Neath & District Photographic Society

Adjustment Layers and Layer Masks

Mention the Layer Palette and most people new to Photoshop go "oh no, I can't understand Layers".

The truth of the matter is that Layers are relatively easy to understand. Imagine sitting at a desk with a print on the table in front of you. Next to you there are several sheets of clear acetate. Take one of the acetate sheets and place it on top of the print, this is a Layer. Whatever you do to the Layer will affect the look of the print, but if you do not like the effect then remove the Layer and the print is back to normal. This is called non-destructive enhancement, simply, you are not touching the original image and can return it to normal at any time. The only difference with Photoshop is that these Layers will perform a function.

Let's look at the **Layers Palette** .

Open a Jpeg Image in Photoshop, then go to **File> Save As** and save the file with a working title, then locate the **Layers Tab** (fig1). If the **Layers Palette** is not showing then go to **Window>Layers** (fig 2) or press **F7**.
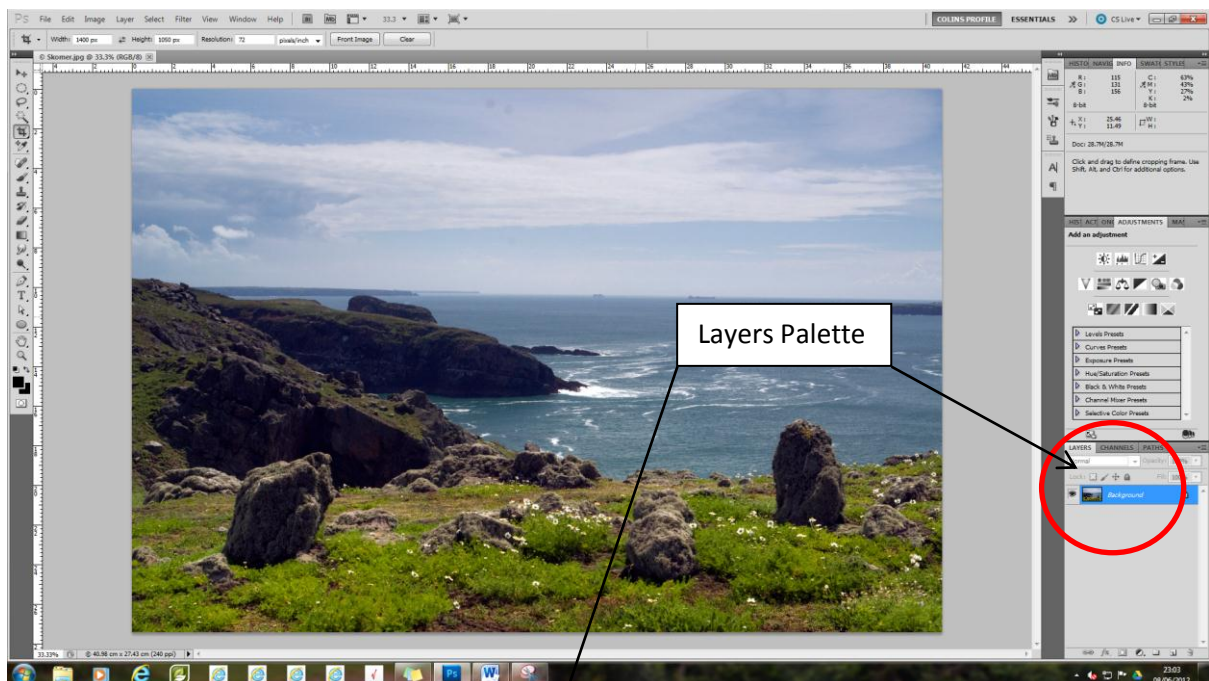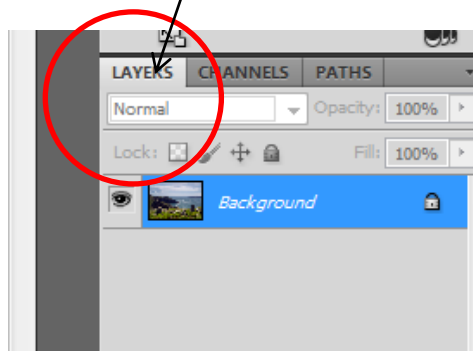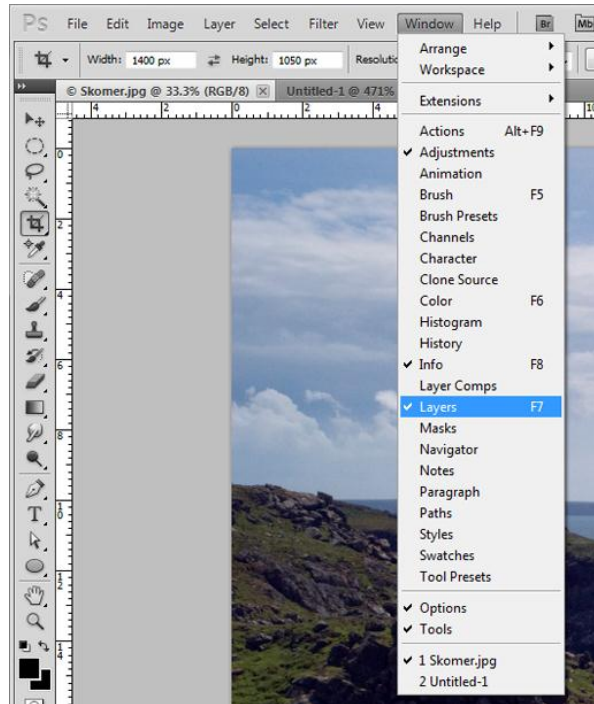

Layers Palette

Fig 1

Fig 2

As soon as the Image is **Opened** a **Layer** called **Background** is created. This **Layer** has a **Thumbnail** of the Image and next to the **Thumbnail** an **Eye Icon** (fig 3). Because this is the **Background Layer** it is locked, shown by the **Padlock Icon**, it cannot be turned off or have its **Opacity** reduced. Anything you do directly to this **Layer** will only be reversible by going back in the **History** state. If the image is saved the effects are irreversible. If you are uncertain make sure you only work on a copy of your image by duplicating the image before you start or save the image you are working on with a new title by using the **File>Save As** command.
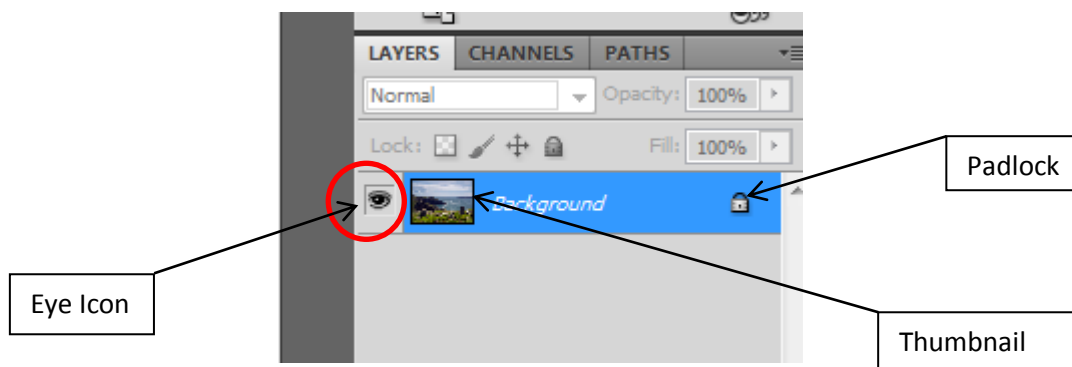

Fig 3

Now create an **Adjustment Layer**. To do this click on the **Adjustment Layer Icon** at the bottom of the **Layers Palette** (fig 4). Alternatively go to **Layer>New Adjustment Layer** in the **Menu Bar** at the top of the **Workspace** (fig 5).
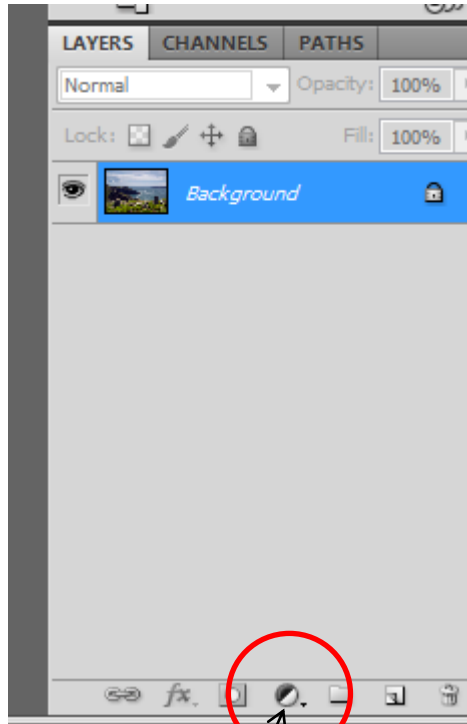

Fig 4

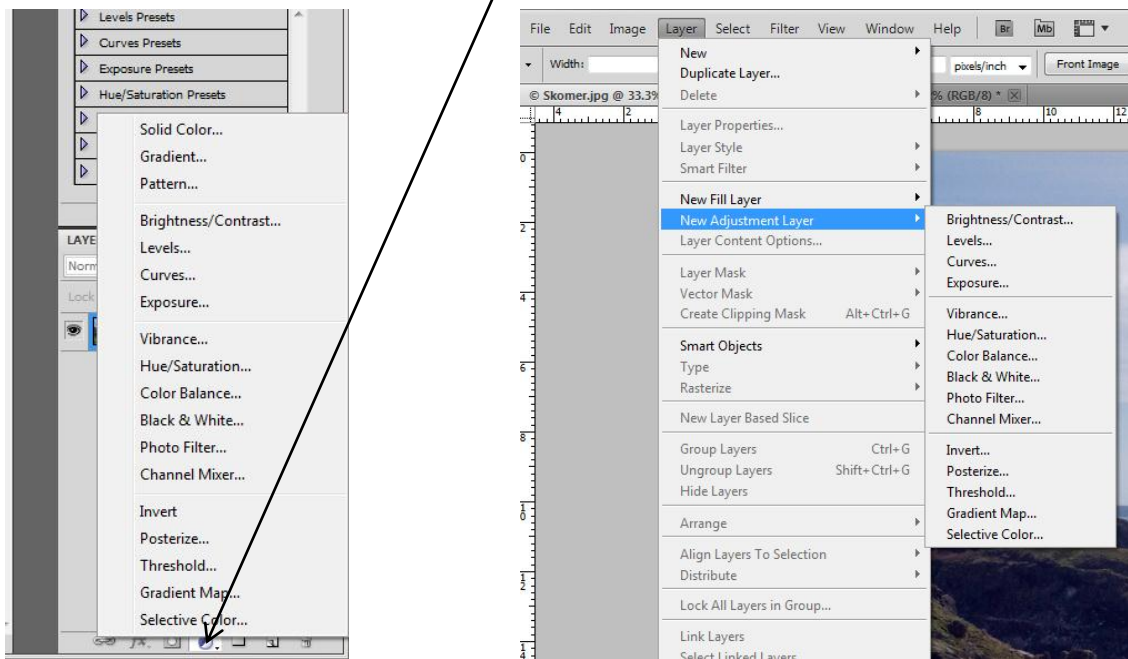This will open the **Adjustment Layer Menu**

Fig 5

To show the effects of the **Adjustment Layers** select **Black & White** from the **Adjustment Layer Menu**. A new Layer has now been created above the **Background Layer** called **Black & White**.

The **Layer** has the **Eye Icon**, a **Layer Icon**, and a **Layer Mask** (fig 6). The **Opacity** and **Fill** are also active, these will be discussed later.
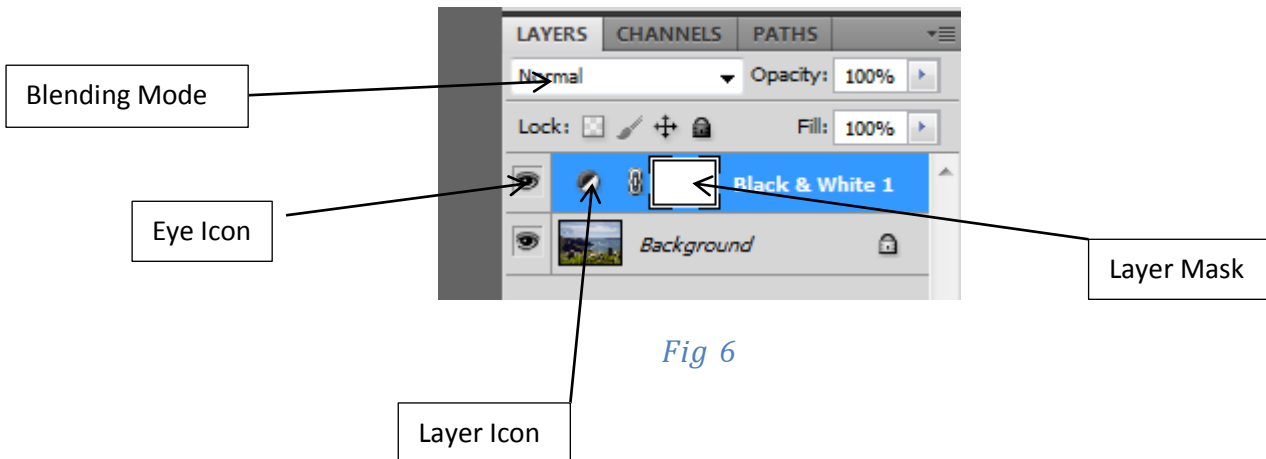

Fig 6

Your image will have been converted into a **Black & White Image**. Now click on the **Eye Icon**, this turns the **Layer** on and off. The **Adjustment Palette** will now have sliders on it to control your **Adjustment Layer** (fig 7). Try moving the sliders around. There are also **Presets** and an **Auto Button**.
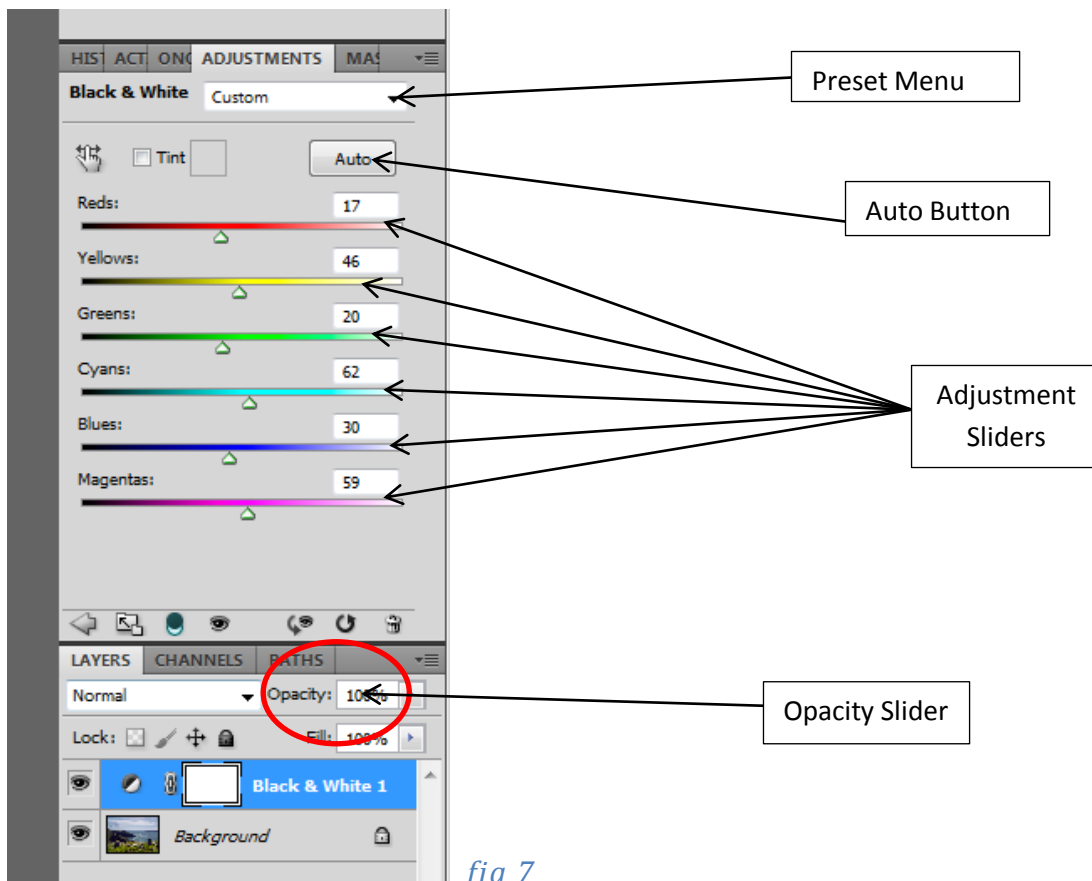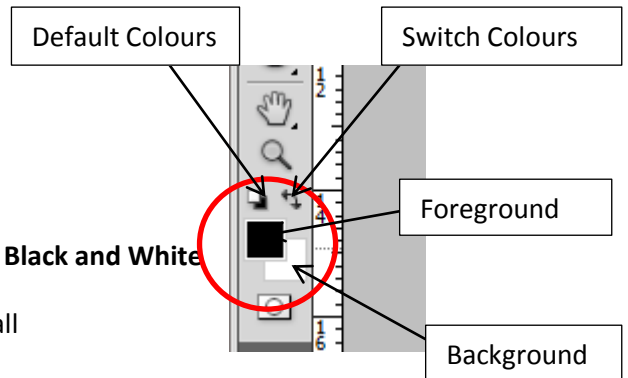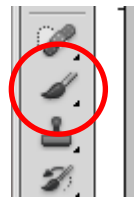

fig 7

Click on the **Auto Button** on the **Adjustment Palette**. Now go to the **Opacity Slider** on the **Layer Palette** (fig 7) and move the **Opacity** down and up, the effect should get less the lower the **Opacity**. Move the **Opacity Slider** back to **100%**.

Go to the **Toolbar** and select a **Brush**

Or press **B** on your keyboard

Default Colours

Switch Colours

Foreground

Background

On your keyboard press **D**, this sets the default colours to **Black and White**

You can also set the default colours by clicking on the small

black and white boxes above the **Foreground & Background** boxes.

Make sure that the **Foreground** colour is set to **Black**, if not then **Click** on the **Double Headed Arrow (Switch Colours)**

Now go back to the **Layers Palette**, click on the **Black and White Layer** if it is not active (**Eye** on and **Blue**) now click on the **Layer Mask** (see fig 6).

Now paint over your image. Where you paint, the colour from the **Background Layer** should show through. This is called **Colour Popping**. If you make a mistake then switch the **Foreground Colour** to **White** (use the double headed arrow or press **X** on your keyboard) and paint over the area. The **Black and White** will be restored.
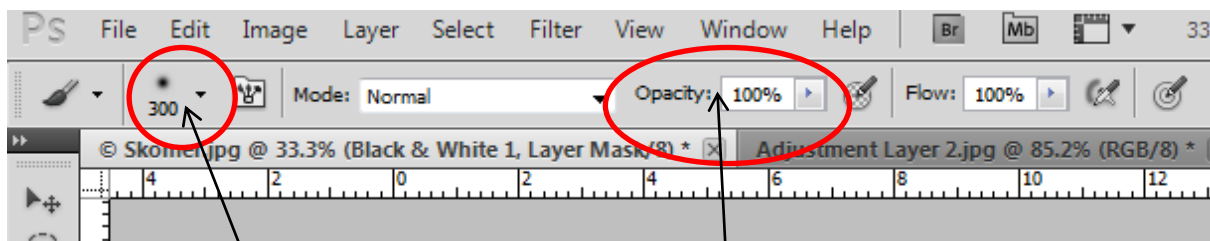

Fig 8

Brush Dynamics Menu

Opacity Slider

Use the **Brush Dynamics Menu** to reduce or increase the **Brush** size and softness.

Saving the Image

When you have finished with your adjustments you will need to save the image, if you are doing a lot of adjustments with different **Layers** it is good practice to save at regular intervals or even save the same image at various stages using easy to remember titles i.e **Image 1**, **Image 2** etc.

There are 2 mains ways to save your project, these are :-

PSD File – this format preserves the **Layers**, so you can revisit the project at a later date. The biggest drawback with **PSD** files is that they are large files as they are not compressed.

Jpeg File – this is the most commonly used file format. Before saving as a **Jpeg** you must **'Flatten'** your image. This compresses the file to a manageable size. Warning, once **'Flattened'** and closed you will not be able to access the **Layers** that made up the image.

Flattening an Image

As I previously said, **Flattening** an **Image** will save space on your hard drive and also enable you to save as a **Jpeg** image. There are two basic ways to **Flatten** an image, both are shown below.

Fig 9

First method - Go to **Layer>Flatten Image** on the **Menu Bar** (fig 9)

The second method – Go to the **Layers Palette**, to the right of the Tab there is a **Drop Down Menu System** (fig 10). Go down the **Menu** to **Flatten Image**.

Drop Down Menu

fig 10
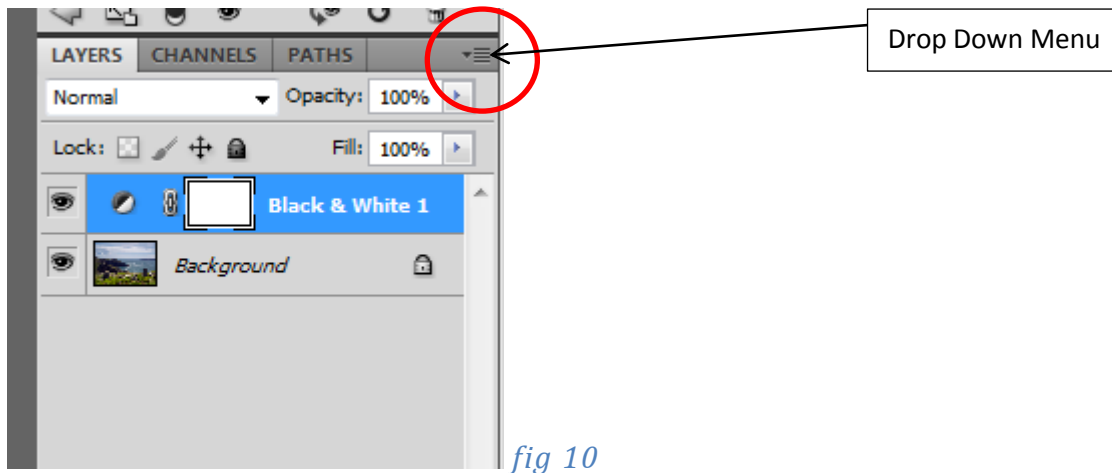
If the image is to be saved as a **PSD File** then go to **File>Save** (if previously saved as a **PSD**) or **Save As**.

The **Save As** option will allow you to select the **File Format** you want to save your image as.

If you are saving as a **Jpeg** then you will be asked for the **Quality** you want to save at. If you are **Printing** the **File** then save at the highest quality (**12**), if you are e-mailing the file or putting onto the web then the suggested quality will be **9** or **10**.