



Stephen Kill, Science Photographer

Stephen Kill is a photographer at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) in Oxfordshire. RAL is part of the Science and Technology Facilities Council, one of the UK's Research Councils and provides large scale scientific facilities for academia. He sees his role as producing striking images to help promote these facilities and science in general. Here he tells us about his life in science.

My interest in photography and science started at an early age with the encouragement from an uncle into natural history, in particular birds. This led to me participating in field survey work for a local bird club and the British Trust for Ornithology and also later to my interest in photography. I spent hours in hides observing and photographing birds. To fund the camera and the film which was then a necessity, I had a paper round and worked on Saturdays in a photographic shop.

After A-levels, I wasn't sure what I wanted to study at University and a teacher suggested that I consider photography. I applied for both arts and science based courses and chose a course in Photographic Science at what is now Westminster University. The course was about the science behind photography: optics, making films, processing chemistry and specialist photographic techniques and included large amounts of maths, physics and chemistry as well as some photography!

After University I joined my current employer at its Appleton Laboratory near Slough. I was initially employed to produce satellite images from computer data, to provide AV (audio-visual) facilities and to work in the darkrooms. Gradually I did more and more of the photography and today I am the Chief Photographer at the STFC's Rutherford Appleton Laboratory on the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire.

My job has evolved over the years. The darkrooms have gone, we are totally in the digital era and the photography is more and more geared for PR (public relations) to promote the facilities and science. The photography is very varied with people featuring heavily; scientists and engineers from the laboratory or visiting from anywhere in the world, school children, the general public and VIPs. I also do quite a bit of record photography of the new facilities currently being built, pieces of equipment and people at work. I have even done some aerial photography on occasion too.

It's essential to have an interest in and know something about what you are photographing. This is equally true in all fields of photography. I need to be able to talk to the scientists about their work and explain why I am taking the images in the way that I am. You have to get the person that you are photographing into the role you want and to get a good image they often have to exaggerate what they are doing. Scientists often do not want to be photographed so have to be encouraged and their presence usually makes all the difference. One

This image of a laser target is one where Stephen looked beyond what was commissioned with a striking and original result.

Stephen's photographs have appeared in a large number of publications all around the world, including *CATALYST*, *New Scientist*, *Nature* and national newspapers. They have also been used in local papers and school prospectuses, especially when school trips to the site have taken place. One has been used on a credit card; a framed print of one was presented to the then Prime Minister Tony Blair when he visited and one is on display in the British Embassy in Paris.

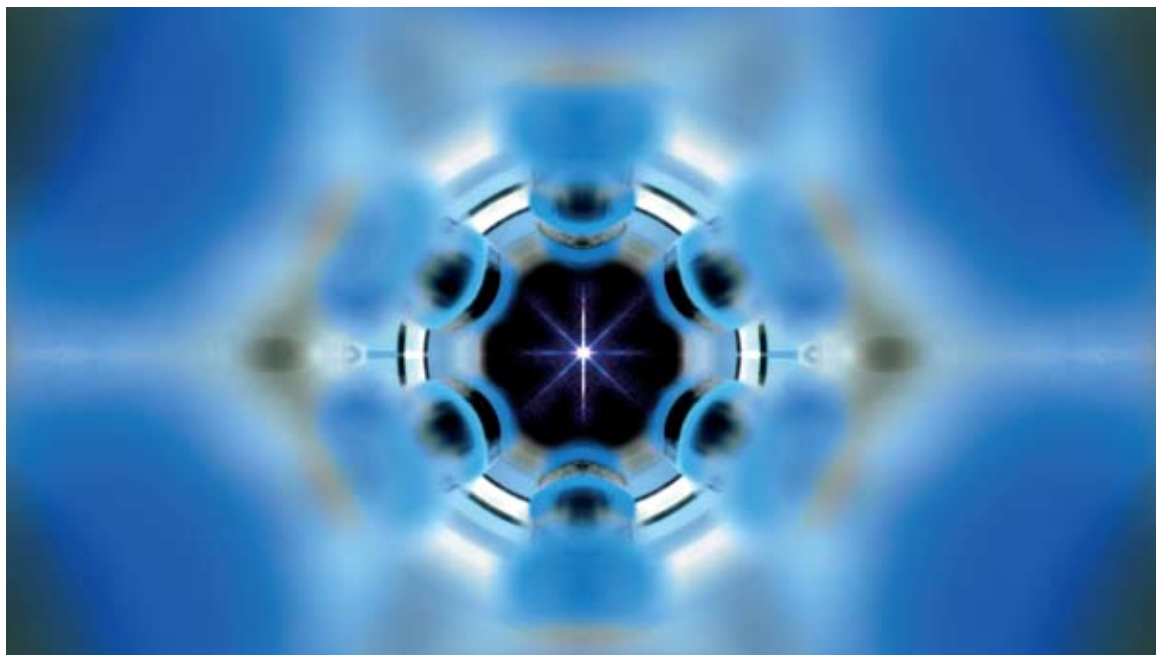
of the big advantages of digital photography is that I can show the person who I am photographing the pictures as I take them and use this to explain why I want them to do things in a certain way.

My philosophy is that wherever possible I like to look for images beyond the original commission and it is often these extra shots which are the most successful and enduring. I see the main point of my role as helping with the public understanding of science, capturing interest and opening up what the laboratory does to people who might not otherwise know about it.



Above right: Stephen at work. **Above left:** Working in cleanroom conditions Stephen was dressed from head to foot like the scientist in this image.

One of Stephen's favourite images, this picture of sextupole magnets at the Diamond Light Source was presented to Tony Blair when he visited and has been displayed in the British Embassy in Paris.



Photographing VIPs is part of Stephen's work. Here Stephen photographed Prime Minister Tony Blair during a visit to the Diamond Light Source.



Look here!

The Science and Technology Facilities Council website has several images of their work, many of which were taken by Stephen: www.scitech.ac.uk/PandS/Gallery/contents.aspx

The Wellcome Foundation has an Images of Science competition each year. See the images which made the finals here: www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/wia/index.html

Stephen Kill was talking to Vicky Wong. All the images in this article were taken by Stephen Kill except the image of Stephen at work which was taken by Eric Jenkins, UKAEA.