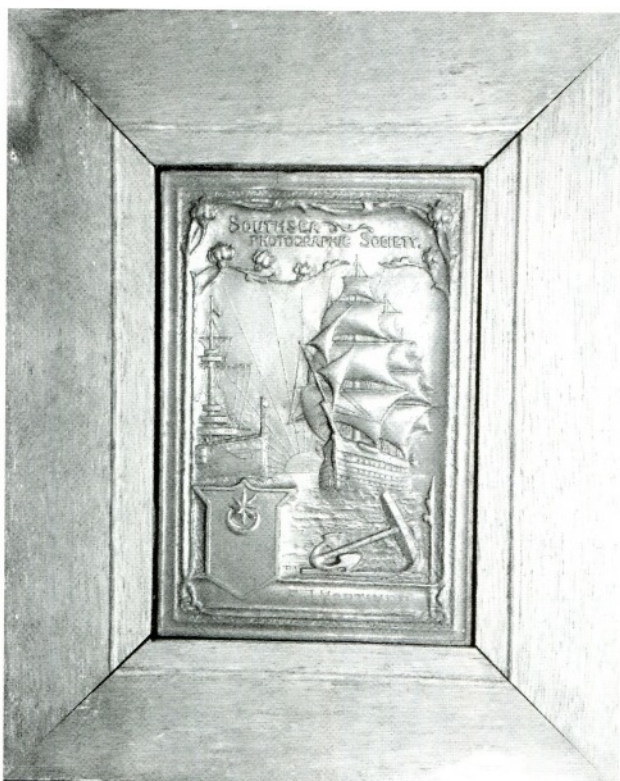
Silver medal from the Isle of Wight Photographic Society 1903.



Gold award from Johannesburg Photographic Society 1932.



Bronze plaque from the Croydon Camera Club 1904 (95x60mm).



Framed bronze plaque awarded by the Southsea Photographic Society 1905 (plaque 120x185mm).



Silver plaque from the South London Photographic Society 1905 (50x95mm).



Large bronze plaque from the Affiliation of Photographic Societies 1904 (125x220mm).



Royal Photographic Society bronze medal 63mm diameter - engraved on the rim "Awarded to F J Mortimer 1904"



Glasgow East End Industrial Exhibition bronze medal 65mm diameter 1903-1904.



Silver plaque from the Sheffield Photographic Society