Bramhall Photographic Society

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS
ADJUSTMENT LAYERS EXPLAINED (WHAT THEY DO)

(This technique will work in any version of Elements although the screenshots may vary slightly)

There are a total of 11 different Adjustment Layers available to use in Elements, but the most used ones are Levels, Brightness & Contrast, Hue and Saturation.

Adjustment Layers let you make changes to your image, and however many you use they can all be deleted without affecting your original image. This is called working Non-destructively. If you are not using an adjustment layer you should always make a copy layer of your original image to work on (ctrl+J), or right click on the image in the layers panel and choose 'duplicate layer' - again for the same reason – working non-destructively, means you always have your original image to go back to.

Adjustment Layers are accessed via this icon at the top of the layers panel. To see this, you need to be in the "Expert" Mode.
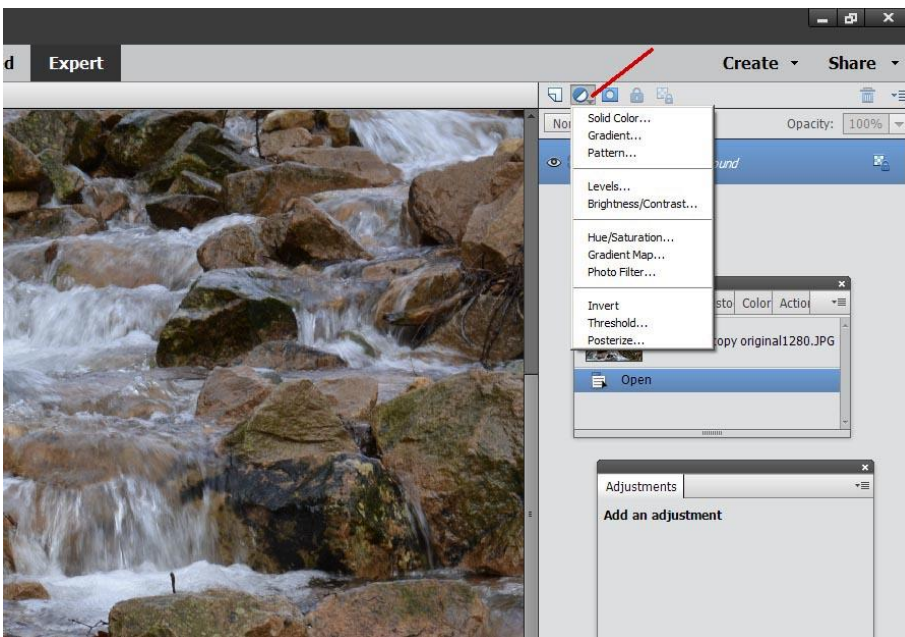

You need to click on the small black downward facing triangle – which opens up a 'dropdown list' of every available adjustment layer – see above screenshot.

In this screenshot, there is already a Background layer, which is the open image.

We will try levels first – 4ᵗʰ down in this list, this opens a dialogue box and places a levels layer above the Background Layer. This has its own 'layer mask' which we can discuss later.

This dialogue box shows a histogram, which is an indicator of how the image is made up i.e. blacks/midtones/whites. In this particular case, the histogram is rather bunched up to the left, meaning the image is rather dark.
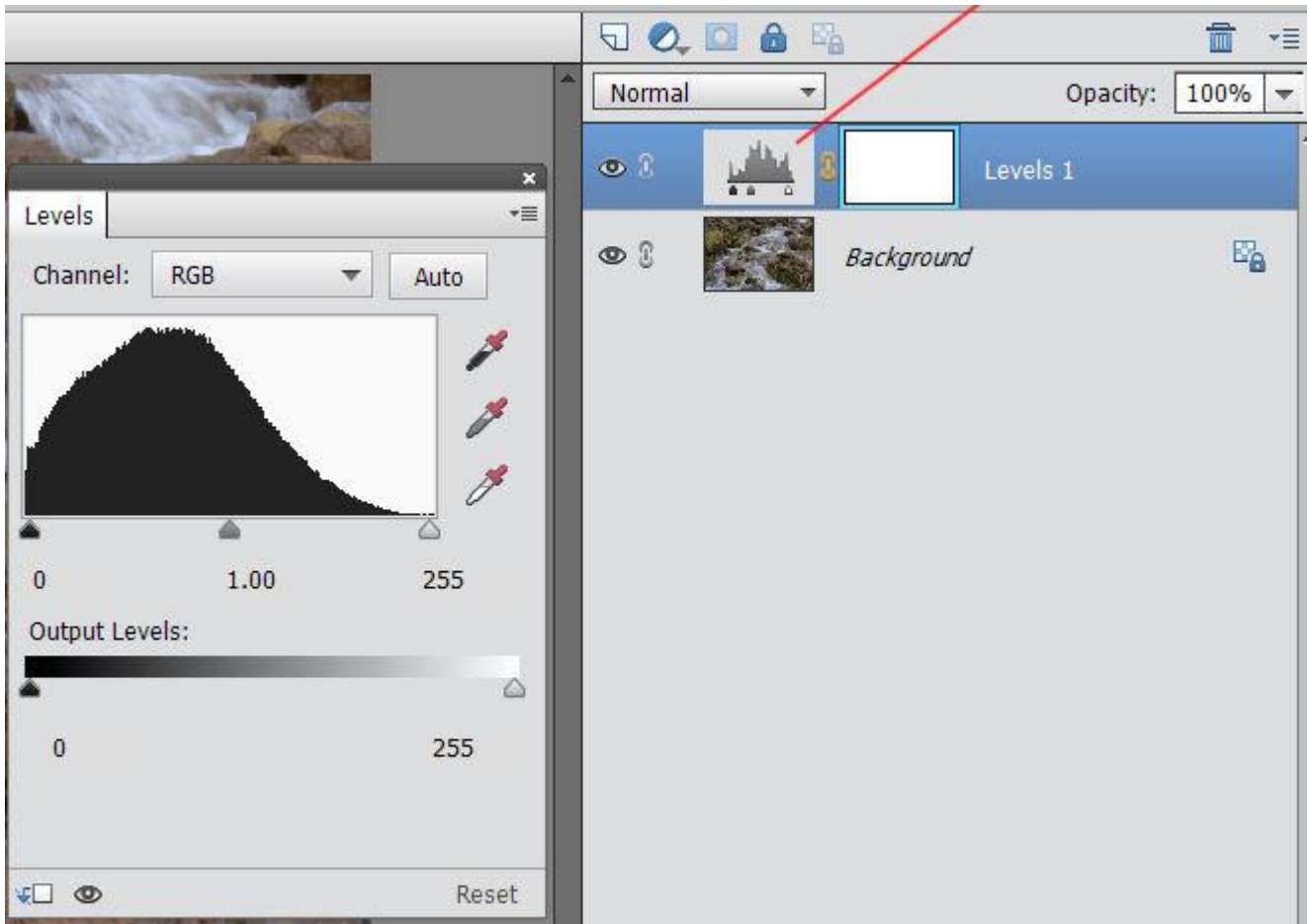
The small triangle at the right, below the histogram, can be dragged inwards a little to meet the base of the black mass to the left. Alternatively, if the lower of the 3 eyedroppers is clicked on (white) when you then click on area in the image that should be white, you will see instant changes both to your image and on the histogram. You can click on different areas of the image to get the best result. Both the Black and the Grey eyedroppers are used in the same way i.e. pick the black eyedropper and find the area in the image which would be the blackest area.

You can combine moving the sliders and also using the eyedroppers till you get the effect you want. If there is a considerable gap at either or both sides of the histogram, the sliders would probably be your first option to pull them in to meet the base of the histogram at both sides.

The screenshot below (page 3) shows the histogram after using the white eyedropper only
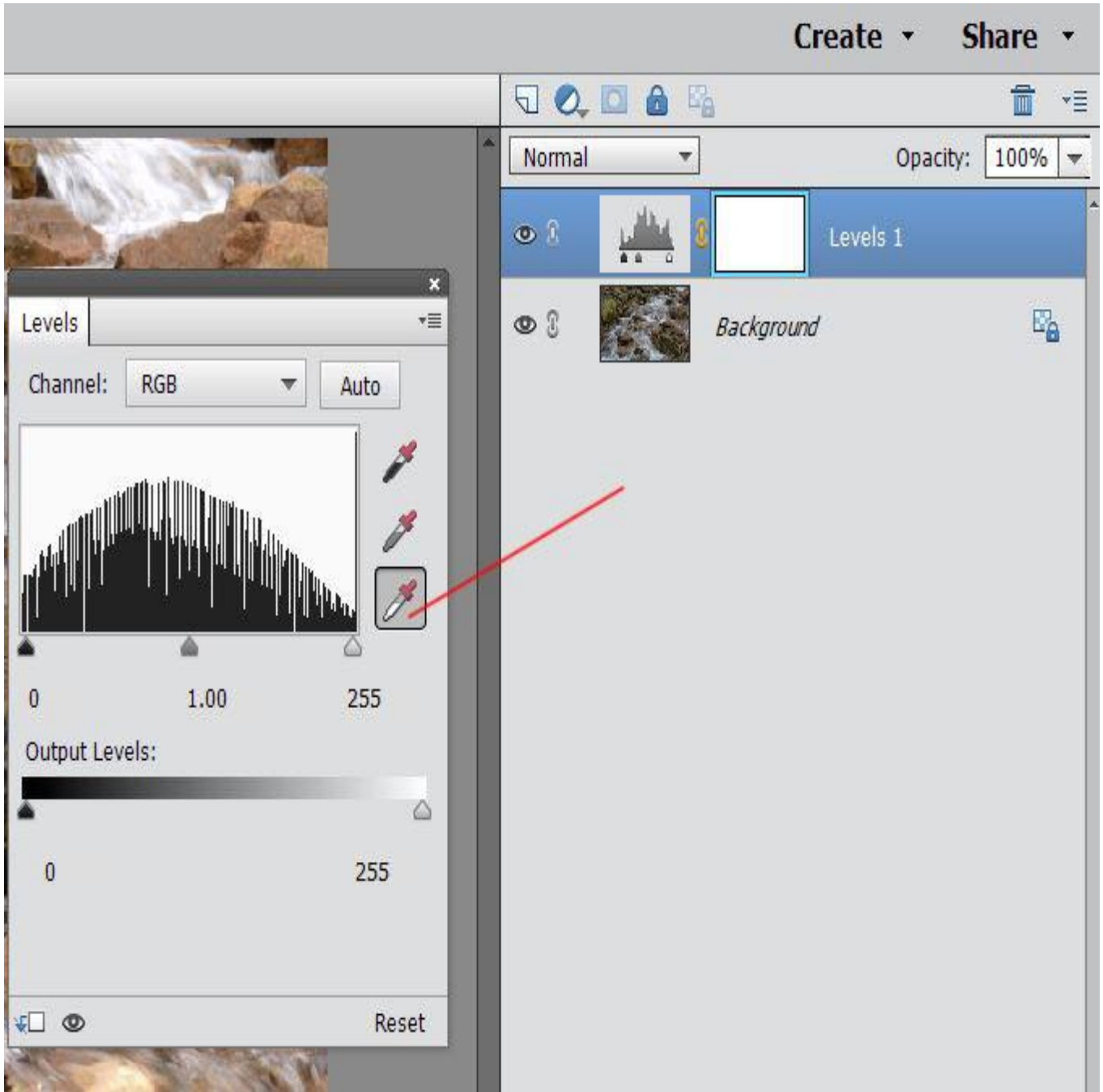
This alone brightened the image considerably.

Another Adjustment Layer to try is the Brightness and Contrast - again accessed in the same way as the levels Adjustment layer above. The dialogue box which opens is very simple and looks like this below (page 4) its default settings are centred at zero for both Brightness and Contrast. On this screenshot it shows the adjustments I made for this particular image – lifting both the brightness and contrast. Again this Adjustment layer comes with its own layer Mask.
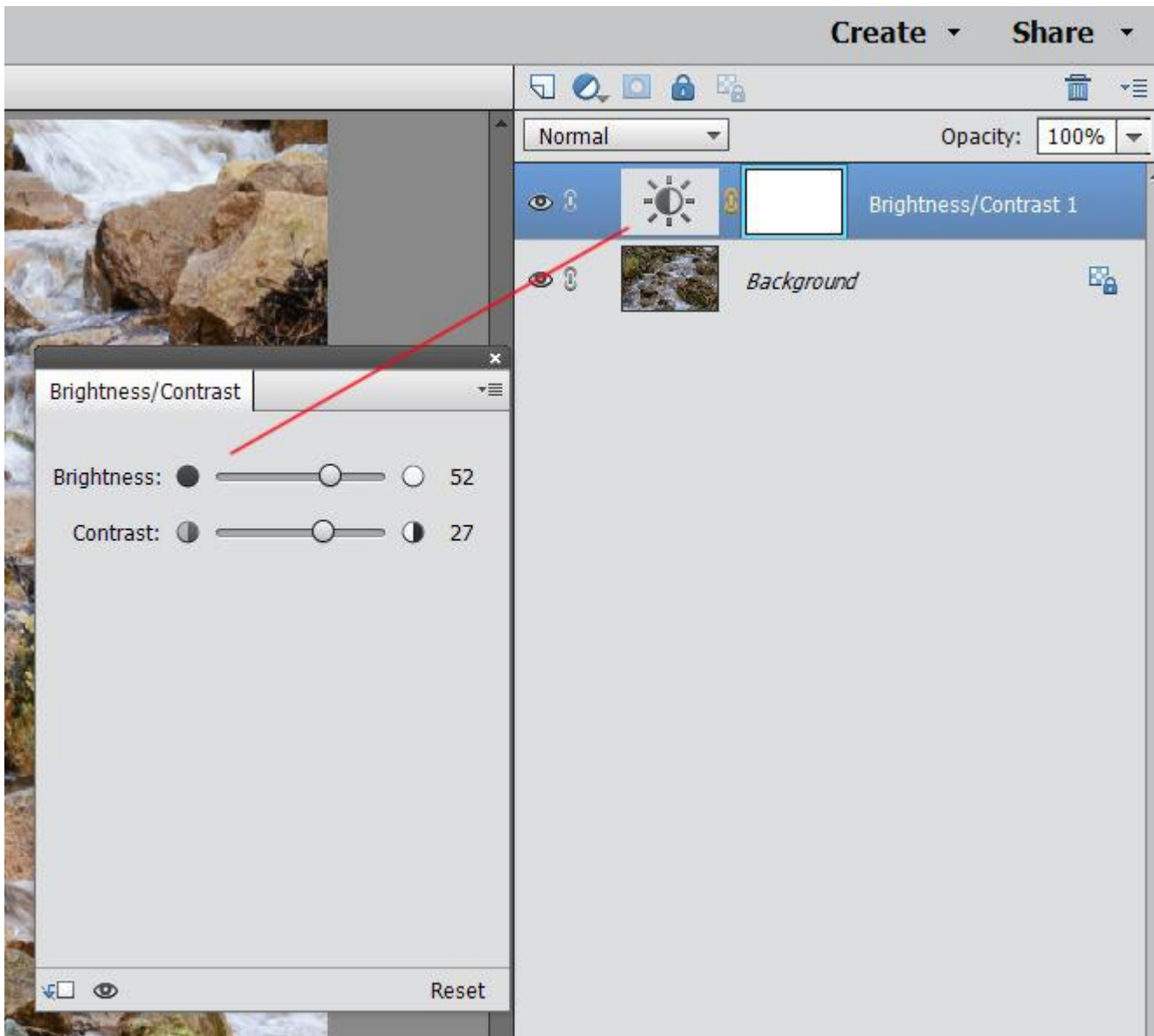

The Hue and Saturation Adjustment Layer is also another very useful tool, again accessed as before (via the dropdown list of the 2nd icon from the left at the top, in the form of a small circle diagonally split blue and white)

With this dialogue box you have the option of altering the Hue/Saturation or Lightness of any colour in the image by clicking on the dropdown triangle next to where the dialogue box says Channel 'Master' (which if you leave at this setting alters the image globally - all colours)

There is the option of choosing Reds, Yellows, Greens, Cyans, Blues or Magentas. Only one colour can be altered at a time, but any number of these colours can be altered individually.

The Colorize box can be ticked and then use the Hue slider to get very different effects to your image.
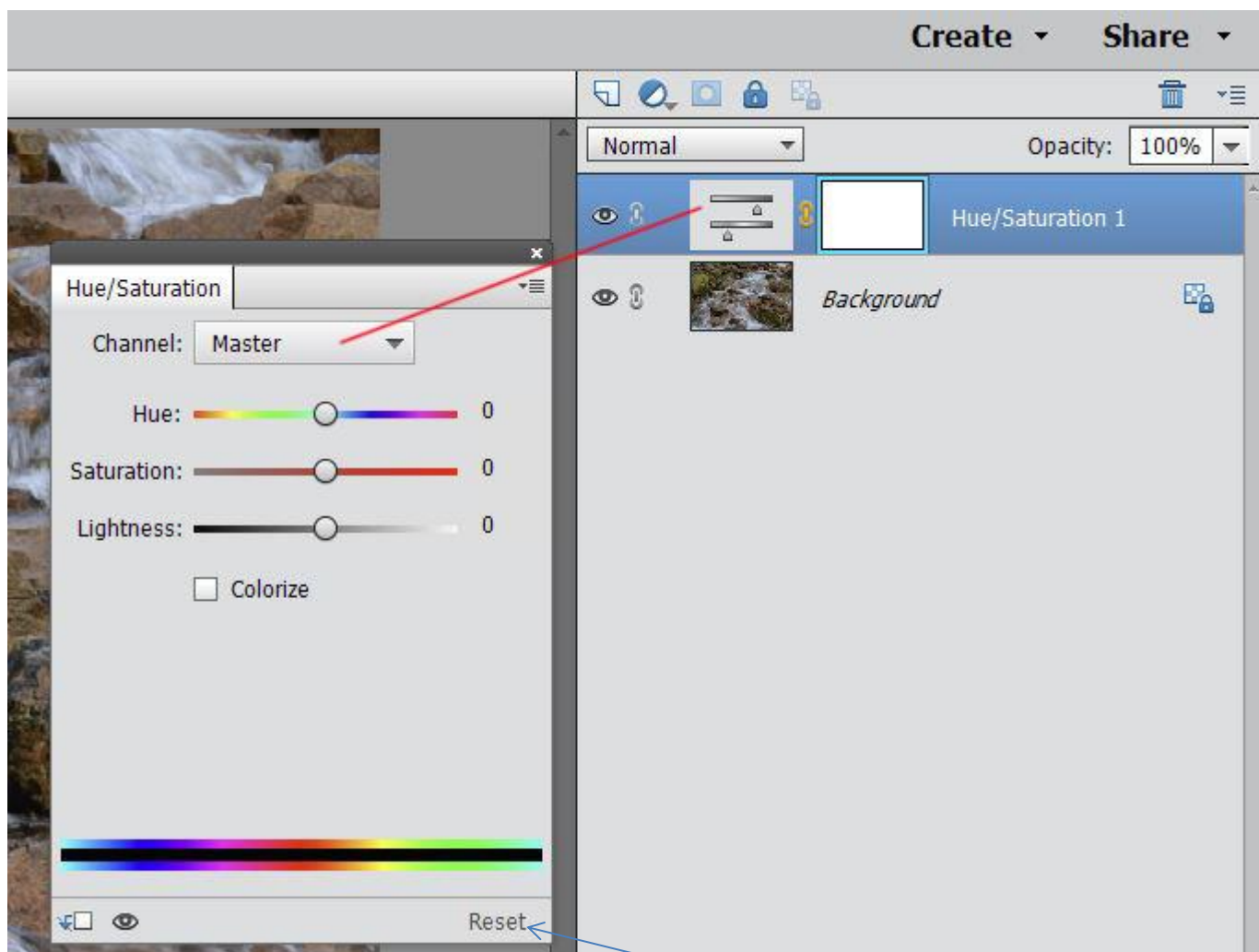
On all of the Adjustment Layer dialogue boxes there is a Reset button at the lower right hand side. This removes all your altered settings and sets them at the default setting ready for you to try again.

On all of the Adjustment Layer dialogue boxes there is a small 'eye' on the lower left – clicking this will give you the opportunity to see what your image looked like before you made the alterations within this particular dialogue box. Clicking it on and off allows you to see both 'versions' of your image.

On all of the Adjustment Layer dialogue boxes there is also, at the far left lower corner, a small square with an arrow pointing down. This, when left at its default setting, means that these changes will affect all the layers below. If ticked, the changes will only affect the layer directly below. This will become clearer when we try using selections combined with Adjustment Layers.

Every adjustment layer can also be finely tuned by reducing the opacity slider down from 100% until you reach the effect you want. The Hue and Saturation adjustment layer can also remove all

colour and turn your image into a mono image – for this – you move the Saturation slider all the way to the left (-100) You may not want Mono, you can have the saturation at any number from -100 to +100 though on an image +100 can look way over the top.

A common treatment on some Mono images is to make use of the layer mask which is shown in the adjustment layer with a small lock sign to its left. If you click on the white mask, and paint on the image with black – you bring back/show the colour below.

Solid Colour is perhaps one of the lesser used Adjustment layers is the first on the list, but it certainly has its uses. It can be used at a low opacity over an image you want to appear paler, more diffuse. This is what you will see when you add a Solid colour Layer Mask. First screen shot shows the default 100% opacity and the second shows where to lower the opacity – here it shows 50%
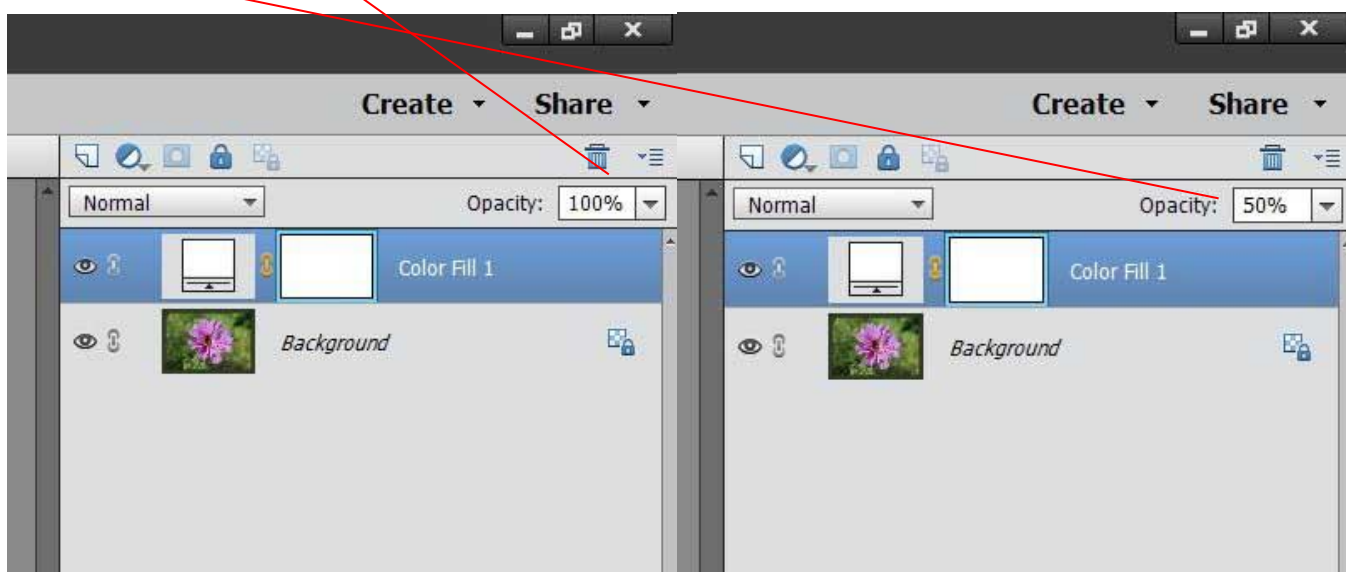
It also fills the layer with whatever colour is uppermost in your foreground/background colour boxes. You can alter this colour by using the colour picker in the box which has automatically opened. See below. Or, you can 'mouse' over your image and the colour picker appears allowing you to choose an exact colour from your image.
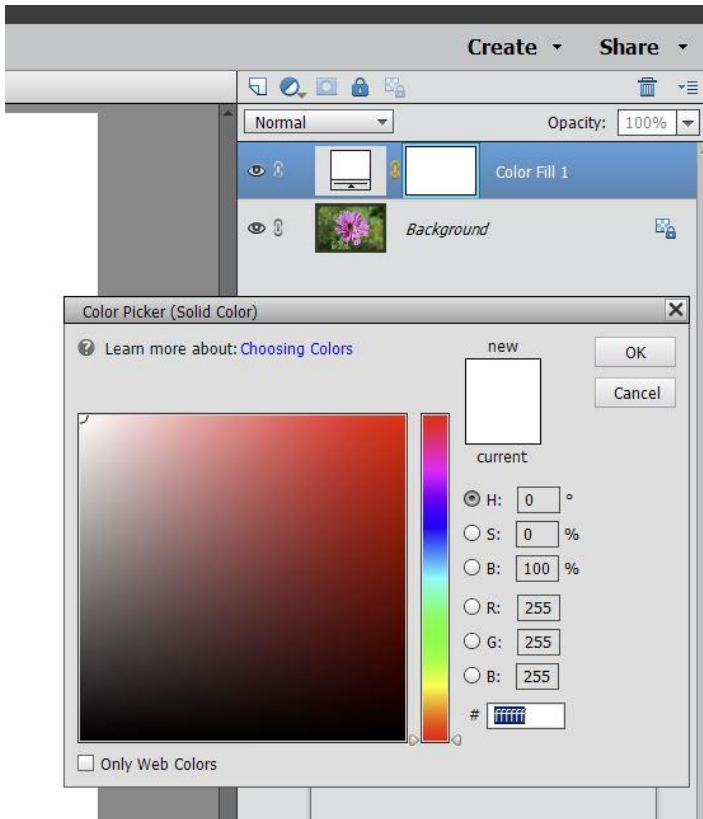
In the screen shot below, I have used the elliptical selection tool to draw an ellipse around the background image of a flower, and then put a solid fill layer over this. The 'marching ants' selection still show. It is then possible to click into the layer mask, pick a black brush and paint over the centre of the open image (which at present will be white) and the selection below will be revealed – the area not selected (outside the ellipse) will stay white. If you want to change the white to another colour, simply double click on the fill layer icon (not the mask) and the colour picker tool can be used on the image itself to choose an exact colour from the image.
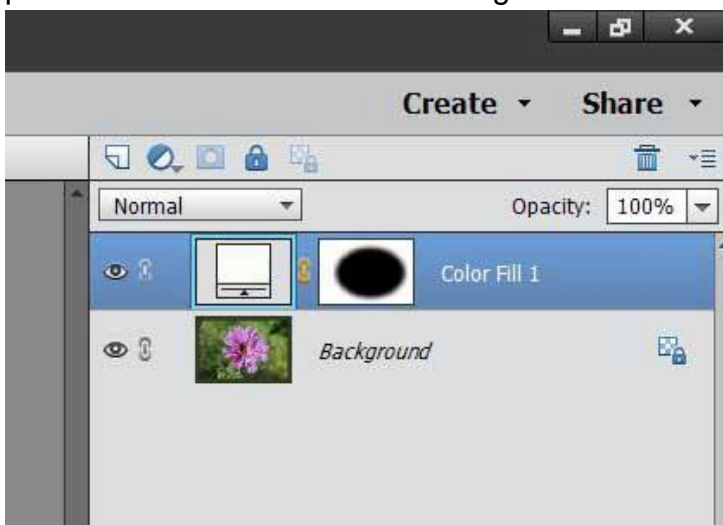
I do hope these notes are helpful, and if I have not explained myself clearly enough, please feel free to contact me at
heather.carslake@sky.com