

SONYA NEWELL-SMITH

by Bryn Campbell

This collection of photographs by Sonya Newell-Smith is not the late flowering of a talent but a body of work created over many years. Sonya's career began in the early 1960's, when she worked as a freelance photo-journalist. She put her career on hold when she married David Newell-Smith, who had just joined the staff of 'The Observer'.

They wanted to share the whole of their lives together and, when it was at all possible, she accompanied him on assignments. Their love of photography was central to their work, their private lives and their ambitions. Occasionally, they both found time to take pictures for themselves but these snatched moments could never satisfy their enthusiasm. They made plans to become more financially independent, and to gain greater time and freedom to devote to photography.

In 1978, they took the first step in that process by setting up their own business, Tadema Gallery, London, for 20th century Abstract art, decorative arts and jewellery. Once it was firmly established, Sonya and David spent many weekends taking photographs in London's East End. They also took advantage of their business trips and holidays abroad to extend the range of their work

Sonya is quick to acknowledge how much she learned from David but it is clear from her early photographs that she was blessed with natural talent, quick reactions and 'a good eye'. She has made the most of these gifts through her enthusiasm and

determination to improve. Her work stands four-square in the classic tradition of photo-journalism, direct and honest, with an underlying warmth and gentle sense of humour.

She has a Press photographer's ability to make the most of a brief photo-opportunity but also the photo-journalist's instinctive drive to cover a situation in depth. Long-term projects enable her to deploy all her skills to do justice to a subject, instead of settling for a more superficial view. The variety, insight and vitality of the Brick Lane photographs prove the value of such an approach.