

Becoming a Researcher

Reading Objects Teaching Pack 3: Photographs

Guidance

The purpose of this pack is to offer activities and resources to aid a teaching workshop to undergraduate or postgraduate researchers new to Special Collections. Activities begin with a detailed reading of specific photographs held in Special Collections and are designed to engage students in the content, context, structure and materiality of items. The aim of the session is to provide students with the questions and tools to rigorously read other photographs they may encounter during their research, and to critically distinguish these from other types of material.

In line with the Research Skill Development Framework used by the University of Leeds, the aim for this teaching session is to encourage an increased level of student confidence and autonomy when approaching primary materials, and to facilitate independent research.

At the end of the pack you will find links to related resources in Special Collections, a key questions sheet, and an activity handout that can be used during the session.

Session overview

Students work in small groups (of no more than 5), each group focusing on one photograph. Progressing through 2 short activities, students gain experience of the skills needed to interpret photographs in an archival research context.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the teaching session students should be able to:

- Critically examine a photograph taking into account its content, context, structure and physical properties.
- Interrogate the purpose for which the photograph has been taken and ask broader questions about photography, including the extent to which photographers construct or record the scene.
- Consider how the published context of the photograph (for example on a newspaper page) affects how it is received.
- Take into account the physical properties of a photograph and their effects.

Planning a Session:

Teaching sessions using Special Collections material are generally held in the Brotherton Room. This can comfortably accommodate up to 20 students looking at material.

Information on booking the Brotherton Room is available at:

https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/255/use_special_collections/11/use_special_collections/5



Primary materials to be consulted in library or via the Special Collections website:

"Travelling Bird of a Feather." [Eviction Darenth Woods] photograph (BC MS ROM 2/A/1/2/5)

Persistent link: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/620418>

"Operation Gipsies in Darenth Woods: Caravans are towed away." Photograph ([BC MS ROM 2/A/1/2/7](#))

Persistent link: <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/620417>

Suggested secondary reading

- Students can read Special Collections Research Skills resources in advance of their visit to Special Collections. These are available online at: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/256/research_and_teaching/302/special_collections_support_for_research/3
- Roland Barthes, '[The Photographic Message](#)' (1961), in *Image, Music, Text*. [Library catalogue record: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b1043685>]. This essay examines ways of reading press photographs.
- Richard Salkeld, *Reading Photographs: An Introduction to the Theory and Meaning of Images* [Library catalogue record: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b3344606>].

Lesson Plan:

Introduction	Talking to group	5 minutes
Activity 1: Content	Small Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 2: Context	Small Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 3: Further Context	Small Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 4: Structure & Materials	Small Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 5: possible extension activity	Small Group Discussion	30 minutes
Round up	Whole Group Discussion	5 minutes

Introductions:

Powerpoint introductions to Special Collections for use in teaching sessions are available at:

https://library.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/249/teaching_resources



Case Study: Photographs from the Romany Collection

ACTIVITY 1: Content

Look in detail at Photograph 1 and Photograph 2.

Think about the following questions

1. What do you think is going on in these pictures? Why do you think this?
2. Are there any clues as to where the pictures were taken?
3. Can you guess which year the pictures were taken in? What makes you think this?
4. What kind of photographs are these? Do you have any thoughts on what kind of photographer might have taken them and why they might have photographed this particular scene?
5. To what extent does a photographer construct as much as record the scene in any photograph? Think about decisions including: the choice of angle, the distance or proximity of the shot to the subject, how much background is included, whether all aspects of the photograph are equally in focus.
6. Can you see any evidence of editing on the photographs? Why do you think this might have been done? What would be the effect of taking one element out of a picture and isolating it?

ACTIVITY 2: Context

1. Read the contextual information about the photographs and revisit the questions above. Does this information change any of your answers?
2. Look carefully at the reverse side of the two photographs.
 - a) What does this information suggest about why these photographs were taken and how they were used?
 - b) Does the purpose for which the photograph was taken change your opinion of the content of the photograph in any way?
 - c) How might the purpose of the photograph affect how it was taken and/or edited?



TEACHING NOTES for ACTIVITIES 1 and 2

- **Contextual information for the photographs**

These photographs were taken during the eviction of a Gypsy and Traveller settlement in Darenth Woods, Kent, in 1962. On Wednesday 3rd January 1962, Darenth Parish Council gave seven days' notice to nearly 300 Gypsies and other Travellers to quit. The eviction was widely reported in the press and repeatedly brought before the House of Commons by the MP for Erith and Crayford, Norman Dodds.

- The pictures are press photographs.
- Alterations have been made to both photographs. In **photograph 1**, a white border has been applied to the photograph around the figure of the boy. This suggests that this part of the photograph was edited out and used as a picture on its own. Given the information on the back of the photograph this seems to conflict with how the photograph was initially intended to be used. The initial summary of the photograph, dated 20th January 1962 (the date of the evictions) draws a comparison between the young boy and the older gentleman who he is standing next to in the photograph. They are 'birds of a feather', the summary suggests, making a pun on the fact that the boy is holding a chicken. The mention of both the boy and the elderly gentleman in the summary suggests that at least initially, the whole photograph was intended to be published alongside the text.
- Nevertheless, underneath the printed summary is a handwritten note to 'cut out boy' and there is also a date stamp which states that the photograph was used on 18th May 1963, over a year after it was originally taken. Another handwritten note at the bottom of the photograph reads 'Features Nat Character Gypsies'. This suggests how the picture would have been filed, and indicates the kinds of articles that the photograph would have been considered appropriate to illustrate. Planet News' stamp is visible on the back of the photograph, and this news agency, which owned the photograph, would have been paid a fee each time it was used.
- A similar process has occurred in **photograph 2**, although this time it is a group who have been singled out from their background. Interestingly, one of the features that this re-framing has edited out is the presence of another photographer, shooting the same scene from behind their backs, or directing his camera at other scenes beyond the frame. By effacing the existence of another photographer, the owner of this photograph is able to suggest that the photograph is both unique (and so worthy of a higher fee) and naturalistic. The presence of another photographer both draws attention to the process of taking a picture, and consequently the editorial process, and also suggests that multiple pictures of the scene have been taken, making it potentially less valuable.



- **Notes on terminology and spellings**

It is important that since these sources were created the terminology used to describe some of these communities has changed and/or been clarified. Today, the terms Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are not synonyms but apply to distinct groups of people. [Leeds GATE](#) provide a very useful guide to terminology in their [‘Who are Gypsies and Travellers?’](#) briefing.

- Some of these groups including Romany Gypsies are recognised as an ethnic minority in UK law, and as such it is correct to apply capital letters as you would when writing American or English, for example. As Leeds GATE note however, it is also polite to use capital letters for other groups who consider themselves distinct even if these have not yet been recognised in law.
- Historically terms of reference and spellings of terms relating to Gypsies and Travellers have differed, and this might affect some search engine results. It is worth using the alternative spelling Gipsy, as well as searching under the terms Romany and Traveller, to broaden the scope of search results.



ACTIVITY 3: Further context

Read 'Peaceful rout of Darenth Gypsies: Moved along politely, but destination unknown', *Observer* 21 January, 1962, p. 12. [accessible via library catalogue record <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b1625751>]

1. This article includes a photograph of the group we have already seen in Photograph 2. Does the wording of the article influence how you look at the photograph? If the photographs were juxtaposed with text written in a contrasting tone, or from a different ideological standpoint would your opinion of the photographs be changed?
 2. Do you approach photographs within articles in a different way to photographs unaccompanied by words?
 3. Why do you think the four photographs used to illustrate the *Observer* article were chosen? How do they compare / differ from the two photographs you have already looked at?
-

ACTIVITY 4: Structure and materials

Watch footage of the eviction at Darenth Woods taken by Pathé News:

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/gypsies-evicted>

1. How does the use of different media affect your engagement with / reading of the events recorded by the two photographs that you looked at?
2. What choices have been made for the photographs to look as they do? We need to take into account that if they were designed for newspaper reproduction they would need to fulfil certain specifications, but what is the effect of these? How would the photographs differ if they were taken in colour for example?



ACTIVITY 5: Extension Activity

Compare the photographs, footage, and newspaper reports of the Darenth Wood evictions with the more recent print and media coverage of the 2011 Dale Farm evictions. These can be compared both in terms of the press approach to the subject of Gypsy and Traveller evictions, and Gypsy and Traveller communities more broadly, but also in terms of the effect that new kinds of media have on the reporting of subjects. Reports, blogs, photographs, and footage which vary in their political perspective can be found by using the search boxes on the BBC, *Guardian*, and *Daily Mail* websites as well as Youtube.



Related Resources

If you have enjoyed this workshop and would like to research further into any of the ideas or questions raised, you might be interested in the following resources held by Special Collections:

- [The Romany Collection](#)
The Romany Collection is one of five designated collections held by the University of Leeds Library. It contains over 3000 printed works and a wide range of archive material including; press cuttings, photographs, manuscripts, typescripts, letters, music, objects, paintings and drawings referencing Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, Europe (Roma) and worldwide.
- **Photographs**
Special Collections holds a large number of photographs within its diverse collections. Collections with a significant number of photographs include the [Godfrey Bingley photographic archive](#), which contains around 10,000 images taken between 1884 and 1913, the [Liddle Collection](#), and the [West Yorkshire Playhouse archive](#). There are also materials relating to photographic controversies including the [Cottingley Fairies Collection](#).

Images from some other collections have also been digitised. To find only these do an advanced search and click on 'including digital images' in the digital media tab.



External Links

Further information on the Darenth Wood evictions and their consequences can be found from the following sites:

Records from Hansard:

1st December, 1961:

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1961/dec/01/gypsies#S5CV0650P0_19611201_HOC_8

2nd May, 1962: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1962/may/02/a2-road-dartford-gypsies>

Press articles, including:

The Times: [library catalogue record <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b2661465>]

“Where are the gypsies?” “Gone”, 1 December, 1961, p. 13

‘Gypsies must quit Darenth Woods’, 4 January, 1962, p. 4

‘Evicted Gypsies to March for Cash Aid’, 22 January, 1962, p. 6

Guardian: [library catalogue record: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b1625751>]

‘Mr Dodds Pleads Cause of the Gypsies’, p. 2

‘Gypsies told to quit’, 4 January 1962, p. 2

‘MPs day with Gypsies’, 10 January 1962, p. 20

Photographs

- The National Media Museum website includes digitised photographs, information of the museum’s photography collections and information on the history of photography:
<http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/collection>
- V&A Photography Collection <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/photographs>

Gypsy and Traveller resources

- [Leeds GATE](#) Gypsy and Traveller Exchange: a members organisation for Gypsy and Traveller people in West Yorkshire. They provide a very useful guide to term in their [‘Who are Gypsies and Travellers?’](#) briefing.
- [Gypsy Lore Society collection](#) at the University of Liverpool Special Collections. This includes photographs taken by Fred Shaw and Ivor Evans of British Gypsies from the late 19th century to the 1940s, some of which are digitised.
- [Robert Dawson Romany Collection](#), Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading



SPECIAL COLLECTIONS THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

- [Romany and Traveller Family History Society](#), which includes links to resources by region.
- [Guardian article](#) on the photographer Mary Turner who has photographed the Gypsy and Traveller families evicted from Dale Farm in 2011.



Becoming a Researcher: Photographs

Handout 1: Activities and Questions

ACTIVITY 1: Content

Look in detail at these photographs and think about the following questions

1. What do you think is going on in this picture? Why do you think this?
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3. Can you guess which year the picture was taken in? What makes you think this?
4. What kind of photograph is this? Do you have any thoughts on what kind of photographer might have taken this and why they might have taken a picture of this particular scene?
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Handout 1

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Becoming a Researcher: Photographs

Handout 2: Key Questions to Ask

Content

- What does the photograph show?
- What does the photograph not show? Has the frame of the photograph isolated the subject from its context?
- How is the subject approached – is it a close-up for example or do we see some of the background to the subject? Think about the angle chosen by the photographer and whether all of the elements of the picture are equally in focus.
- Is the photograph on its own, or is it positioned as part of an article? Is there any written text that describes the scene?

Context

- Who took the photograph?
- When was the photograph taken? Where was the photograph taken?
- Why did they take the photograph? Was it commissioned? Was it for personal use? For a newspaper? For an advertisement?
- Who donated the photograph to the archive, or (if it's not an archived photograph) who owns the photograph now?
- Are there any marks or stamps on the photograph which give clues as to its context?

Structure and Materials

- How would you describe the colour, texture, or quality of the photograph? Does this tell us anything about the photographer or the purpose of the photograph?
- What effects, if any, has the photographer used? Have they chosen to photograph in colour or in black and white? Has this been made as an aesthetic or a practical decision?
- Can you tell how the photograph has been used by its condition? Has it been hanging on a wall and damaged by sunlight? Do pin marks suggest that it has been displayed on a wall or noticeboard? Has it been cut to fit into someone's purse or wallet and carried around with them? Has it been used as a form of identification?

