Helmut and Alison Gernsheim:
An Inventory of Their Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Gernsheim, Helmut, 1913-1995, and Gernsheim, Alison, 1911-1969
Title: Helmut and Alison Gernsheim Papers
Dates: 1755-1979
Extent: 32 boxes (16.11 linear feet), 15 galley files (gf)
Abstract: The Helmut and Alison Gernsheim Papers consist of article and book drafts, correspondence, research materials, and collected correspondence and works that document the Gernsheims' long career as collectors and photo historians.
Call Number: Manuscript Collection MS-1587
Language: English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish
Access: Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase, 1963 and Gift, 1980
Processed by: Nicole Davis, 2011
Repository: The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center
Biographical Sketch

Helmut Erich Robert Kuno Gernsheim was born in Munich, Germany, on 1 March 1913. His father was an historian of literature and his brothers were historians of art and economics, respectively. Helmut went to the University of Munich to study art history, but on the advice of one of his brothers he turned to photography as it offered better prospects for making a living. He entered the State School for Photography in Munich in 1934, graduated in 1936, and then worked for two months at a provincial portrait studio. From there he returned to Munich and received a commission to photograph the Munich Marionette Theatre. He also began working with color photography using Uvachrom processes. As he was half Jewish he was anxious to leave Germany under Hitler, and an exhibition of his puppet photographs at the World's Fair in Paris in 1937 allowed him the opportunity to move abroad. From Paris he went to London for a commission to photograph works at the National Gallery.

In 1938, Gernsheim took a job taking publicity photographs for P & O Cruises, but eventually war intervened. In July 1940 as a German and "friendly enemy alien" he was forced to go to an internment camp in Australia for a year. During this time he lectured other internees on the aesthetics of photography and then used his lecture notes to write New Photo Vision, his first of many books on photography. Upon his release from internment in 1941 he returned to London and joined the staff of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, taking photographic surveys of important and historic buildings in the London area for the National Buildings Record. Gernsheim's work was shown in exhibitions held by the British Council, the Ministry of Information, the Courtauld Institute of Art, and the Churchill Club and was well received by critics.

During the war Gernsheim had met Alison Eames (born 1911), and they married in 1946. Gernsheim continued to work as a freelance photographer, taking architectural images as well as publicity shots and portraits, but his photographic career began to wane. Around this time he met Beaumont Newhall, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, who encouraged Gernsheim to research photographic history and to build a collection of 19th century photographs which were at risk of being lost to history. Gernsheim followed this advice, and Alison became his collaborator on this photohistorical work. Over the next few decades the Gernsheims built a peerless collection. One of their most significant findings was the world's first photograph, "View from the Window at Le Gras," taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in France in 1826. Their collection also contained significant works by many British photographers including Julia Margaret Cameron, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), Roger Fenton, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, and William Henry Fox Talbot.

In addition to amassing a large collection, the Gernsheims were prolific writers. They produced dozens of books, over 200 articles, and several exhibitions, helping to establish the study of the history of photography. Their History of Photography became an authoritative and influential source from the time of its publication in 1955. Helmut spent many years trying to find a home for his collection in an effort to establish a national museum of photography in Britain. However, his efforts were fruitless and in
1963 he sold his collection to the University of Texas.

On March 27, 1969, Alison Gernsheim died. Helmut continued to advocate for the study of photographic history from his home in Lugano, Switzerland. He served as a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Texas in 1979 and at the University of Arizona in 1981. Helmut Gernsheim died on July 20, 1995, in Switzerland.

Sources:

In addition to biographical information found within the collection, the following sources were used:


Scope and Contents

The Helmut and Alison Gernsheim Papers document the Gernsheims' long career dedicated to the history of photography with book and article manuscripts; correspondence; research files with clippings, notes, and ephemera; collected correspondence and manuscripts by others; and mementos from photography-related events. Items span from the late eighteenth century to the 1970s. The archive is organized into three series: I. Works, 1947-1965, undated; II. Correspondence, 1943-1967; and III. Research Materials, 1755-1979.

Series I. Works consists of notes, drafts, proofs, galleys, and related correspondence for articles and books that Helmut and Alison wrote together, individually, and with others. Items are arranged alphabetically by published title. Variant titles are indicated for some drafts. Included are drafts of some articles that were unpublished.

Series II. Correspondence contains letters to and from both Alison and Helmut Gernsheim relating primarily to their careers as photo historians but also to their personal lives. Correspondents include photographers, families and descendents of deceased photographers, photo historians, publishers, museum curators, friends, and others. Items are arranged alphabetically by correspondent and chronologically within each correspondent's set of letters.
Series III. Research Materials, the largest series, is divided into four subseries: A. Topic Files, 1755-1963, B. Collected Materials and Mementos, 1934-1962, C. Works by Others, 1830-1979, and D. Withdrawals, undated. Subseries A. Topic Files consists of research materials relating to the history of photography which are arranged alphabetically by topic. Items include newspaper and magazine clippings and printed materials dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, Helmut's typed and handwritten notes, and related correspondence. Subseries B. Collected Materials and Mementos contains exhibition catalogs and invitations, conference papers, and other printed materials as well as personal items like press permits and notebooks. The exhibition mementos include items related to exhibitions of the Gernsheims' own collections. This subseries is arranged alphabetically by topic or event name.

Subseries C. Works by Others contains both correspondence and manuscripts by photographers and photo historians from the 1830s-1970s which the Gernsheims purchased or collected. Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by sender, except a couple of folders grouped by recipient, such as letters received by John Spiller. These files do not contain correspondence with the Gernsheims themselves and some of the letters are facsimiles, not originals. Following the correspondence are collected manuscript materials, arranged alphabetically by author, which include essays about photochemistry and photographers and some notes by photographers. The last subseries, D. Withdrawals, contains notes by Helmut Gernsheim which were originally laid into books in his library or with photographs in his collection. Original location information is noted with the items.

Indexes at the end of the finding aid list works and correspondents. Boxes 30-32 contain oversize materials. These materials were previously described in the Ransom Center's card catalog.

Related Material

The Gernsheims' vast collection of photographs is housed in the Ransom Center's Photography Collection.

Separated Material

The Gernsheims' library of over 2,700 books has been separated from the collection and is housed in the Ransom Center's Book Collection. The HRC Personal Effects Collection contains awards, medals, and miscellaneous objects belonging to the Gernsheims. Several cassette tapes with interviews of Helmut Gernsheim are housed in the Ransom Center's Sound Recordings Collection. A set of photographic Christmas cards by Angus McBean has been removed from the Correspondence series and transferred to the Ransom Center's Photography Collection.
Index Terms

People
Gruber, L. Fritz
Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), b. 1874
Hoppé, E. O. (Emil Otto), 1878-1972
Man, Felix H., 1893-1985
Newhall, Beaumont, 1908-1993
Renger-Patzsch, Albert, 1897-1966

Organizations
George Eastman House
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)
Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain

Subjects
Cameron, Julia Margaret, 1815-1879
Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898
Coburn, Alvin Langdon, 1882-1966
Daguerre, Louis Jacques Mandé, 1787-1851
Fenton, Roger, 1819-1869
Niépce, Nicéphore, 1765-1833
Talbot, William Henry Fox, 1800-1877

Subjects
Calotype
Cameras
Color photography
Daguerreotype
Photographic chemistry
Photography, Artistic
Photography--Equipment and supplies
Photography--Europe--History
Photography--Exhibitions
Photography--Great Britain--History
Photography--Scientific applications
Photography--Societies, etc.
Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain

**Document Types**

- Clippings
- Correspondence
- Manuscripts
- Photographic postcards
- Research notes
Series I. Works, 1947-1965, undated

"110 Years of Photography--Have We Advanced?" by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections, 7 February 1950

The Acquisition of Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin, 1878 [description of a photograph], typed draft with corrections, undated

"Aesthetic Trends in Photography, Past and Present," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Motif*

Parts I and II, typed drafts with corrections, 7 June 1958

Part III, typed draft with corrections, 14 April 1959

*Alvin Langdon Coburn, photographer: an Autobiography*, edited by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim

Correspondence, notes, and printed materials, undated

Typed draft with corrections, undated, and typed blurb, 12 October 1965

Typed draft with corrections, undated

"Athanasius Kircher and the Magic Lantern," by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft for "Discovery" with corrections, 13 February 1958

*Beautiful London*, by Helmut Gernsheim

Typed draft with corrections and list of plates, [1950]

Proofs with corrections, 1950

"A Beautiful Queen: the Biography of Queen Alexandra, Consort of King Edward VII," by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim for *Homes and Gardens*

"Queen Alexandra," typed draft with corrections, undated

"A Beautiful Queen," parts I-IV, typed draft with corrections, 1 January 1960

Part II, partial typed draft with corrections, undated

British Council Exhibition, by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections, May 1950
"Centenary of the Royal Photographic Society," by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft for *Photorama*, February 1953

*A Century of Photography, Niépce to Moholy-Nagy, from the Gernsheim Collection*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim, galley proofs and page proofs with corrections, 1956

*Churchill, His Life in Photographs*, by Helmut Gernsheim with Randolph S. Churchill

Correspondence, 1954-1955

"Churchill, His Life in Pictures," notes and introduction draft, undated

Typed draft with corrections, undated

*A Concise History of Photography*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections, 18 September 1964

Creative Photography: 1826 to the Present, an exhibition from the Gernsheim Collection, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Typed draft with corrections and letter, March 1963

Proofs with corrections, undated

Galley proofs with corrections, March 1963

Creative Photography: Aesthetic Trends 1839-1960, by Helmut Gernsheim

"The Aesthetics of Photography," typed draft with corrections, 1960


Galley proofs with corrections, undated

*Edward VII and Queen Alexandra: A Biography in Word and Picture*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

"Draft I," typed draft with corrections, 7 March 1961

Typed draft with corrections and hand-drawn family trees, undated

Page proofs, notes, and draft fragments with corrections, undated
Proofs with corrections, 1962


"The Evolution of the Camera in the Nineteenth Century," by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections for *Photorama* and correspondence, December 1951

*Fashion and Reality: 1840-1914*, by Alison Gernsheim

Correspondence, 1962-1963

Typed draft with corrections, 1963

Page and jacket proofs with corrections, 1963

*Focus on Architecture and Sculpture: an original approach to the photography of architecture and sculpture*, by Helmut Gernsheim

Typed draft of introduction by Nikolaus Pevsner, with corrections and correspondence, February 1948

Typed draft with corrections, undated

Galley proofs with corrections, undated

"G. B. S. and Photography," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photographic Journal*

Typed interview with handwritten responses by George Bernard Shaw, 1949

Typed draft with corrections, 26 November 1950

*Historic Events: 1839-1939*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Typed draft with corrections, undated

Galley proof with corrections, undated

*The History of Photography, from the earliest use of the camera obscura in the 11th century up to 1914*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Partial typed draft with corrections, undated

Typed drafts with corrections and sample page proof, April 1954

Page proofs with corrections, 1954-1955
Galley proofs of index with corrections, 1954-1955

Page proofs with corrections, 1955

*Hundert Jahre Photographie, 1839-1939*, edited by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections and uncut signature, March-May 1959

"The Ideal Camera," by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections for *The British Journal of Photography*, 25 February 1948

*Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work*, by Helmut Gernsheim

Handwritten draft of introduction by Clive Bell, with correspondence, August 1947

Typed draft with corrections, undated


Correspondence, 1948-1958

"L. J. M. Daguerre," typed draft with corrections, undated


Page proofs of illustrations, undated

Laudatio für Herrn Felix H. Mann, by Helmut Gernsheim, typed transcript, 1965

*Lewis Carroll--Photographer*, by Helmut Gernsheim

Typed draft with corrections, undated

Proofs of photographic plates, including uncut pages, undated

Galley proofs with corrections, [1949]

"Macrophotography and Photomicrography," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Future*. The Value & Interest of Macrophotography & Photomicrography, typed draft, undated

*The Man Behind the Camera*, edited by Helmut Gernsheim
Handwritten and typed draft with corrections, undated

"Helmut Gernsheim" chapter, typed draft, undated

Page proofs, jacket proof, and correspondence, September-October 1948

_Masterpieces of Victorian Photography_, by Helmut Gernsheim

Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition catalog, typed draft with corrections, 30 January 1951

Phaidon Press edition, typed draft with corrections, 1951

Page proof with corrections of list of illustrations and of illustrations, undated

Galley proofs, 1951

Press releases, May-August 1951, undated

"Medical Photography in the Nineteenth Century," by Alison Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections for *Medical & Biological Illustrations XI*, 29 August 1960

"Niepce's Supposed Kew Photograph and Other Niepce Heliographs Extant in Great Britain," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photographic Journal*. Niepce's Supposed Kew Church Photograph, and other Niepce Heliographs Extant in Great Britain, typed draft with corrections, 12 July 1950

The Origin of 3-D, [by Helmut Gernsheim], typed draft with corrections, undated

Photographische Entgleisungen, by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections for *Foto Prisma* [unpublished], 10 May 1958

Photography in Chancery, by Helmut Gernsheim and Beaumont Newhall, typed drafts with corrections, 9 September 1951, undated


"The Photography of Sculpture by Artificial Light," by Helmut Gernsheim for *British Journal of Photography*, typed draft with corrections, 24 March 1948


"Draft Suggestion for the Foundation of a National Museum of Photography," typed drafts with corrections, May-July 1951

"Proposal for the Foundation of a National Collection of Photography," typed draft with corrections, September 1951

*Queen Victoria: A Biography in Word and Picture*, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Notes, hand-drawn family trees, and typed draft with corrections of foreword and jacket flaps, undated

Incomplete typed drafts with corrections, undated

Typed draft with corrections, undated

Typed draft with corrections, 1958

Title page proof with correspondence, March 1959

Galley proofs with corrections, 10 June 1957, 27 January 1959, and 1959

"Recovery of Silver from Photographic Solutions," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photography*, typed drafts with corrections, undated

"Rediscovery of the World's First Photograph," by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Correspondence, 1951-1954

Typed draft with corrections, undated

Typed drafts for *Photographic Journal*, with corrections, 16 and 19 March 1952

Typed draft for *Life*, with corrections, 24 March 1952

Typed drafts for the *Times*, with corrections, 24 March 1952, undated

Typed draft for *Photorama*, with corrections, undated [published August 1952]

"Roger Fenton, Photographer of the Crimean War," [print version of the broadcast by Helmut Gernsheim on the BBC Third Programme published in *The Listener*, 1952]
Typed drafts with corrections, undated

Galley proofs with corrections, undated

\textit{Roger Fenton, Photographer of the Crimean War: His Photographs and His Letters from The Crimea}, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim

Correspondence, 1946-1958

Partial typed draft with corrections, 31 March 1954

Typed drafts with corrections, undated

Page proofs with corrections, 1954

The 'Royal' One Hundred Years Old, by Helmut Gernsheim for \textit{Photography}, typed draft with corrections, 4 December 1952

"Royal Photographic Society. The Centenary of Its Foundation," by Helmut Gernsheim for the \textit{Manchester Guardian}

"The Royal Photographic Society Celebrates its Centenary," typed draft with corrections, undated [published 20 January 1953]

"Royal Photographic Society Centenary," broadcast by Helmut Gernsheim for Austrian Youth Programme, typescript with corrections, 11 January 1953

Some Comments on a Recent Article [by George Wakefield], by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft with corrections, 19 March 1944


"Some Early Applications of Photography to Science," by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim for \textit{The Physician's Panorama}, typed draft with corrections, 3 September 1962

St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, by Helmut Gernsheim, typed draft, undated

"Subjective Photography," by Helmut Gernsheim for \textit{Art Photography}, typed draft with corrections, 22 February 1956

"Summer Holiday," by Helmut Gernsheim for \textit{Photography}. Holidays, typed draft, 15 May 1946
"Texture and Form, Essentials of Good Photography," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photography Year Book (1952)*. Form and Texture in Photography, typed draft with corrections, 21 May 1951

"A Tribute to E. O. Hoppé," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photography*, typed draft with corrections, undated [published April 1953]

Valentine & Sons, Ltd., Dundee, by Helmut Gernsheim for *Functional Photography*, typed drafts with corrections and inserts, 22 August 1952, undated

"The Value and Interest of Macrophotography," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Photography*, typed drafts with corrections, undated

W. H. Fox Talbot, 1800-1877, by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim for *Foto-Prisma*, typed draft with corrections [unpublished], March 1958

"What is Wrong with our Exhibitions?" by Helmut Gernsheim for *British Journal of Photography*, typed draft with corrections, September 1947, and correspondence, 1948

"Which is the Oldest Photographic Society?" by Helmut Gernsheim for *British Journal of Photography*, typed draft with corrections, 13 September 1951

"Wilson's of Aberdeen," by Helmut Gernsheim for *Functional Photography*, typed drafts with corrections, 7 August 1952


"World Photographic Exhibition At Lucerne. Work from Fifty Countries," by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim for the *Manchester Guardian*. The World Exhibition of Photography at Lucerne, typed drafts with corrections, undated, and correspondence, 1952

Series II. Correspondence, 1943-1967

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Container</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-Al</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am-Au</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo-Bri</td>
<td>10.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyer, Alden Scott</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braive, Michel Francois</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bro-Cha</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che-Cu</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coburn, Alvin Langdon</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da-Du</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodgson, F. Menella, Lucy, and Violet</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ea-Ex</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erfurth, Annemarie</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa-Go</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faber and Faber</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain Press re: publications, 1942-1956</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr-Gu</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gruber, L. Fritz</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha-Haw</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He-How</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu-Ja</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo-Lam</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lan-Ler</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Les-Lu
Longmans, Green, and Co.
Ma-Me
Man, Felix H.
Mayer, Grace M.
Mi-My
Na-Od
Newhall, Beaumont and Nancy Wynne
Oxford University Press
P-Pe
Ph-Rob
Phaidon Press
Pollack, Peter
Renger-Patzch, Albert, Agnes, and Sabine
Rog-Sch
Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain
Sci-Sm
Secker & Warburg
So-Sw
Steinert, Otto
Stenger, Erich
Ta-Vi
Wa-We
Weidenfeld and Nicolson (Firm)
Wh-Zg
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilson, Charles A.</th>
<th>Container 17.5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified correspondents</td>
<td>Container 17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Articles published in Photorama, 1951-1960</td>
<td>Container 17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Granada Television and films based on historical photographs, 1960-1962</td>
<td>Container 18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Lawsuit for payment from Photo Monde, 1954-1958</td>
<td>Container 18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Photos published in the Daily Telegraph, 1962</td>
<td>Container 18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas cards, circa 1940s-1960s</td>
<td>Container 18.4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas cards from Cecil Beaton, circa 1950s</td>
<td>Container 18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas cards from Angus McBean, 1947-1963 [moved to PH:McBean, A., Box 2]</td>
<td>Container 18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Series III. Research Materials, 1755-1979

Subseries A. Topic files, 1755-1963

Assorted topics

- Album of clippings, 1839-1946
  - Container 19.1
- Magazine clippings, 1935-1964
  - Container 19.2-3
- General clippings, correspondence, and notes, 1848-1962
  - Container 19.4-20.2
- Photography songs, etc., notes and clippings, 1800-1958
  - Container 30
- Assorted notes, sketches, and envelopes
  - Container 20.3

Applications of photography to science

- Clippings, correspondence, and notes, 1864-1963
  - Container 20.4-5
- Correspondence re: "Splash of Milk" by Harold Edgerton, 1962
  - Container 20.6
- Calotype process and other paper processes, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1844-1958
  - Container 20.7
- Cinematography, magic lanterns, and dioramas, clippings, printed materials, and notes, circa 1755-1950s
  - Container 20.8-21.1, 32
- Color photography, printed materials, undated
  - Container 21.2
- Cuttings, engravings and advertisements, clippings, 1847-1953
  - Container 21.3
- Daguerreotype process, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1825-1959
  - Container 21.4-6
- David Octavius Hill, clippings and notes, 1850-1869, undated
  - Container 21.7
- Early cinema and theater, programs, circa 1890s-1910s
  - Container 21.8-22.1

History of photography prior to 1839
Clippings, notes, and articles, 1848-1958, undated  Container 22.2

Correspondence, 1947-1958  Container 22.3

Illustrations, clippings, 1937-1939  Container 31

Lewis Carroll [Charles Lutwidge Dodgson]

Research notes and correspondence, undated  Container 22.4

Notebooks with Dodgson's diary entries on photography copied by Gernsheim, undated  Container 22.5

List of photographs by Lewis Carroll in *The Lewis Carroll Picture Book*, typed draft with corrections, undated  Container 22.5

Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, notes and correspondence, 1950-1955, undated  Container 22.6

Nineteenth century photographic book and exhibition reviews, clippings, printed materials, and notes, 1851-1953  Container 22.7

Other people's efforts in photography, clippings, 1935-1962  Container 23.1

Photographic Christmas cards, circa 1861-1954  Container 23.2

Photographic clubs and societies, photography as an aid to education, and copyright, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1852-1953  Container 23.3

Photographic equipment and apparatus, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1849-1959  Container 23.4-5

Photomechanical printing, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1854-1959  Container 23.6

Robert Hunt, typed notes, undated  Container 23.7

Roger Fenton, clippings, notes, and correspondence, 1854-1954  Container 23.8

Stereoscopes and binocular vision patents, clippings, printed materials, and notes, 1849-1955  Container 24.1

William Henry Fox Talbot, clippings, correspondence, and notes, 1846-1960, undated  Container 24.2

Subseries B. Collected Materials and Mememntos, 1934-1962
Assorted exhibition catalogs and press releases, 1949-1962  
Container 24.3-4

Assorted exhibition invitations and programs, circa 1940s-1960s  
Container 24.5-25.1

Biennale Photo-Cinéma-Optique [Biennale de la Photo et du Cinéma]
  Conference papers [meeting minutes], 1955  
Container 25.2-3
  Mementos, 1955  
Container 25.4

Centre International de la Photographie and Photokina
  Bulletins, 1956-1957  
Container 25.5
  Mementos, 1958  
Container 25.6

Lists of items by Gernsheim in the Royal Photographic Society exhibitions and collections, 1943-1948  
Container 25.7

National Film Theatre, programs, 1956-1960  
Container 26.1-2

Negative sleeves inscribed by Ralph Waldo Robinson, undated  
Container 26.3

Notebook with list of exposures, 1934-1935  
Container 26.4

Press permits and letters of permission to take photographs, 1937-1949  
Container 26.5

Royal Photographic Society Centenary Conference
  Printed materials, 1953  
Container 26.6
  Galley proofs of journal articles, 1953  
Container gf

World Exhibition of Photography at Lucerne
  Correspondence, 1951-1952  
Container 26.7
  Mementos, 1952  
Container 26.8

Subseries C. Works by Others, 1830-1979
  Correspondence, 1830-1963  
Container 27.1

A-Lu  
Container 27.1
Barnett, H. Walter (Henry Walter), letters received

Fenton, Roger, letters from Crimea, handwritten notebook, 1854-1855, with typed transcripts of letters

Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), letters sent and received

Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), with Watt & Son, re: royalties from *A Selection from the Letters of Lewis Carroll to his Child-friends*, 1933-1938

Henle, Fritz, letters written from India, 1934-1935

Na-Wh and unidentified

Spiller, John, letters received, 1874-1912

Essays, 1853-1979

Carjat, Etienne, "Rends-moi le fauteuil!" handwritten copy, 1883

Courten, Lodovico de, Comte, "Emulsions au Collodion," handwritten note, undated

Hammarskiöld, Hans, "Billa and I," typed draft, undated

Hammarskiöld, Hans, "My Little Sister," photographic reproduction of a typed draft, undated

Hatch, Beatrice, "Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)," typed drafts with corrections, undated

Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), editor, *A Selection from the letters of Lewis Carroll to his Child-friends*

Notes, 1932-1933

Typed draft with corrections, 1933

Partial proof with corrections and notes, 1933

Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), "Some Reminisces of Lewis Carroll," assorted typed and handwritten drafts with corrections

Henle, Fritz, Introduction to the opening of the Pablo Casals / Contemporary Color Photography Exhibit, typed transcript, 8 March 1979
Le Gray, Gustave, bound manuscript for 4th edition of *Nouveau Traité*, 1854, with handwritten note by Gernsheim, 1951

Container 29.1


Container 29.2

Méliès, Georges, typed contract between Méliès and 'Mr. X, artiste prestidigitateur,' circa 1910

Niépce, Nicéphore, "Notice sur l'héliographie," handwritten copies and typed transcripts, undated


Spiller, John and William Crookes, "Researches on the methods of preserving the sensitiveness of collodion plates," handwritten draft with corrections, 14 April 1856

Container 29.3

Spiller, John, "Robert Hunt's Old Specimens," handwritten note, May 1888

Stellman, W. E., "Western trip of W. E. Stellman and C. A. Smith," typed draft with gelatin silver prints glued in, 1921, with correspondence

Container 29.4-5

Talbot, William Henry Fox, "Talbot's quick process," handwritten note, [1853]

Container 29.6

Waterhouse, J. (James), notes from Josef Maria Eder's *Handbuch der Photographie*, undated

Werge, John, assorted handwritten notes, 1890, undated

Wilson, G. W. (George Washington), handwritten diary fragment, 1863

Yorke, Alec, "The Tableaux," handwritten draft, January 1888

Unidentified author, "The Fanatics," screenplay typescript and outline, October-November 1961

Container 29.5

Unidentified author, notes on developing on sepia paper, undated

Container 29.7

Unidentified author, "Shackleton's Argonauts," mimeograph, undated

Subseries D. Withdrawals, undated

Notes removed from books and photographs in the Gernsheims' collections

Container 29.8-9
Oversize materials removed from elsewhere in the collection

Container

30-32
Index of Correspondents

An asterisk indicates that the folder contains photographic prints made by that correspondent in the form of postcards or greeting cards.

- A. M. Heath & Co. Ltd.--10.7
- A. P. Watt (Firm)--10.7, 27.6
- Abbott, Edith--10.7
- Abdey, Herbert E.--10.7
- Abel, Frederick Augustus, Sir, 1826-1902--28.2
- Aberdeen Art Gallery--10.7
- Abney, William de Wiveleslie, Sir, 1843-1920--27.1
- Académie des sciences (France)--22.2
- Adams, Ansel, 1902-1984--10.7, 18.6
- Adams, C. Kingsley (Charles Kingsley), b. 1899--10.7
- Adburgham, Alison--12.5
- Adheémar, Jean--10.7
- Adox Fotowerke Dr. C. Schleussner GmbH--25.1
- Aerofilms Limited--18.1
- Aftonbladet (Stockholm, Sweden)--10.7
- Air cooled news--29.3
- Aldridge, Joan--10.7
- Alexandra, Queen, consort of Edward VII, King of Great Britain, 1844-1925--27.1
- Alfieri, Bernard--10.7
- Allenby, Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, Viscount, 1861-1936--27.2
- Allister, Ray, 1907- --10.7
- Alston, Rowland Wright--10.7
- Amateur photographer--22.3
- American Federation of Arts--15.6
- American Museum of Photography (Philadelphia, Pa.)--10.8
- Ames, Winslow--10.8
- Anderson, Alex--10.8
- Anderson, Erica--10.8
- Angeli, Helen Rossetti--10.8
- Anglo American Corporation of South Africa, ltd.--18.1
- Annan, Agnes B.--10.8
- Annan, David--10.8
- Annan, J. Craig (James Craig), 1864-1946--10.8
- Annan, T. C.--10.8
- Annand, A. McKenzie, 1905- --10.8
- Architectural review (London, England)--4.2
- Armitage, Ethel--10.8
- Army Museums Ogilby Trust--9.3
- Art Institute of Chicago--15.6
- Arts Council of Great Britain--20.2
- Ashbee, Janet--10.8
- Associated Newspapers (London, England)--2.3
- Associated Press--2.3
- Atkinson, John, Baron--27.2
- Atlantis Verlag--10.8
Auerbach, Erich, 1911-1977--18.4*, 18.6*
Autotype Company--10.8
Bäckström, Helmer, 1891- --10.9
Bäckström, Alison--10.9
Baier, Wolfgang, 1889-1968--10.9
Ball, Anthony C.--10.9
Barnes, William, 1920- --10.9
Bath Photographic Society--24.2
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum--10.9
BBC publications--18.1
Beardmore, George--10.9
Beaton, Cecil, 1904-1980--10.9, 18.5, 18.7
Beaufort, Francis, Sir, 1774-1857--27.1
Bell, Clive, 1881-1964--5.8
Bell, Quentin--10.9
Bellew, Kyrle, 1855-1911--27.2
Bensusan, A. D.--10.9
Bentley, Margaret--10.9
Bergh, Sven-Erik, 1912- --17.3
Bernfeld, Henri Marcel--10.9
Bernfeld, Michel--18.2
Bernhardt, Sarah, 1844-1923--27.2
Biblioteca ambrosiana--23.5
Bibliothèque nationale de France--18.2
Bickersteth, Ella, 1858-1954--10.9
Bickersteth, John Burgon--10.9
Biennale de la Photo et du Cinéma--25.2-4
Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery--10.9
Birnstingl, Charles--10.9
Bissell, Clifford H. (Clifford Hershey), b. 1887--10.9
Blackhall, Vera, 1985- --10.9
Blanche, Jacques-Emile, 1861-1942--27.2
Blau, Tom--2.3
Bliss, Douglas Percy, 1900-1984--10.9
Bliss, Trudy--10.9
Boissonnas, Henri-Paul, 1894-1966--10.10
Bond, H. G.--10.10
Bond, Mrs. D. A.--10.10
Bond, Violet B.--10.10
Bone, James, 1872-1962--10.10
Bone, Stephen, 1904-1958--10.10
Booth, Arthur H. (Arthur Harold)--10.10
Borzecki, S.--10.10
Boucicault, Dion, 1820-1890--27.2
Bourke-White, Margaret, 1904-1971--10.10
Bowden-Smith, L. M.--10.10
Boxall and Boxall--10.10, 14.6
Boyer, Alden Scott--10.11
Boys, Michael--18.4*
Braive, Michel François--11.1
Brandt, Bill--10.10, 18.4
• Brassaï, 1899-1984--10.10
• Brewer, Miss--8.9
• Brewster, David, Sir, 1781-1868--27.1
• Brieux, Alain--22.3
• Brighton (England). Public Library, Museums, and Fine Art Galleries--10.10
• British Broadcasting Corporation--8.9, 10.10
• British Film Institute--26.2
• British journal of photography--10.10, 22.3, 23.3
• British Medical Association--20.5
• British Museum--10.10, 22.3, 23.3
• British Red Cross Society, London Branch--10.10
• Brodie, Desborough--11.2
• Brooks, Alfred Mansfield, 1870-1963--6.1, 21.5
• Broom, Winifred M.--11.2
• Brown University. Library--6.1
• Browne, B. S.--11.2
• Bruce, Maurice--11.2
• Brunon, Jean--9.3
• Budapesti Történeti Múzeum--11.2
• Bührer, Emil--11.2, 26.7
• Bull, Lucien--11.2
• Bulstrode, Beatrix--11.2
• Bunnell, Peter C.--11.2
• Burke, Keast--11.2
• Burri-Bischof, Rosellina--11.2
• Burt, H. B.--11.2
• California Palace of the Legion of Honor--11.2
• Cambridge Public Libraries--11.2
• Camera Press Limited--2.3
• Cameron, Julia Margaret, 1815-1879--27.1
• Canada. Dept. of National Defence--9.3
• Cardew, Philip--11.2
• Carjat, Etienne, 1828-1906--27.1
• Carlebach, Alfred--11.2
• Cartier-Bresson, Henri, 1908-2004--11.2
• Cash, Betty--18.4*
• Cash, James Allan--7.2, 11.2, 18.4*
• Cashman, Joseph, 1881-1969--18.1
• Cayla, Alfred--11.2
• Central Press Photos Limited--2.3, 18.1
• Centre International de la Photographie Fixe et Animée--18.2, 24.4, 25.5
• Chamberlain, C. C. (Christopher Churchill)--18.1
• Chambers, Peggy--11.2
• Chandler, James H.--11.2
• Chapin, Earl V.--11.2
• Chapman, Ronald--11.2
• Charles, David, F.R.P.S.--11.2
• Chequer, A. J.--11.3
• Christ Church (University of Oxford). Library--11.3
• Christie, Manson & Woods--22.3
• Church Times (London, England)--11.3
- Clark, Anne Bennet--11.3
- Clark, Ronald William--20.2
- Claudet, F. H. B.--11.3
- Clay, Mrs. I.--11.3
- Clay, R. S.--11.3
- Clegg, William Paul--11.3
- Clemens, Samuel Langhorne, 1835-1910--27.2
- Clerc, L.-P. (Louis-Philippe), 1875-1959--27.1
- Cobb, Gerald--11.3
- Cobb, Ralph F.--11.3
- Coburn, Alvin Langdon, 1882-1966--1.4, 11.4, 12.3
- Coke, Van Deren, 1921-2004--11.3
- Collins, Horace--11.3
- Colvin, Christina--11.3
- Connolly, Terence L. (Terence Leo), 1888-1961--11.3
- Conservatoire national des arts et métiers (France)--22.6
- Constanze--22.3
- Cooper, John Irwin, 1905--9.3
- Coremans, Paul B., 1908-1965--11.3
- Corfield, W. G.--11.3
- Coster, Joan--11.3
- Cotswold Publishing Co.--12.2
- Country life (London, England)--22.3
- Courtauld Institute of Art--8.9
- Craeybeckx, A. S. H.--17.7, 18.6, 22.2
- Cramb, J.--11.3
- Crawford, James Ludovic Lindsay, Earl of, 1847-1913--28.2
- Creative Photo Group--11.3
- Croft-Cooke, Lucy--11.3
- Cumberlege, Geoffrey--15.2
- Curtis Brown Ltd.--11.3
- Curtis, Decima--11.3
- Daguerre, Louis Jacques Mandé, 1787-1851--6.1, 21.4, 22.6, 27.1
- Daily mail (London, England)--2.3
- Dalby, Thomas--11.5
- Daniel, M.--11.5
- Dauglish, G. W.--11.5
- Davenport, Millia--11.5
- Davis, William Gordon--2.3, 18.1
- De Maré, Eric Samuel, 1910-2002--11.5*, 18.5-6
- De Silva, Signorina--11.5
- De Volkskrant--11.5
- Denne, E. J.--6.1
- Dent, Alan--11.5
- Department store economist--11.5
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie--12.6
- Diamond, Hugh Welch--27.1
- Dodgson, C. H. W.--27.5
- Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge, 1832-1898--27.1
- Dodgson, F. Menella--11.6
Frankfurter Illustrierte (Frankfurt, Germany)--8.9
Fraser, Charles E.--12.2, 18.4*, 18.5*, 18.6*
Frederick Muller, Ltd.--12.2, 18.1
Frith, Francis E.--12.2
Frith, G.--12.2
Frith, Julius, 1873--12.2
Fuller, Hester Thackeray--12.2
Furse, Katharine, 1875-1952--12.2
G.W. Wilson & Co.--28.1
Gardener, William M., 1914-2000--12.2
Garlitz, Barbara see Stannard, Una, 1927-2004
Geen, M. S.--12.2
Geoffrey Bles (Firm)--27.1
George Eastman House--11.5, 14.7, 15.1, 17.2, 20.8, 22.3, 23.5, 24.5-6
Gernsheim, Walter, 1909-2006--18.2
Geselschap, J.--24.2
Gevaert Photo-Producten N.V.--17.7
Gibbon, Monk, 1896-1987--12.2
Gill, R. C.--12.2
Gilles, Albert--12.2
Gilliatt, Elizabeth--2.3
Glass, Douglas--12.2
Godden, Geoffrey A.--23.6
Godman, S.--21.5
Goldberg, Reuben--12.2, 18.5*-6*
Goldsmith, Walter J.--24.1
Goodman, Francis, 1913-1989--18.4*5
Gorsline, Douglas W., 1913-1985--12.2
Granada Television--18.1
Grant, Irene C.--12.5
Grant, Julia M., 1864-1952--12.5
Great Britain. Central Office of Information--26.7
Great Britain. Embassy (France)--18.2
Great Britain. Embassy (Spain)--8.9
Great Britain. Foreign Office--2.3
Great Britain. Metropolitan Police Office--8.9
Great Britain. Ministry of Works--26.5
Great Britain. Patent Office--23.3
Great Britain. Post Office--12.5
Great Britain. Public Record Office.--9.3
Great Britain. Treasury--26.5
Green, Desmond--12.5
Green, Lytton W.--12.5
Green, Roger Lancelyn--12.5
Greenacre, Phyllis--12.5
Greenhill, Leslie P., 1914-1996--18.4*5
Greenhill, Ralph--12.5
Greer, Joseph, M.J.Inst.E.--12.5
Grobet, Lourdes--12.5
Gross, Harry I.--12.5
Grosse österreich Illustrierte (Vienna, Austria)--8.9
Gruber, L. Fritz--12.6, 27.1
Guardian (Manchester, England)--12.5
Guest, Ivor Forbes--12.5
Guillemain, Charles--12.5
Gull, Beatrix Manico see Bulstrode, Beatrix
Gwynn, Denis, 1893-1973--12.5
Haight, Gordon Sherman--13.1
Hake, Henry Mendelssohn, 1892----14.6
Hall, Norman--13.1, 18.5-6*
Hammacher, Arno--13.1, 18.4*-5*, 18.6
Hammarskiöld, Hans, 1925----13.1*, 18.5*-6*
Hansell, Peter--13.1
Hardwich, T. Frederick--27.1
Hardy, Bert--13.1
Hargreaves, B. J.--13.1
Hargreaves, Caryl--13.1
Harris, Percy W.--13.1
Harris, R. G.--13.1
Harrow School--2.3
Harry N. Abrams, Inc.--13.1, 15.6
Hartnoll, Phyllis--13.1
Hastings, Patrick, Sir, 1880-1952--27.2
Hatch, Ethel C.--13.1
Hatch, Evelyn M. (Evelyn Maud), b. 1874--13.1, 27.5-6
Havinden, John--13.1
Haward, Lawrence, b. 1878--13.1
Heath, Rodier--8.9
Heiss, M.--13.2
Held, Heinz, 1918-1990--13.2
Helpers of Wonderland League--27.5
Helps, Lucy Taylor--13.2
Henderson, Philip, 1906-1977--13.2
Henisch, Heinz K.--13.2
Henle, Fritz, 1909-1993--27.7
Henley, Mabel--13.2
Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery--13.2
Henry Stone & Son--13.2
Herschel, John Charles William, Sir--13.2
Herschel, John F. W. (John Frederick William), Sir, 1792-1871--27.1
Hess, Hans, art curator--13.2
Hess, Lillie--13.2
Hill, Douglas M.--13.2
Hill, Juliana M. S.--13.2
Hill, Richard Leslie--13.2
Hills & Saunders--2.3
Historical Society of Pennsylvania--6.1
Hitchcock, Basil--13.2
Hogarth Press--13.2
Holton, Leonard G.--13.2
Gernsheim, Helmut, 1913-1995, and Gernsheim, Alison, 1911-1969 Manuscript Collection MS-1587

- Hopkins, Rose H.--9.3
- Hopkinson, Gerti--13.2, 18.5*-6*
- Hoppé, Frank--13.2
- Horton, Ronald, 1902-1981--13.2
- Houghton Library--13.2
- How, R. W. (Ruth Winifred)--13.2
- Howson, Joan--13.2
- Hudock, Charles J.--13.3
- Hudson, D. P.--13.3
- Hudson, Derek--13.3
- Hughes, Graham--13.3
- Hunt, Robert, 1807-1887--27.1, 28.2
- Hunter, Peter, 1913--12.4
- Hurley, Frank, 1885-1962--27.1
- Hutton, Kurt--13.3
- Illustrated London news--13.3
- Imperial War Museum (Great Britain)--9.3
- Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights, and Composers (Great Britain)--27.5
- Independent Newspapers (Firm)--18.1
- Inglis, Christian Caird--13.3
- Institute of Contemporary Arts (London, England)--13.3
- International Club of Photography--23.3
- International Photo- and Cine Exhibition--12.6
- Irvine, Alan, 1926--13.3
- Isham, Millicent--13.3
- J. H. Dallmeyer, Ltd.--13.3
- Jaffé, Michael, 1923--13.3
- James, Henry, 1843-1916--1.4
- Jammes, André--13.3
- Janker, Robert, 1894--13.3
- Jaques, Irene--13.3
- Jerrard, G.--27.1
- Joekes, Theo--13.4
- Johnson & Sons--6.1
- Johnson W. E.--13.4
- Johnson, Peter W., fl.1930-1990--13.4
- Johnston, J. Dudley, b. 1868--13.4, 16.2, 22.3
- Jones, E. Norman--13.4
- Jones, Francis--28.2
- Jones, Henry Arthur, 1851-1929--27.2
- Josiah Wedgwood & Sons--22.3
- Jouville,_______--27.1
- Kaplan, Philip, 1903-1990--13.4
- Kar, Ida, 1908-1974--13.4, 18.5
- Karstein, Leonard--11.3
- Keetman, Peter--13.4
- Keith, Cecil G.--13.4
- Kempe, Fritz--13.4
- Kerber, J. H.--13.4
- Keystone Press Agency Ltd.--2.3
- Kodak (Moscow, Russia)--27.1
- Kodak Limited--8.9, 9.3, 13.4, 20.4, 20.6, 22.7
- Kretschy, Adolf--13.4
- Krohn, F.W.T.--27.1
- Laboratoire Central des Musées de Belgique--11.3
- Lambert, Pierre, 1899-1969--13.4
- Landgren, Marchal E.--13.5
- Landshoff, Fritz Helmut, 1901- --13.1
- Lane County (Or.). District Attorney--13.5
- Laski, Philip--18.5*
- Lathbury, Jean G.--18.5*
- Laughlin, Clarence John--13.5, 18.6
- Lay, Cecil H.--13.5
- Lebrun, R. Malengret--13.5
- Lee, Neville P.--8.9
- Leeds Photographic Society--23.3
- Lennon, Florence Becker--13.5
- Leroy, Jean, author--13.5
- Lerski, Anneliese--11.2, 13.5
- Leslie, Mary Isabel, 1899- --12.5
- Library of Congress--13.6
- Library of the Society of Friends (London Yearly Meeting)--18.1
- Lilien, Otto M.--13.6
- Little, Cerita Stanley--13.6
- Liverpool (England). Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Gallery. Library.--22.6
- Liverpool Amateur Photographic Association--23.3
- Llewelyn Davies, Peter, 1897-1960--13.6
- Lloyds Bank--18.2
- Loewenstein, Fritz Erwin, 1901- --13.6
- London Electrotype Agency Ltd.--2.3
- Longmans, Green, and Co.--8.7, 14.1
- Lonsdale, Kathleen, Dame, 1903-1971--13.6
- Loomis, Roger Sherman, 1887-1966--13.6
- Lorant, Stefan, 1901-1997--13.6
- Luboshez, Flo--27.1
- Luboshez, Nahum E.--27.1
- Lumière, Louis, 1864-1948--27.1
- Lyle & Davidson, Ltd.--13.6
- Lyons, Marvin--13.6
- Mackworth-Young, Robin--17.4
- MacLachlan, Kathleen--14.2
- Macmillan & Co.--2.3
- Madeira Wine Association--14.2
- Magnum Photos, inc.--14.2
- Man Ray, 1890-1976--27.1
- Man, Felix H., 1893-1985--14.3, 18.5, 27.8
- Man, Lieselott--14.2
- Manchester College of Science & Technology--14.2
- Mancioli, Corrado--14.2
- Manvell, Roger, 1909-1987--14.2
Mardin, Yusuf--14.2
Marriott, J.T.--14.2
Marsh, Graeme R. M.--14.2
Martin, Alice--14.2
Mathews, Alister--14.2
Max Parrish & Co.--14.2
Mayall, J. E. (John Jabez Edwin), 1813-1901--28.2
Mayer, Grace M.--10.9, 14.4
Mayne, Roger--14.2
Mayor, A. Hyatt (Alpheus Hyatt), 1901-1980--6.1, 14.2
McAllister, Gilbert--14.2
McBain, James--14.2
McBean, Angus, 1904-1990--14.2
McCandlish, Elizabeth MacKenzie--14.2
McCann-Erickson Advertising Limited--14.2
McClurkin, T.--14.2
McDonald, Peter--14.2
McKenzie, F. F.--14.2
Meaney, John William, 1918- --17.1
Mehew, E. J.--14.2
Méliès, Georges, 1861-1938--28.1
Mellor, Nora--9.3
Mendelsohn Bartholdy, Edith--14.2
Merriman, Daniel--14.2
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)--14.2, 24.4
Middleton, Bella--14.5
Mikut, Oskar--21.2
Military Historical Society (Great Britain)--9.3
Miller, R. C. P.--14.5
Moeschlin, Peter--14.5
Moholy, Lucia--14.5
Monckhoven, D. van (Désiré), 1834-1882--28.1
Mond, Ludwig, 1839-1909--28.2
Moore, Raymond, 1920- --14.5
Morath, Adolf--14.5
Moravská galerie v Brn ě--14.5
Morgan, Frederick Charles--14.5
Morrison, Walter J.--14.5
Morshed, O. F. (Owen Frederick), Sir, 1893- --17.4
Movin-Hermes, Benno, 1902-1977--17.7
Müller, Hugo, 1833-1915--28.2
Münchner Stadtmuseum--14.5, 24.5
Munch, A.--28.1
Munro, Margaret C. N.--14.5
Musée Carnavalet--22.6
Museum für Photographie (Dresden, Germany)--14.5
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)--10.9, 14.4, 14.5, 14.7, 22.7, 24.4
Museum of the City of New York--14.4
Muybridge, Eadweard, 1830-1904--28.1
Myers & co., booksellers, London--14.5
Mytum, Ernest--8.9
Poole, F. F.--15.4
Poole, Zöe F.--15.4
Poupel, Robert--15.4
Pownall, G. O.--15.4
Prestel Verlag--14.1
Princeton University--15.4, 22.4
Pritchard, H. Gibbon--22.3
Pritchard, Norah E.--8.9
Pritschow, Maria--15.4
Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County--6.1
Pulford, A. H.--15.4
Radio Times Hulton Picture Library--15.4, 18.1
Raphael King Ltd.--15.4
Rapho (Agency)--8.9
Rawdon Smith, W. H.--15.4
Redesdale, Sydney, Lady--15.4
Reed, Langford, b. 1889--15.4
Reinhold Thiele & Co.--28.1
Remington, G.--28.1
Renger-Patzsch, Agnes--15.7
Renger-Patzsch, Albert, 1897-1966--15.7
Renger-Patzsch, Sabine--15.7, 18.5-6*
Reyher, Ferdinand--15.4
Reynolds, J. S. (John Stewart)--15.4
Rhead, E. L. (Ezra Lobb), b. 1864--28.2
Riobó, Julio Felipe--15.4
Rix, Michael M.--15.4
Robbins, Michael--23.8
Roberts, Frederick Sleigh Roberts, Earl, 1832-1914--28.1
Roberts, Warren, 1916--17.1
Robinson, Margaret W.--15.4
Rodin, Auguste, 1840-1917--27.2
Rogers, Bertram Mitford Heron, 1860--16.1
Rollph, Dorothy--16.1
Romer, Grant B.--16.1
Ronchi, Vasco, 1897-1988--16.1
Roose-Evans, James--16.1
Roscoe, Henry E. (Henry Enfield), 1833-1915--28.2
Ross, Clare M.--16.1
Roth, David--16.1
Rothstein, Arthur, 1915-1985--16.1
Roux, Jacques--16.1
Royal Astronomical Society--16.1
Royal Empire Society (Great Britain)--9.3
Royal Institute of Chemistry--16.1
Royal Institution of Great Britain--22.3
Royal Naval College (Great Britain)--16.1, 26.5
Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain--3.8, 8.9, 11.4, 13.4, 16.2, 22.3, 23.3, 26.6
Royal Society (Great Britain)--22.3, 22.6, 24.2
Royal Society of Arts (Great Britain)--22.3
Royal Society of Edinburgh--22.3
Gernsheim, Helmut, 1913-1995, and Gernsheim, Alison, 1911-1969 Manuscript Collection MS-1587

- Royal United Service Institution (Great Britain)--9.3
- Ruff, Aubrey--16.1
- Sachse, Alfred--28.1
- Saint Margaret's Church (Westminster, London, England)--17.2
- Saint-Saëns, Camille, 1835-1921--27.2
- Salt, Florence H.--16.1
- Sandell, Sixten--16.1
- Savoia, Elena di, duchessa d'Aosta, 1871-1951--27.2
- Scambler, F. V.--28.1
- Schad, Christian, 1894-1982--16.1
- Schatz, August--16.1
- Schmitt-Breuninger, Friederike--16.1
- Schmoll, J. A.--28.1
- Schneiders, Toni--16.1
- Schrott, Elsa von--16.1
- Schultze, R. S.--24.2, 26.6
- Schwarz, Heinrich, 1894-1974--16.1
- Schweizerischer photographen-verband--26.7
- Science Museum (Great Britain)--16.3, 22.2, 23.3
- Scott, Clement, 1841-1904--27.2
- Scott, John Swire--16.3
- Scott-Elliot, A. H.--17.4
- Secker & Warburg--9.3, 16.4
- Seligman, Janet--16.3
- Selle, Walter--16.3
- Selz, Peter Howard, 1919- --14.5
- Semana gráfica (Madrid, Spain)--8.9
- Shadbolt, Lavinia G.--16.3
- Shand, James--8.9
- Shaw, Bernard, 1856-1950--14.3
- Shennan, Louise R.--16.3
- Sherrard, Lucilla--18.5
- Sickert, Walter, 1860-1942--27.2
- Sieberg, Josephine--16.3
- Sierra Club--16.3
- Simony, Bernadette de--16.3
- Simony, Comte de--16.3
- Simony, Comtess de--16.3
- Sipley, Louis Walton--10.8, 16.3, 18.4, 18.5*
- Sirot, Georges--16.3
- Skimming, Audrey--16.3
- Skopec, Rudolf--16.3
- Smith, Frank, photographic engineer--21.5
- Smith, P. L. H.--16.3
- Smith, Trevor A. D.--16.3
- Société française de photographie--8.9
- Society of Chemical Industry (Great Britain)--28.2
- Somers Cocks, J. V.--9.3
- South Africa House (London, England)--18.1
- Soviet Union. Posol´stvo (Great Britain)--23.8
- Spencer, A.--16.5
• Spiller, John, 1850-1928--28.2
• Spiller, Leonard--16.5
• Sport & General Press Agency Ltd.--2.3
• St. Paul's Cathedral (London, England)--26.5
• Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Germany)--22.6
• Stannard, Una, 1927-2004--12.2
• Steichen, Edward, 1879-1973--14.5
• Steinert, Otto, 1915-1978--12.1, 16.6*, 18.6*
• Stenger, Erich, 1878-1957--16.7*
• Stone, Lawrence--16.5
• Stoner, Stephen H.--16.5
• Strand, Paul, 1890-1976--16.5*
• Stratton, M. A.--16.5
• Strom, Rolf A.--20.7
• Stuart Wortley, Henry, 1832-1890--28.2
• Stubbs, S. G. Blaxland (Stanley George Blaxland)--16.5
• Suschitsky, Wolfgang--16.5, 18.4*, 18.5*, 18.6*
• Swan, Hannah--28.2
• Swan, Joseph Wilson, 1828-1914--28.2
• Swan, Kenneth R.--16.5
• Swan, Percival--16.5
• Szarkowski, John--14.5
• T. & R. Annan and Sons--10.8
• Taft, Robert, 1894-1955--17.1, 21.5
• Talbot, M. T.--17.1
• Talbot, William Henry Fox, 1800-1877--28.1
• Tate & Lyle, ltd.--17.1
• Tate Gallery--26.7
• Tausk, Petr--17.1
• Thames and Hudson--17.1
• Thaulow, Fritz, 1847-1906--27.2
• Theodor Ackermann (Firm)--17.1
• Thomas Agnew & Sons--9.3
• Thomas, Charles, photographer--17.1
• Thomas, T. Henry--9.3
• Time-Life International--8.9
• Times (London, England)--8.9, 26.7
• Toplis, G. E.--17.1
• Tottenham, Clementina, Lady--17.1
• Traynor, J. Richard--17.1
• Triennale di Milano--17.1, 17.7
• Triggs, Stanley--17.1
• Tucker, Alan C.--6.1, 17.1
• Tyrell, Kenneth--17.1
• United States. Embassy (Great Britain)--27.1
• United States. Foreign Service--17.1
• University of Cambridge. Observatory--17.1
• University of Oregon. Museum of Art--17.1
• University of Oxford. Museum of the History of Science--17.1
• Van den Berghs, Ltd.--14.1
• Vaughan, Emma S. J.--17.1
Index of Works

- "110 Years of Photography--Have We Advanced?" --1.1
- The Acquisition of Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin, 1878--1.2
- "Aesthetic Trends in Photography, Past and Present" --1.3
- Alvin Langdon Coburn, photographer, an Autobiography --1.5-6
- "Anthanasius Kircher and the Magic Lantern" --1.7
- Beautiful London --1.8-9
- "A Beautiful Queen: the Biography of Queen Alexandra, Consort of King Edward VII" --1.10-12
- British Council Exhibition--2.1
- "Centenary of the Royal Photographic Society" --2.2
- A Century of Photography, Niépce to Moholy-Nagy, from the Gernsheim Collection --gf
- Churchill, His Life in Photographs --2.4-5
- A Concise History of Photography --2.6
- Creative Photography: 1826 to the Present, an exhibition from the Gernsheim Collection --2.7-9, gf
- Creative Photography: Aesthetic Trends 1839-1960 --2.10-12, 3.1, gf
- Edward VII and Queen Alexandra: A Biography in Word and Picture --3.2-6
- "The Evolution of Pictorial Photography" --3.7
- "The Evolution of the Camera in the Nineteenth Century" --3.8, 23.5
- Fashion and Reality: 1840-1914 --3.10, 4.1
- Focus on Architecture and Sculpture: an original approach to the photography of architecture and sculpture --4.2, gf
- "G. B. S. and Photography" --4.3
- Historic Events: 1839-1939 --4.4, gf
- History of Photography, from the earliest use of the camera obscura in the 11th century up to 1914 --4.5-11, 5.1-5, gf
- Hundert Jahre Photographie, 1839-1939 --5.6
- "The Ideal Camera" --5.7
- Julia Margaret Cameron--Her Life and Photographic Work --5.8-9
- Laudatio für Herrn Felix H. Mann--6.7
- Lewis Carroll--Photographer --6.8-10, gf
- "Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre" --21.5
- "Macrophotography and Photomicrography" --7.1
- The Man Behind the Camera --7.2-5
- Masterpieces of Victorian Photography --7.6-8, gf
- Medical Photography in the Nineteenth Century" --7.10
- "Niepce's Supposed Kew Photograph and Other Niepce Heliographs Extant in Great Britain" --7.11, 22.2
- The Oldest Photograph in the World--22.3
- The Origin of 3-D--7.12
- Photographische Entgleisungen--7.13
- Photography in Chancery--7.14
- "The Photography of Cecil Beaton" --7.15
- "The Photography of Sculpture by Artificial Light" --7.16
- "Pioneer of Photography: L. J. M. Daguerre Centenary on July 10" --7.17
- "Proposal for a National or International Museum and Institute of Photography" --7.18
- Queen Victoria: A Biography in Word and Picture --8.1-7, gf
- "Recovery of Silver from Photographic Solutions" --8.8
Rediscovery of the World's First Photograph --9.1, 22.2
"Roger Fenton, Photographer of the Crimean War" --9.2, gf
Roger Fenton, Photographer of the Crimean War: His Photographs and His Letters from The Crimea --9.4-6
The 'Royal' One Hundred Years Old --9.7
"Royal Photographic Society. The Centenary of Its Foundation" --9.8
"Royal Photographic Society Centenary" --9.9
Some Comments on a Recent Article [by George Wakefield]--9.10
"Some Common Misconceptions About Early Photography in Scotland" --9.11
"Some Early Applications of Photography to Science" --9.12, 20.5
St. Martin's-in-the-Fields--9.13
"Subjective Photography" --9.14
"Summer Holiday" --9.15
"Texture and Form, Essentials of Good Photography" --9.16
"A Tribute to E. O. Hoppé" --9.17
Valentine & Sons, Ltd., Dundee --9.18
"The Value and Interest of Macrophotography" --9.19
W. H. Fox Talbot, 1800-1877--9.20
"What is Wrong with our Exhibitions?" --10.1
"Which is the Oldest Photographic Society?" --10.2
"Wilson's of Aberdeen" --10.3
"The World Exhibitions of Photography at Lucerne" --10.4
"World Photographic Exhibition at Lucerne: Work from Fifty Countries" --10.5