

Institution: De Montfort University		
Unit of Assessment: 32		
Title of case study: Reframing Photographs: identification, value making and knowledge construction from photographic collections		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Kelley Wilder	Professor in Photographic History	1 September 2008–present
Dr Gil Pasternak	Associate Professor-Research/Reader in Social and Political Photographic Cultures	17 June 2013–present
Professor Elizabeth Edwards	Research Professor in Photographic History	1 June 2011–31 January 2016
Professor Roger Taylor	Senior Research Fellow	1 February 2003–31 July 2010
Professor Stephen Brown	Professor	January 1994–June 2013 and August 2013–July 2016
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013–December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The Photographic History Research Centre (PHRC) conducts social and cultural research across a spectrum of record, Victorian and family photography. Its research has: (1) transformed photographic history research by improving the effectiveness and speed of attribution and investigative work of private collectors, commercial dealers and institutional historians; (2) altered museum policy and practice at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Science Museum Group (SMG) enabling them to use their photographic collections to challenge existing narratives about institutional and object histories/y; and (3) using domestic photographs and community photo compilations, it has created a safe space for culturally divided groups to explore common connections beyond prescribed social roles, canonical identities and authorised cultural heritage collections.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Millions of photographs are generated from museum cataloguing, anthropological studies, geographic surveys or scientific experiments and privately taken photographs. PHRC is the first Centre dedicated to studying the social and cultural histories of these photographs, which are often uncatalogued and unrecognised in official histories. Record or reference photographs and private photographs are little valued and often marginalised, with many in danger of being destroyed. PHRC research provides analytical tools that enable institutions and communities to see the value of these collections and to reveal the powerful, but often inaccessible and unheard, historical narratives about society, culture and politics that they embody.</p> <p>PHRC constitutes three distinct but interrelated strands of research:</p> <p>(1) OPEN DATA RESOURCES</p>		

PHRC has developed major online resources and computational search tools to support identification, attribution and cataloguing of photographs. In the early 2000s, research by Taylor into Victorian photography collated an extensive offline collection of photographic exhibition records from the 19th century. Supported by AHRC grants G2 and G3, Taylor and Brown transformed this research into two online open access research databases: *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839–1870* (2004) and *Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society 1875–1915* (2008). They include 65,000 exhibition records searchable for the first time via the internet by photographer, exhibition, process, price and title [R1]. The exhibition records themselves were largely text only and in 2014, Brown, with an AHRC grant [G1], developed FuzzyPhoto, a computational similarity matching engine using fuzzy logic algorithms to search for images referenced by the exhibition records across more than 1,400,000 historical photographic records in different heritage organisations. FuzzyPhoto was confirmed as an effective method to deal with wide variations in cataloguing metadata between institutions, and between departments in a single institution, and for using the exhibitions' information to enhance records of artefacts in heritage organisations [R2].

(2) INSTITUTIONAL USES OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND THEIR CULTURAL LEGACIES

This strand of PHRC research explores photographs as sources of cultural knowledge in museums. Research by Edwards and Wilder showed that photographs of objects are not neutral records but are integral to constructing historical narratives that continue to influence the identity of museum collections and knowledge-making practices into the present day [R3, R4]. Edwards' research on institutional photographs, including the legacies of colonialism and how it is addressed in the museum space, found that photographs have remained largely unexamined as part of the decolonisation discussion in the museum sector and thus serious engagement with photographs was outside the experience of most curators [R3]. The outputs of Edwards' research conducted as part of the HERA-funded project PhotoCLEC (2012–2014; G4), are accessible online and it remains an important resource dedicated to the study of photography and decolonisation in Western museums. Wilder's research revealed the centrality of photographs to science and archive protocols in the 19th century as they became essential 'visual arguments', yet were not in themselves valued as collections [R4]. Wilder's investigation of the cultural legacies of photographic materials highlights how science photographs and catalogue information about them is created through not only the making of photographs, but through their collection and recirculation as 'information' or even 'knowledge' [R4].

(3) PRIVATE PHOTOGRAPHY IN POLITICS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The third strand of PHRC research concerns domestic photographs and community photo compilations. Supported by a GBP503,000 Horizon 2020 grant [G5], *Digital Heritage in Cultural Conflicts* (DigiCONFLICT), Pasternak's research examines the social and political uses of these private collections with a particular focus on their decentralisation of authorised heritage and participation in identity formation and cultural politics. His research demonstrates the multiple ways non-professional photographic cultures have transformed social politics, concrete historical processes and conservative approaches to cultural diplomacy [R5, R6].

3. References to the research

- [R1] Brown, S. and Taylor, R. (2004) *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839–1870*. <http://peib.dmu.ac.uk/>; Brown, S. (2008) *Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society 1875–1915*. <http://erps.dmu.ac.uk/>
Two websites funded by two AHRC grants [G2, G3].
- [R2] Brown, S. (2015) "'Words, words. They're all we have to go on": Image finding without the pictures', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 31(4): 671–68; doi:10.1093/llc/fqv018
Peer-reviewed journal article.
- [R3] Edwards, E. (2013) 'Absent histories and absent images: photographs, museums and the colonial past', *Museum and Society*, 11(1): 19–38;
https://www.academia.edu/3128024/Absent_Histories_and_Absent_Images_Photos_in_Museums_and_the_Colonial_Past

Peer-reviewed journal article.

- [R4] Mitman, G. and Wilder, K. (eds) (2016) *Documenting the World: Film, Photography and the Scientific Record*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; ISBN 9780226129112

Peer-reviewed edited book.

- [R5] Pasternak, G. and Ziętkiewicz, M. (2017) 'Beyond the familial impulse: domestic photography and sociocultural history in post-communist Poland, 1989–1996', *Photography & Culture*, 10(2): 121–145;
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2017.1321291>

Peer-reviewed journal article.

- [R6] Pasternak, G. (2020) 'At home with "Palestine": performing historical photographs of the West Bank in Israeli households', in G. Pasternak (ed.) *Visioning Israel-Palestine: Encounters at the Cultural Boundaries of Conflict*, London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, pp. 210–243; ISBN 9781501364624

Book chapter in peer-reviewed edited book.

Grants: This PHRC research attracted over GBP1,000,000 in grant funding.

- [G1] GBP390,280 AHRC Research Grant AH/J004367/1, PI Stephen Brown
 [G2] GBP179,457 AHRC Research Grant AH/D001420/1, PI Stephen Brown
 [G3] GBP37,470 AHRB RE/AN10921/APN17589, PI Stephen Brown
 [G4] GBP388,567 (12-2010) EC/HERA PhotoCLEC, PI Elizabeth Edwards
 [G5] GBP503,000 EU Horizon 2020/JPICH AH/S000119/1, PI Gil Pasternak
 [G6] GBP5,743 BA/Leverhulme SG161689, PI Kelley Wilder

4. Details of the impact

(1) TRANSFORMING PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY RESEARCH

PHRC hosts 7 digital photographic history resources. The two most used are *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839–1870* (PEIB) and *Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society 1875–1915* (ERPS). These databases represent a unique international resource and have become trusted sources for a variety of international users, from historians to private collectors and commercial dealers. Between 2014 to mid-2018, both databases had approximately 12,000,000 visits each (11,437,675 for PEIB and 12,205,343 for ERPS) from users in Europe, North America, the UK and the Middle East [C1, C2]. A user survey conducted March–June 2020 shows that more than half of current users accessed the databases for their jobs or for collections referencing, and the majority of those surveyed (76%) said they used the databases for their own personal research [C2]. For commercial professionals, amateur historians and academics these databases improve the speed and efficiency of investigative practices that form the basis for photographic research and attribution, as illustrated below from a selection of user comments [C2]:

'I work for a major art collection, and the websites have helped research the collection ... and ... have also helped inform more accurate dating of objects.'

'[the database] makes it practical within a reasonable time frame to inform people with whom we are working about the photographs.'

'The websites make it possible to make research connections quickly that would otherwise take weeks of research in archives.'

(2) RECONSIDERING PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS AND CHANGING MUSEUM PRACTICE

Since the 1850s the V&A has regularly made and stored multiple photographs of different objects, dispersed across departments, making it impossible to count exactly how many photographs it holds. PHRC's research has helped to acknowledge and explore tens of thousands of photographs located across all of its departments for use in research and display.

This has been facilitated through two V&A staff writing PhDs with Wilder, and Edwards's appointment as the V&A's inaugural Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor (2017–2022).

Edwards's research at DMU and direct intervention in the research culture of the museum has led curators to change their practice of disposal or selective retention of photographs, instead cleaning and rehousing them for use in research and exhibition [C3]. This has enabled analysis of the photographic collecting practices in the Museum and at the National Art Library, bringing new photographs for display in the public galleries, and creating a new understanding of the photographs and the objects that relate to them. A specific example is the William Kinton Parkes 1920s collection of about 4,000 reference photographs and over 300 questionnaires from 20th-century sculptors including Ossip Zadkine, Oswald Herzog and Evelyn Beatrice Longman. The photographs, held at various off- and onsite holding rooms and departments, had been separated from the sculptors' questionnaires and were at high risk of disposal. The curatorial staff supported by Edwards argued for full retention of the entire collection, resulting in reconnection with the texts of the project, more comprehensive cataloguing of the questionnaires and photographs, and re-evaluation of sculptors' work.

A Curator in the Word and Image Department at V&A commented:

Reappraisal of these photographs in light of Edwards' work shows them to be a vital part of the 'ecosystem' of museum photographs, and key documents for the study of the formation of curatorial knowledge within the museum. They also have particular interest in fields beyond photographic history due to their content, so much so that their recovery was reported in the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association website. [C3]

(3) SHAPING POLICY AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

PHRC research has informed a new strategic narrative around the relationship between science and photography that has guided the new collections policy at the National Science and Media Museum (NSMM). The NSMM holds some of the largest and most significant collections of photography, film and television technologies in the world (3,000,000 items). Since 2015, Edwards and Wilder have worked closely as advisers with the SMG and the NSMM to foster understanding of its collections. Traditionally the museum had understood its collection from an aesthetic or content basis and in 2017 it added 'science' to its name and remit, representing a significant change in the purpose of the museum to better understand and communicate the role of science in media technologies.

The Head Curator acknowledged that PHRC research contributed heavily to the conceptualisation of this new direction:

[Wilder's] world leading expertise on the relationship between science and photography was critical to how the NSMM informed its new approach to its collection ... [we] repositioned our understanding of the collections around concepts of process and practice ... that were directly informed by Prof. Wilder's distinction between 'photographic science' and the 'science of photography' [C4]

The NSMM's new collections policy has now been adopted across the 7 sites of the SMG which between them hold 7,000,000 objects and welcome millions of visitors every year in person and online. The collections policy was officially published on the SMG website in December 2020 [C5]. According to the Curator, the new policy 'means that we will be more aligned with the purpose and values of the SMG and be able to reach new audiences with a new energized understanding of the role of photography to our audience's lives' [C4].

(4) OPENING TRANSCULTURAL AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Pasternak's research engages divided and minority communities through analysis and repurposing of their domestic photographs, coupled with socially engaged photographic production.

As part of his Horizon 2020 funded project *Digital Heritage in Cultural Conflicts* (DigiCONFLICT; 2018–2021), Pasternak has encouraged re-examinations of authorised cultural heritage and historical knowledge in Israel, Cyprus and the UK. Cooperating with divided local communities,

he combined photography, digitisation processes and oral history to co-create cultural outputs and programming, such as public photo displays and photographic publications.

In November 2019, for example, Pasternak worked with Leicester's Polish and Jewish communities using photography to build cultural and interpersonal connections. A series of workshops enabled members of the two communities to share with each other their lived experiences, feelings and memories to reconnect with their interrelated history and culture. The resulting photobook 2020, titled *Recovering Connections: Poles, Jews and Our Interrelated Heritage* [C6], has interwoven their visual impressions and reflections as well as individual and communal heritage, demonstrating the deep relationship between two communities who live in the same city but only rarely encounter one another. The Chair of the Polish community organisation, Project Polska, observed that using photographs as a medium of expression, 'allowed participants to convey non-verbal messages about their cultural background and enticed reflection on the importance of those traditions, both in terms of positive and negative experience ... They also recognised the mutual foundations in both communities' imageries' [C7]. Following the project with Dr Pasternak, further cross-cultural events were planned, including a culinary event which went ahead as an online event in October 2020 and a digital photo exhibition scheduled for March 2021.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [C1] PEIB and ERPS website data information; and
<http://peib.dmu.ac.uk/> and <http://erps.dmu.ac.uk/>
- [C2] PHRC online resource survey report. Quotations can be found on pp. 6, 7.
- [C3] V&A Curator testimonial, 2020 and
The article: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/william-kineton-parkes-and-sculptors-of-the-twenties>
- [C4] SMG Curator testimonial, letter, 16 December 2020.
- [C5] Collection policy publication on SMG website, 11 December 2020;
<https://www.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/blog/collecting-photography>
- [C6] Czyznikowska, B., Levene, M. and Pasternak, G. (eds) (2020) *Recovering Connections: Poles, Jews and Our Interrelated Cultural Heritage*, London: Independent Publishing Network. ISBN 9781838536046
- [C7] Testimonial from Chair of Project Polska, 15 January 2021.