Bonfire night at Milburn

The deadline for my Masterclass happened to fall on Bonfire Night. However, my best-laid plans for the day – to photograph the gathering of sheep that day from the Pennines - fell through. Instead of the sight of great flocks being driven along the edge of High Cup Nick as I'd anticipated, there was a mere trickle, most of the sheep having sensibly already hopped it to the lower slopes. Feeling a little in the doldrums, I opted to go Milburn's Bonfire night, which proved to be a fine village event. After stoking up on their excellent hot soup and gingerbread, I started on the photography but soon realised I'd forgotten just about all the cardinal rules of taking fireworks!

The last photo of the evening. I like the village atmosphere and the cottage behind with the white smoke streaming out from the chimney. Using a tripod and getting well back from the fire worked well. On my Nikon D300 I set the ISO at 1600 and the f-stop at 2.8 with a resulting exposure of 1/3rd sec and used averaged centre-weighted metering. There is quite a lot of grain ('noise') at this high ISO, but a benefit of more expensive cameras is their ability to handle poor light.

This could have been much better. I was being lazy, had left my brain at home and didn't get my tripod out of the car until later, thinking I might get away with a very fast shutter speed. This was ISO 1600, with 1/20th sec exposure. I had forgotten that fireworks need the reverse to look impressive; use a slow shutter speed with exposures of anything from 2 seconds to 30 seconds and hold the shutter open for as long as the firework explodes. However, too long an exposure in this instance might have resulted in over-exposure of my foreground figures. It's a matter of try it and see!

My golden rules, which I *may* remember next time, are:

- Bring a small torch
- Stand well back, preferably at height
- Don't use flash
- Set the camera manually on a slow-ish speed.
- Experiment and have fun.
- And don't leave the tripod in the car!