

Reputations made and lost:  
the writing of histories of early twentieth-  
century British photography and the case of  
Walter Benington  
by  
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## **Abstract**

Walter Benington (1872-1936) was a major British photographer, a member of the Linked Ring and a colleague of international figures such as F H Evans, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen and Alvin Langdon Coburn. He was also a noted portrait photographer whose sitters included Albert Einstein, Dame Ellen Terry, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and many others. He is, however, rarely noted in current histories of photography.

Beaumont Newhall's 1937 exhibition *Photography 1839-1937* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York is regarded by many respected critics as one of the foundation-stones of the writing of the history of photography. To establish photography as modern art, Newhall believed it was necessary to create a direct link between the master-works of the earliest photographers and the photographic work of his modernist contemporaries in the USA. He argued that any work which demonstrated intervention by the photographer such as the use of soft-focus lenses was a deviation from the direct path of photographic progress and must therefore be eliminated from the history of photography. A consequence of this was that he rejected much British photography as being "unphotographic" and dangerously irrelevant. Newhall's writings inspired many other historians and have helped to perpetuate the neglect of an important period of British photography. As a result, the work of key photographers such as Walter Benington is now virtually unknown.

Benington's central involvement with the Linked Ring and his national and international exhibition successes demonstrate his significance within post-1890 British photography. Recent moves in the writing of histories of photography have called for the exploration of previously unknown archives and collections. A detailed examination of a cross-section of Benington's work will illustrate that he was a photographer of great distinction and marked individuality fully worthy of a major reappraisal.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction – Discovering Walter Benington

“Mr Benington’s camera has the better of me” (Pound 1916: 35)

In June 1916, a year after the young French sculptor, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska had been killed in the trenches, Ezra Pound completed *Gaudier-Brzeska, a Memoir* (Pound 1916). His tribute brought together excerpts from Gaudier’s writings and drawings, photographs of Gaudier’s sculptures plus his own reflections on the sculptor. He also included four portraits of the sculptor by Walter Benington. Pound declared that the *Memoir* consisted of impressions and opinion, mine and those of Mr Benington’s camera. And Mr Benington’s camera has the better of me, for it gives the subject as if ready to move and to speak (Pound 1916: 35)

Pound’s gracious acknowledgement recognized that Benington’s photographic skills had the power to capture Gaudier’s reality in a way beyond words. It is this power to communicate that underpins so much of Benington’s work whether in his portraits or in his documentary studies or in the field in which he was possibly best known – as a Pictorialist photographer and leading member of the Linked Ring. And yet Benington is virtually unknown within current histories of photography.

Walter Benington (1872-1936) was a major figure in British photography in the period from 1890 onwards and enjoyed a significant reputation amongst his contemporaries. From 1894, he had exhibited regularly at the annual Photographic Salon and, in 1902, was elected to the Linked Ring with the sobriquet of *Housetopper*. His most celebrated work was *The Church of England* (1903) (Fig. 1.1, see also Plate 1) which was considered to be “one of the best London pictures which have yet been produced” (*Amateur Photographer* 1924: 539). His work was regularly selected for inclusion in British pictorialist contributions to international exhibitions across Europe and the USA and he contributed to Alfred Stieglitz’s final Photo-Secessionist show at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo in 1910. In assessing his place within the Linked Ring as it became a major force in the development of Pictorial photography both in Britain and internationally, it

becomes clear that while there are many significant parallels between the course of Benington's career and the development of British photography from 1890 onwards there are also important instances where his work was strikingly different from that of many of his contemporaries. He was not a photographer working in isolation but one deeply conscious of the roots of his practice and his need to develop and share its potential. His importance lies in the fact that he was able to realise some of this potential while so many of his British colleagues were unable to do so. With the acrimonious collapse of the Linked Ring from 1908, Benington's photographic career began to develop in several new directions. He attempted to maintain the highest standards in pictorial photography in the face of the growing popularity of the snap-shot style of photography and was a key member of the short-lived London Secession which might have taken British photography in new and challenging directions.

In 1909, Benington purchased the Photographic Association, a prestigious set of studios and processing facilities serving the needs of wealthy amateurs. He established an extensive practice as a portrait photographer with sitters including Arthur Conan Doyle, Ellen Terry and Albert Einstein as well as many artists, literary figures and academics. As noted above, his work with the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was warmly praised by Ezra Pound (Pound 1916: 35). Other projects included his stark photographic exposé of poverty on Bankside in London (Benington 1912a) which has remained unseen since its first publication in a radical magazine in 1912. An unpublished portfolio of Tilbury Docks (Benington 1912b) from the same period finds a particular beauty in the industrial setting in a manner made fashionable by modernist photographers of a decade or more later. These images were a continuing confirmation of his commitment to the idea of "The Beauty of Ugliness" (Benington 1904c: 282). "The Cult of the Ugly" was journalistic shorthand for the "modern" habit of making the commonplace and the supposedly unbeautiful, the subjects for photographic treatment. Such proto-modernist tendencies were considered by some to be disturbing of the good order of society. His early interest in photographic apparatus and his work as a glass block engraver gave him the confidence to

experiment in a variety of processes including carbon printing, gum bichromate and other techniques and his favoured medium of platinum printing at which he was an acknowledged master.

Reproductions of his work in contemporary journals and newspapers indicate an impressive range and a remarkable technical mastery. Original prints and negatives in the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) archives, in the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) and other archives and private collections demonstrate the quality and range of his work. His work was frequently cited by contemporary critics and his images illustrated texts and articles on developments in photography. He was deeply engaged in the work of the Linked Ring and signed off the minutes of its final meeting. He also built a substantial reputation as a portrait photographer with a wide range of sitters amongst the literary, musical and artistic elite. In 1924, some thirty years after he had first exhibited with the Linked Ring, Benington's reputation as a major British photographer was recognized with the publication of a retrospective pictorial review (*Amateur Photographer* 1924: 537) In 1929 *Amateur Photographer* noted that: "This worker has at all times demonstrated a keen appreciation of all pictorial matters associated with the camera, and his pictures always have the stamp of individuality, coupled with sound technical knowledge" (*Amateur Photographer* 1929: 299).

Benington was clearly a photographer of some significance and yet current general histories of photography such as Lemagny & Rouille (1987), Newhall (1994), Frizot (1998), Rosenblum (2007) and Wooters & Mulligan (2010) make no mention of him. When *Amateur Photographer* introduced its feature "The Name-Droppers Guide, 1997-1998" (*Amateur Photographer* January 1997 onwards) based on the views of many respected photo-historians, Benington was not considered of sufficient importance to be included in a series on "the world's greatest photographers" (Atherton 1998: np). Other histories and encyclopaedias of photography have provided no information on him and more detailed studies of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century photography have yielded only a little more.

More recently his work has started to become rather better known in specialist circles but it is still (2015) rarely presented to a wider audience. And yet, as the following study will demonstrate Benington's oeuvre includes a remarkable range of images which are exciting and full of interest and demand to be better known. The need to reappraise his work and to present it to a wider public in a critically structured fashion is becoming increasingly urgent in the light of significant changes of archival and curatorial practice.

This study has been designed to lay the foundations for this critical reappraisal by investigating how and why Benington, who had enjoyed a significant reputation amongst his contemporaries, has effectively ceased to feature in the history of photography. During the majority of his working life, he enjoyed a high level of "visibility" both in the practical sense that his work was often seen in exhibitions and in the press, and in the metaphorical sense of being one of the clearly identifiable figures of contemporary photography. Currently (2015) he is virtually invisible.

By examining Benington's work in the wider context of British photography from the 1890s onwards it is hoped to escape the charge of trying to resurrect the claims of a complete unknown. Far from being unrecognized by his contemporaries he was increasingly identified with many important developments from the 1890s onwards. There is, perhaps, some danger in creating too close an identity between Benington's career and the course of British photography because one must not lose sight of his remarkable individuality. Drilling down into contemporary accounts of the collapse of the Linked Ring from 1908 we shall find that Benington followed a remarkably independent path. Throughout the investigation it becomes evident that the history of photography in Britain from 1890 is a good deal more complicated than it is usually reported in general histories of photography. Reflecting something of this complexity, we shall examine a number of factors which may have been involved in the changes in reputational status of both Benington and of British photography post 1890.



The first major set of factors concerns the nature and purposes of histories of photography from their origins in reporting the early developments of photography through to Newhall's *Photography 1839-1937* (1937) and beyond. How these histories have come into being and how they have subsequently developed will be examined with particular attention being paid to issues of national and cultural bias and the range of aesthetic values which were prioritized at the time of their writing.

Early photographic histories prior to Newhall explored developments in the technologies of photography as well as its aesthetics in relation to the "Photography as Art" debate. The introduction of Dry Plate technologies in 1871 was seen as the opportunity for photographers to explore new ways of individual expression. We shall examine how photographers used this greater freedom to express individual perspectives through a variety of new technical practices. At the heart of these developments was the establishment of the Linked Ring in Britain in 1892. It built on activities in Vienna in 1891 and created a photographic movement of international scope. Subsequently, the international photographic community began to divide between those who supported further new developments and those who continued to favour the traditions of Pictorialism. The split appeared to follow national lines with adherents of the aesthetic values of Modernism being most powerfully grouped in the USA while in Britain there was continued support for a now settled impressionism of the pictorialist style. Such a simplistic view of national polarisation will be tested in the light of the evidence that not all British photographers were content with maintaining the *status quo* even where this was the majority view. Nevertheless, the broad picture of an international divide became the received version of events with Britain seen as the stronghold of the photographic old order of Pictorialism.

Recognizing the patterns of pre-Newhallian histories of photography is an important prelude for a study of *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937). It will be argued that Newhall's work was built on an understanding of past

events found within these histories but filtered through the specific historical and cultural contexts in which it was produced and that it was very much moulded by the expectation of those commissioning it. In his *Photography 1839-1937* (1937) Newhall treated pre-1870 photography as a spring-board for later developments in the twentieth-century. He argued that the introduction of Dry Plate technologies in the 1870s encouraged work that was “painterly” and “anti-photographic.” The validity of Newhall’s views and the possible reasons behind them will be examined as will be the ways in which he applied his negative judgement to British photography post-1890. His views have prevailed in many subsequent versions of photographic history. How far this interpretation of events is valid will be examined but there appears to be strong evidence that amongst the outcomes of Newhall’s actions is the fact that Benington’s work has rarely been featured in conventional histories of photography.

A second set of factors concerned with the decline in reputation of British photography post-1890 and of Benington himself, will involve a detailed study of photographic activities within Britain during the period. Not only will the study help to counteract Newhall’s damning view, but it will also help to track down and report on the many cross currents within the overall narrative. The evidence, derived from the original sources, demonstrates that British photography at the time of the Linked Ring and beyond was significantly more complex than Newhall would allow. His dismissal of most British work of the period as essentially “painterly” and therefore unphotographic, demands to be challenged. However, doing so will also reveal some of the disunities and tensions within British photography. Much of the evidence in support of the view that British photography of the period was exciting and innovative will be derived from a close examination of Benington’s career and the work of some of his close colleagues within and beyond the Linked Ring.

Benington’s early years culminated in a series of major Pictorialist images that not only demonstrated a real technical mastery but also revealed an imaginative vision that commands respect. Difficulties within the Linked

Ring over its major purpose became increasingly pressing over the next few years as these pressures increased significantly. Some demanded that the Linked Ring should serve the needs primarily of the British photographic community while others, including Benington, argued that the future of British photography lay with a commitment to an International vision. The aftermath of these difficult times will be examined through Benington's own experiences and thoughts. While the majority of British photographers seem to have been content to produce modest and uncontroversial work, Benington set out to explore a variety of photographic genres in which he produced works which reach towards Modernism. There is a continuous line of development in his work from the early days to his post-Pictorialist work which has not previously been explored.

In exploring the possible reasons for Benington's current invisibility, there is a strong sense that much of the story of British photography from 1890 onwards has not been sufficiently celebrated within Britain itself. We will examine how far British photography from 1890 was actually perceived and supported within the photographic and cultural establishment in Britain in the periods immediately following. The easy assumption has been that the rejection of British Pictorialism by foreign modernist historians from the 1930s onwards has been the sole cause of its continuing neglect. Such a view appears to exempt all other parties from any blame for its lack of appreciation. The question needs to be asked as to whether such an exemption is justified.

To discover some possible answers, it is necessary to examine a variety of British views on British photography published from the 1920s onwards. Here there is a clear divide between those who valued traditional approaches to photography and were fearful of the impact of modernism and those who seemed to be less constrained by loyalty to a past that they considered no longer relevant and, as a result, were keen to embrace new approaches. This split within Britain reflected the ever widening gulf between mainstream British attitudes to photography and the modernist views from Europe and the USA. Compounding these problems was the way in which the major

cultural and artistic institutions in Britain viewed photography with a significant lack of enthusiasm. The centennial celebrations were regarded by many as the opportunity to look back nostalgically at the very earliest days of photography and to devalue much that had followed. There was little thought of viewing past work as the springboard for the future. After the centenary retrospective shows there were few opportunities during and immediately after WWII for celebrating British photography in major exhibitions. There were however a number of important published studies and other commentaries which seemed to consolidate the feeling that post-1890 British photography was something of an anachronism. At best, the photography of this period was considered to be historically “quite interesting.” At worst when latter-day versions of it were presented glowingly as the best of contemporary British photography, it was regarded by others as an over-indulgent irrelevance.

A number of exhibitions held in Britain since 1970 will be examined to establish the variety of curatorial practices in presenting British photography to a wider public. Some of the exhibitions, especially those sponsored by the Arts Council, were to play a crucial role in promoting both British Pictorialism and post-Pictorialism as integral parts of the continuing history of British photography. One benefit of this new approach was that it considered British Pictorialism as an art movement that had a natural life span and that it contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. The arguments that acknowledged the legitimacy of Pictorialism and other photographs of the period can help to counteract the negativity of Newhall’s rejection of Pictorialism as unphotographic, anti-modern and representative of pre-WWI values. Such an approach does not necessarily endorse the views of those who clung to the old forms as a guarantee of some kind of secure continuity. The key Arts Council exhibitions between 1975 and 1990 were determined to examine photography from new perspectives and, as a result, much previously neglected work was brought to the attention of the public. There have been a few more recent exhibitions equally prepared to challenge the conventional ways of presenting photographic images. One implication of Benington’s somewhat

irregular appearances in these exhibitions is the need to examine the final set of possibilities about his continuing neglect. If the post-1890 period of British photography is now beginning to receive more positive critical attention and yet Benington remains still largely unrecognized, we must begin to question whether there is something specific to Benington that renders him “outside the circle.”

The final cluster of issues related to the possible reasons for the continuing neglect of Benington’s work therefore examines whether there might be features unique to Benington which have exacerbated the position. We can piece together something of Benington’s biography as noted above drawing on a number of published and unpublished sources to help build our picture of him. This knowledge can certainly help us to understand the complex times in which he was operating, but such evidence of Benington the photographer is of little real consequence without access to his original images. The absence of his day books and other “professional” information makes it difficult to establish him as a full photographic persona. What is striking about the record of the material available is how scattered and piece-meal the surviving archives are. The rather random nature of this material and the difficulty of accessing it, appear to have a direct bearing on his reputational “survival” and his potential visibility.

The framework of the study as outlined above has required the building up and analysis of a substantial evidence-base concerning the different areas of concern. The sources examined have included a wide variety of histories of photography and related material. Wherever possible, variant versions of events have been cross-referenced with original sources to confirm the reliability or otherwise of the different accounts. For instance, F J Mortimer, who succeeded Hinton as editor of *Amateur Photographer*, was instrumental in establishing the *Salon des Refusés* as a riposte to the “American” Salon of 1908 claiming that he was “saving” British photography. His version of events is strikingly different from that found in the unpublished correspondence between George Davison and Stieglitz (Beinecke Letters Davison to Stieglitz 285/1 etc, various dates 1909)

A good deal of additional material such as exhibition catalogues and reviews as well as specialist articles and studies has also been examined. Contemporaneous press reports and reviews have been invaluable but due note has been made of their possibly partisan nature. Other unpublished or difficult to locate materials has also been examined. Harker (1979) made good use of the Linked Ring and related papers in the RPS Archive. These original documents have been revisited to check additional details not included in her work. Interestingly, much of this Linked Ring material, including a number of Photographic Salon catalogues, was donated to the RPS by Benington's widow in 1937. Catalogues of most of the Photographic Salons and of the RPS Annual Exhibitions are now available on line and have helped to confirm the details of the critical commentaries in the press.

Guides to research methodology such as Gunn and Faire (2011) and Garraghan (1946) provide ample warnings about the reliability and integrity of both primary and secondary sources. This has been particularly important where major conclusions have been drawn by historians and commentators based on possible mis-readings – deliberate or otherwise – of material. This particular danger needs to be highlighted when examining Newhall's approach to the history of photography where he is accused of employing the philosophy and methodology of 'Whig' history in "shaping the facts" to suit his chosen interpretation. Mis-readings are not, of course, confined to Newhall.

Although contemporary reports and exhibition reviews in the photographic press and elsewhere give a particular flavour to the events they describe, it is necessary to note the advice given some years ago that: "The view of the past from the present is like looking into a distorting mirror and judgement passed on people of former times, using today's criteria, is to fall into a trap" (Harker 1979: xi) This encouragement, to try to understand the values and vocabulary of the period, is an invaluable antidote to the tendency to interpret events of the past in today's terms. The same warning applies to a number of specific social concepts which have changed over the

past 100 years. Two examples will serve to demonstrate the problem. The first concerns the difference between Amateur and Professional in the field of photography. The current distinction between the two may be more concerned with sources of income and possibly about the quality of the work produced. When Benington purchased The Photographic Association in 1909 he became a professional photographer and ceased to be a “gentleman amateur”. His standing amongst his Pictorialist colleagues and in the eyes of the wider public would be altered as he now became identified with “trade”. A similar example of this acute social distinction can be found in the Gentlemen v Players cricket matches where Gentlemen received expenses and the professional Players received a wage (Porter & Wragg 2007). The distinction between the two, which clearly reflected class distinctions elsewhere in society, continued in Britain until 1963.

Another term often found in the photographic press concerned the description of the photographer as “a worker.” In its original usage it did not have any particular connection with social status or financial reward but was used in the neutral sense of someone engaged in an activity. Horsley Hinton uses it in this way: “I am convinced that the average English [photographic] worker does not take himself or his work seriously enough” (Hinton 1905e: 195). The same term was used in a later description of Benington “This worker has at all times demonstrated a keen appreciation of all pictorial matters ....” (*Amateur Photographer* 1929: 299) In this context, the term does not appear to have any Marxist connotations of the labouring classes (Edwards 2006). It is interesting to note that when Cecil Beaton used it to describe the Pictorialist photographers of whom he disapproved, the term had begun to take on the flavour of an almost amused contempt (Beaton 1944: 47). Even more freighted with meaning was Beaton’s description of these photographers as “Edwardian.” In 1944, the term would effectively have consigned the individuals to the now long distant and out-dated past. More recently the term Edwardian has acquired several other distinct meanings. Margaret Drabble has described one view of the Edwardian period as a time of “sunlit prosperity and opulent confidence preceding the cataclysm of the Great War” (Drabble 1985: 307). She

contrasts this nostalgic view with others which see the period, certainly in English literature, as one full of excitement and a new sense of freedom. While Beaton seems to be using the term Edwardian pejoratively, one might reflect that the other interpretation of the term Edwardian captures more accurately the excitement of Benington's work between 1901 and 1910 and beyond.

Benington's work was regularly illustrated in the contemporary photographic press and other journals but these images were usually reproduced in half-tone and were therefore of limited quality. This quality has been further compromised by subsequent copies. There is a real problem when attempting to assess the full visual impact of the originals – the richness of tone of platinum prints or the almost three-dimensional textures of the best gum-bichromate images barely survive the processes of mass reproduction. Original prints of a number of Benington's works are in the RPS archive, and copies have been specially reproduced for this study as Plates I-XVI in the Appendix. The majority of the originals were donated by F H Evans or A L Coburn with both of whom Benington had close links. The RPS archive supplied the Benington images which have featured in exhibitions such as Jeffrey (1975) and Taylor (1978) and more recently Roberts (1996) and Liddy (2003). They have also been used to illustrate important texts such as Harker (1979) and Weaver (1996b).

In 2006-2007, the National Portrait Gallery held an exhibition of Benington's photographic portraits to give prominence to a recently acquired portfolio of his work (Freestone 2006). In working on this exhibition and subsequently, it has also been possible to confirm a number of provisional attributions to Benington. The negatives for a number of the NPG portraits are in the collection of over 200 glass negatives of his portraits of *Oxbridge Notables and Others* in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (BOD 1997). Original prints of a number of other important sitters have been located in archives and collections in New Zealand and Australia as well as in collections nearer to home.



There are important collections of negatives and original prints of Benington's work with the sculptors Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in a number of archives in London and also in the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. A number of these images have been reproduced, in critical studies of the sculptors and of twentieth-century art, often without proper acknowledgement to Benington. Some recent studies of Gaudier have examined how Benington's photographic records and portraits of the sculptor have helped in understanding the significance of Gaudier's work (Crow 2013, Barassi and Wood 2011). In addition to the images in public collections and archives, there are original prints of a variety of subjects in several different private collections.

Throughout the study, it will be argued that Benington was a British photographer whose work fully justifies detailed study both in its own right and for the crucial insights into the nature of British photography from 1890 to 1930 which he provides. Too often the period has been dismissed as one of little importance or worse. Gernsheim had no doubt that

Impressionistic photography and imitation paintings became epidemics ... the *fin-de-siecle* photographers had been influential but their self-conscious picture-making ... contributed little to the progress of photography (Gernsheim 1969:465, 469)

The study will propose an alternative reading to Gernsheim's dyspeptic version of events in the light of the evidence presented. This reading will propose that during the early 1890s, British photography established itself at the forefront of the development of Pictorialism with the Linked Ring providing an exciting forum for exploring new approaches to the art of photography. The Linked Ring attracted leading photographers from the UK and from Europe and the USA to join them in sharing their work through a series of important exhibitions both in Britain and abroad. Benington was one to gain greatly from the opportunities available through his membership of the Linked Ring. Subsequently, internal tensions over the purpose of the annual Photographic Salon brought about the collapse of the Linked Ring itself. The basic conflict concerned whether the Salon should serve the needs of those at the forefront of developments in modern

international photography or whether it should become exclusively British, serving the needs of a wider circle of photographers who were not attracted to modernist practices. The success of those who favoured the rejection of modernism brought about an almost complete detachment of British photography from developments in the USA and Europe. Working in opposition to this seemingly inevitable drift towards isolation, certain British photographers including Benington pursued different paths to ensure that British photography remained connected, even if somewhat tenuously, to modern developments. While many British photographers felt secure within their own pictorialist boundaries, Benington explored different styles and genres of photography. These important developments in British photography following the collapse of the Linked Ring have received even less attention than the earlier Pictorialist work, limited though this may have been.

The study is a welcome opportunity to challenge the view that British photography of the post-1890 period was of minor importance within the wider histories of photography. It also allows a selection of Walter Benington's work to be presented in a critical context to demonstrate that its current neglect needs to be rectified.

Chapter II will examine issues related to the creation of histories of photography from the earliest days. Attention will be paid to the existence of national bias in photography and attempts to define the Britishness of British photography. Some of the arguments about the characteristics of the photographs of different countries will be considered. The bias which lies behind various national claims over priority in important developments in photography will be examined as part of the survey of the partisan and partial ways that the history of photography has been reported. The benefits of exploring parallels between 'Whig' history and the positivist view of photographic history adopted by some writers will also be examined.

Given Newhall's significant position in the telling of photography's history, Chapter III will offer a detailed examination of the iconic exhibition

*Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937). Particular attention will be paid to the issues of national bias that will be seen to pervade the exhibition and catalogue essay. The problem will be illustrated by an examination of examples such as his preferential selection of American over non-American work in all parts of the exhibition but especially to the section devoted to Contemporary photography. Newhall's representation of British photography will be examined in some detail to highlight his thinking on aesthetic issues. His determination to establish a pedigree between Hill's work and the 'straight' photography which he strongly favoured will be examined as will the secondary sources he used to "prove" his case. The chapter will conclude with an examination of examples of the legacy of *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) to demonstrate how far much of the subsequent reporting of British photography has been determined by Newhall's modernist agenda.

Chapters IV, V and VI will explore details of photographic activity in Britain from 1890 through to the 1930s through the medium of a close study of Benington's work. It will be argued in Chapter IV that the photographic history of this period is far more complex than might appear from the dismissive treatment of it in Newhall and subsequent histories. Key issues to be examined will include the international status of British photography and accusations by foreign observers of stagnation. The intense arguments over new processes and unconventional pictorial content will be examined. Benington was most celebrated by his contemporaries for his Pictorialist images in particular *The Church of England* (1903). This and others of his work will be examined in Chapter V to build up a picture of the range of subject matter and the variety of processes by which he explored his personal vision through photography. The evidence of the growing tensions within the Linked Ring and in British photography in general will also be explored in Chapter V. The 1908 "American" Salon and the *Salon des Refusés* of the same year were crucial landmarks in the turbulent times which brought about the collapse of the Linked Ring and marked the effective end of a corporate British photography as a powerful international force. Benington's progress in exploring new ideas and the attempts to

launch the short-lived London Secession of 1911 will also be examined. Amongst the considerable range of Benington's work we will explore his success as a portrait photographer including examples of his formal portraiture and of his more unconventional character studies. As he moved away from the traditions of Pictorialism he became increasingly involved in a variety of projects some of which confronted issues such as the poverty of Bankside while other projects explored the world of contemporary modern art. The three central chapters of the study will provide evidence that, in spite of the perception that British photography was only concerned with a rather faded Pictorialism, there was a good deal of more exciting work being made. Benington was one of the most important contributors to these different phases of British photography and can be identified as one of the most significant proto-modernist photographic workers of the period.

Chapter VII will explore the responses by leading British commentators such as J Dudley Johnston to modernist trends. His views emerge strongly in the RPS Symposium on Modern Photography (1933) and in the Centenary celebrations (1939). They illustrate very clearly the ever-widening gap between the views of the British photographic establishment and leading commentators in the USA and Europe. Evidence of some of these modern views is to be found in the commentaries by Lucia Moholy (1939) and Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz (1942) while Cecil Beaton (1944) provided a more laconic view. These writers all articulated doubts about the stultifying influence of the outworn Pictorialist tradition. Unlike Newhall, they respected the fact that Pictorialism had been a legitimate photographic response at the time.

In post-war Britain key institutions such as the V&A began to accept that photography was an important cultural medium and exhibitions and began featuring British photography in public exhibitions. The importance of the Arts Council in promoting British photography and in particular ensuring that the full range of photographic work was celebrated will be explored in Chapter VIII. Key exhibitions such as Jeffrey (1975) Taylor (1978) and Mellor (1980) together with Margaret Harker's detailed study of the Linked

Ring (Harker 1979) allowed British photography of the period from 1890 to be given both welcome publicity and real critical understanding. Benington was featured within a number of these exhibitions as one of the major British photographers. Subsequent shows involving British photography drawn from the V&A, RPS and other collections have not always given the post-1890 period such generous coverage with the consequence that Benington's work has only fitfully been brought to the public's attention. The chapter will track Benington's presence in or absence from a number of these exhibitions including the most recent RPS exhibition (Harding 2014).

The concluding chapter, Chapter IX, will review the key factors which appear to have been most directly responsible for Walter Benington's present near invisibility in photographic histories. One of the major findings will show that the lack of sizable and well-organized archive of his work may have been a major barrier to Benington's public visibility and thus the survival of his reputation. Practical ways forward to improve the situation will be suggested including the preparation of a catalogue raisonné and an attempt to collate the various archival sources. Doing so should provide a firm foundation for a full critical evaluation and celebration of his work.

## **Chapter II**

### **Bias and the writing of histories of photography**

America is really the natural home of photography  
(Walker Evans 1931: 126-127)

A central concern of this study is to discover the major factors which have contributed to the present near invisibility of Benington and his work. The marginalization of post-1890 British photography in many current histories of photography has undoubtedly been a major contributor to the issue. The following remarks concerning the beginnings of Pictorialism exemplify the problem:

Especially in England, articles and papers read before the professional photographic societies as well as reviews of annual and special exhibitions translated traditional precepts of art into huffy “dos and don’ts” for photographers ... To overcome the sharp definition decried by some as being too literal for art, photographers were urged to use slower collodion or inferior optical elements, to smear the lens or kick the tripod during exposure, or to blur the print during processing (Rosenblum 1997: 220)

The generalised and somewhat patronizing tone of the account appears to be deliberate – the well-crafted casualness is effective in rendering the British photographic establishment of the period as pompous and the photographers remarkably amateurish. Commenting on the same background to Pictorialism in Britain, Newhall had rather noted the increasing number of photographers who wished to exhibit their work and claimed that:

The standards of the juries which judged these exhibitions were based almost entirely on the traditions of painting. This was equivalent to rejecting the principles of photography, and denying that straightforward, unmanipulated prints were legitimate works of art (Newhall 1937: 61)

As with Rosenblum, the accuracy of Newhall’s account can be checked against contemporary evidence but the more serious issue is the charge that he brings against British photography. He claims that by favouring so-called painterly devices, British photographers were deliberately preventing other styles of photography from being exhibited. No formal evidence is provided to support this assertion. When Newhall declared that: “England

was the home of *combination printing*” (Newhall 1937: 61 original emphasis) he linked a seemingly objective fact, that combination printing had originated in Britain, with the suggestion that as combination printing was, he claimed, undesirable and British, it was somehow inevitable that Britain was the origin of other photographically undesirable “high art” interventions. The implication seems to be that other British developments in photography must also be suspect. Newhall’s approach to the writing of the history of photography will be examined in more detail in Chapter III alongside an exploration of the possible sources for his strongly held opinions. The brief examples of negative reporting of British photography noted above need to be set in the context of the overall development of the creation of histories of photography from the earliest days onwards.

In his study “History of Photography: The State of Research,” Nickel (2001) set out the main features of how historians of photography have worked since 1839. Nickel advised that we need to examine carefully how previous generations have understood the way the histories of photography have worked and how they have passed their understanding on to subsequent groups and into the twenty-first century. We need to understand how and why previous histories have been created and the forms they have taken over several generations. We also need to recognize the powerful influences that some of these histories have had on succeeding generations of critics and historians. By examining the topic of British photography from 1890 in some detail and especially in looking at Benington’s position within that particular field, we can hope to identify how factors such as national bias and aesthetic preferences begin to emerge in the presentation of photographic history.

Nickel noted that photography is unusual in that its inventors “did not wait for the historians to make their discoveries part of written history. They assumed the task themselves” (Jammes and Janis 1983: xi). In Britain, Fox Talbot published *Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing* in 1839 (Talbot 1839) followed by *The Pencil of Nature* (Talbot 1844) while in

France, Daguerre's *Historique et description des procédés du Daguerréotype et du Diorama* (Daguerre 1839) was published in Paris in 1839. Nicéphore Niépce, originally an associate of Daguerre published his *Historique de la découverte improprement nommée Daguerréotype* in 1841 and there were also strong claims to be the prime originator from Hippolyte Bayard. Harmant (1977) has suggested as many as twenty-four possible claimants to be the inventor of photography with each giving an account of his work. Inevitably, controversy surrounded even the best documented accounts thus generating many "origin myths." Marien has argued that "the history of *the idea* of photography" (Marien 2011: xii, original emphasis) is of more significance than the 'origin myths' themselves. Marien was concerned to establish that the early developments in photography were essentially part of the wider 'Politics of Knowledge' debate which encompassed the many intellectual challenges confronted during the nineteenth-century. Concern with precedence of invention – that Niépce came before Daguerre and Fox Talbot followed – promoted the false idea that there was only one line of evolutionary progress. According to Marien, this 'progression' model was false because it did not report what actually happened (Marien 2011: 30)

These early practitioners-cum-historians, in attempting to describe and explain their own versions of events dealt in the shared language of science and technologies. They wrote for similarly equipped colleagues. The next generation of histories were often handbooks of photography with a brief introduction covering past events followed by practical advice on the technical aspects of photography and its application and usefulness in activities such as archaeology, astronomy, and the reproduction of works of art. Typical of this group of histories is *A Popular Treatise on Photography and A Description of, and Remarks on, the Stereoscope and Photographic Optics, Etc. Etc* by the Belgian scientist and photographer Désiré Charles Emanuel van Monckhoven (1834–1882). It was translated from the French and published in London in 1863 (Monckhoven 1863). Ironically the text is illustrated with woodcuts as being best suited for the descriptive role.



Works such as Monckhoven's *Treatise* were designed to meet the needs of a new market in photography as it became more accepted by the general public and was also brought more within its financial reach. Monckhoven was a significant innovator and needed to market his work. He successfully invented or developed an enlarger (1864), a dry collodion process (1871), improvements of the carbon print process (1875–80), and improved silver-bromide gelatine emulsions (Day & McNeil 1996: 495; Hannavy 2008: 1438).

Later histories included Victor Fouque's, *La vérité sur l'invention de la Photographie* (Fouque 1867), Michel Eugène Chevreul's, *La vérité sur l'invention de la Photographie* (Chevreul, 1873) and John Werge's, *The Evolution of Photography ...* (Werge 1890). Some of these texts reworked previously used material within a seemingly agreed national narrative but with a degree of local emphasis. Subsequent histories became markedly more chauvinist with French claims promoted by Potonniée: "The history of photography is essentially French" (Potonniée 1925/1936: x) to match the claims of Germany proposed by Stenger: "other countries have contributed to the origin and development of photography ... We know, however, of the excellent contributions by Germans and we protest against the general belief that photography is a purely foreign invention ..." (Stenger, English edition, 1939: vii). Josef Maria Eder made even more extravagant claims for Germany as the birthplace of photography in *Geschichte der Photographie* (Eder 1932) This text was considered by Newhall to be "unfortunately chauvinistic" (Newhall 1937: 91-95).

### **Some issues of photographic nationalism**

At the same time as the origin narratives were being created, the rapid spread of awareness of the powers of photography was being celebrated at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and other international exhibitions. Claim and counterclaim over the supposed superiority of the different processes were considered to reflect the success of the different nations. As will be examined below, there was a good deal of emphasis on the

competition between national photographs without necessarily defining what a national photograph might be. To provide some sort of context for the discussion about international competition, it may be helpful to examine such frequently used terms as British photographer and British photography.

Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) was born in Cuba of an American father and a British mother and was brought up in the USA and Britain. He has been claimed as a “British photographer and theorist [who] took up photography in 1882” (Kingsley 2005: 193) and as “an American who lived and photographed in England” (Goldberg, 1981: 190). His Britishness seems to be determined by the location of much of his work rather than his family background. Alexander Gardner (1821-1882) who is best known for his photographic records of the American Civil War, was born in Scotland but emigrated to the USA when he was in his thirties. He is usually absorbed into the body of American photographers of the period with no reference to his origins. Other European nationals who moved to the USA such as Eduard Steichen from Luxemburg or Jacob Riis from Denmark seem to have been assimilated relatively rapidly within the cosmopolitan environment of the USA. Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966) “a Boston-born British photographer” (Troy, 2003: 129) had already established something of a reputation as a photographer before settling in England but he did not become a British subject until 1932. The ambivalence over Coburn’s nationality is highlighted by his inclusion in the exhibition *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920* (Taylor 1978). Regardless of his nationality at the time, Coburn was rightly accorded a significant position because the photographic activity in question took place in Britain as the title precisely declares.

Restricting the description ‘British photography’ to work actually created in Britain would mean the exclusion of the Crimean War works of the Lancashire born Roger Fenton (1819-1869) but as he was distinguished in many other home-based photographic activities his inclusion as a British photographer would clearly be justified. The case of Samuel Bourne (1834-

1912) is more complicated as he is best known for his photographic record of British India and celebrated for his “technical mastery ... faultless artistic vision and understanding of picturesque landscape composition” (Gordon 2003: 80-81). One might argue that “picturesque landscape composition” was a distinctively British characteristic even where the location was India and that this might help to define Britishness in photography. However, the choice of a British location or a British subject does not, of itself, make the images produced in Britain a component of British photography. Camille Silvy (1834-1910) probably best known for *The Vallée de l'Huisne* enjoyed a most successful career as a portrait photographer in London between 1859 and 1866 including Queen Victoria amongst his sitters and providing a fascinating record of London society. Cecil Beaton included Silvy in his survey of British photographers, calling him “the Gainsborough of commercial photographers” (Beaton, 1944: 14-18). However, in spite of his British residence and subject matter it is generally believed that Silvy remains firmly within the French photographic heritage. Swedish-born Oscar Rejlander (1813-1875) who settled in Britain in the 1840s and became renowned for *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) is generally regarded as a British photographer (Lundström 2003: 538) and as such he is described, together with H P Robinson, as having been responsible for many of the faults in British photography (Newhall 1937: 54)

Trying to identify what makes a British photographer – parentage, residence, choice and location of subject matter – is less important than trying to identify the distinguishing characteristics of British photography. In terms of exploring what makes British photography British, the concept of “cultural heritage” may offer a fruitful way forward. In spite of the warning: “Nations are complex phenomena that are shaped by a collection of cultural, political and psychological factors” (Heywood, 2000: 251), it is hoped to offer some brief pointers to the context of the cultural nationalism which gives shape to the idea of British photography. Heywood made a distinction between a cultural nation and a political nation. In the first, the unifying features include a common cultural heritage and language. In the

second, it is shared citizenship that is the binding element allowing a variety of different cultural and ethnic groupings to co-exist.

In 1769, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) introduced the term, *Zeitgeist* or “spirit of the time or age.” The term usefully describes “the general cultural, intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and political climate of an era” (Hamilton, 2011: np). Herder also introduced a parallel term, *Volksgeist* which is usually translated as “the spirit (or soul) of the people” but alternatives including “national spirit” or “national character” have been proposed. Factors which may determine the particular characteristics of a “people” include its “natural environment, climate and physical geography, which [have] shaped the lifestyle, working habits, attitudes and creative propensities of the people” (Heywood, 2002: 107). The geographical boundaries of a distinct population group or *Volk* may be coterminous with political boundaries allowing a combination of the cultural and political elements which then may lead to a cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism could become “anti-modern” and conservative in character (Heywood 2002: 108) and therefore highly protective of its boundaries becoming aggressively exclusive and insular when it believed itself to be under attack from foreign forces. Horsley Hinton decided that because of *The New School of American Photography* exhibition, “1900 would be known as the year of the American Invasion” (Hinton, 1900a: 261). Thomas Bedding, editor of *British Journal of Photography* summarized his feelings about the “American” show claiming it to be “a travesty of photography ... this show upsets all the old-fashioned ideals of the English photographer” (Bedding, 1900d: 759-761) A more moderate response suggested that the “foreign genius ... is not quite in accord with the English” (Guest, 1908a: 271-272). Clearly, the writers assumed that their readers would know what was meant and that there was something deeply worrying about what the Americans were doing. The British responses to the American exhibition seem to be located very close to the borders of *Volksgeist* as an example of cultural nationalism. Whereas the concept of *Zeitgeist* has been broadly accepted for its purely descriptive properties, the

thinking behind *Volksgeist* has attracted considerable controversy because of its “racist” implications. Herder’s ideas have been critically examined for the way that a supposed cultural supremacy was concomitant with claims to racial supremacy. The shift to the latter as applied by later political leaders illustrates the inherent dangers in these classifications (Hamilton 2005; Dover 1952).

There have been many attempts to analyse the links between national identity and photography created by individuals: “Photography and the idea of national identity, nation building, national heritage and archive have gone a long way together” (Baetens, 2011: 95). One commonly held assumption has been that there was a clash between the two different processes – the Daguerreotype and the Calotype – and this clash was caused by or reinforced by national differences. Such a simplistic view has been challenged by Jan Baetens in arguing that the medium of photography – *regardless of process* – rapidly became representative of a nation itself (Baetens 2011: 95, emphasis added). He proposed that there was a national approach to many aspects of photographic picture making and appreciation regardless of the processes employed. In support of this interesting notion, he cited the views of François Brunet: “the difference between the French daguerreotype, the British calotype, and the US snapshot cameras, is less technical than cultural (or ideological, if one prefers)” (Brunet 2000 cited by Baetens 2011: 95). In essence, Brunet appeared to suggest that there were greater similarities between a French calotype and a French Daguerreotype than between a French Daguerreotype and its British counterpart. The idea that national characteristics over-rode a common commitment to photography had the consequence that the “long-held dream of photography as a universal language” could never be realised (Baetens 2011: 95). Globalization may appear to offer the natural environment for the abolition of national “photographic” identities and that there would be a supposedly universal photographic language where national boundaries had no meaning. Such a concept was claimed for Steichen’s *The Family of Man* exhibition in the 1950s, (Steichen 1955). The evidence is that too often the

“photographic” language is that of the dominant culture. *The Family of Man* was seen to exemplify a desire to promote an American global hegemony at the height of the Cold War (Kaplan 2005: 55-81).

In his article, “Nationalities and Universalism in the Early Historiography of Photography (1843-1857)” (Brunet 2011: 98-108) Brunet has examined these ideas of photographic national identities and the opposing aspiration of a global vision in the context of certain early Anglo-French differences. His analysis suggested that some early commentators like Lady Elizabeth Eastlake had argued, amongst much else, that the new discoveries in photography might create “a new form of communication between man and man” (Eastlake 1857: 442-468) The idea that such Universalism might act as a possible antidote to the excessive nationalism on both sides of the Channel had some appeal but the reality was rather different (Brunet 2011: 98) Another early commentator, Sir David Brewster, had been equally non-partisan in his appreciation of the contributions from both French and English workers (Brewster 1843: 309-344). Brewster and Eastlake were in the minority in their balanced views on matters of supposed national photographic primacy.

The “origin narratives” developed a life of their own on both sides of the Channel, becoming a proxy for long-standing French and British rivalries over a much wider front such as described in Marien (2011). She described Arago, the prime mover of French Government support for Daguerre, as a “prescient scientist and an accomplished Machiavellian who manipulated French Anglophobia” to secure an advantage (Marien 2011: 33). This Anglophobia, she believed, was rooted in part in the British defeat of Napoleon and in part in differences in government policy over funding scientific developments. It was also exacerbated by Fox Talbot’s controversial patenting arrangements, The French government provided pensions and other government support whereas in Britain and USA there was a dependence on private capital to promote similar developments (Marien 2011: 32). For the French, “Talbot came to personify the English

challenge to French claims to primacy in the invention of the medium” (Gunthert 2002: 123). Gunthert also noted that there was still (2002) scant academic coverage in France of Talbot’s contribution beyond Jammes (1973) and Brunet (2000). He celebrated the fact that Frizot (1994) was one of the rare French historians to give Fox Talbot proper recognition (Gunthert 2002: 120). Such even-handedness appears to be a relatively recent development and markedly different from the national bias, if not outright prejudice, found in earlier histories. The partisan nature of the different interpretations of French, British and American photographs at the two major international exhibitions of the 1850s is striking. The seeking out of differences between national photographs continued to be significant in later international exhibitions such as Paris 1900, Glasgow 1901, Dresden 1909 and Buffalo, NY 1910 and in many subsequent commentaries.

It is important to acknowledge the deep-seated nature of the prejudice to enable us to understand it better, even when it appears unwarranted. Exploring its origins is helpful in identifying particular issues which become especially significant. The Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1855 provided excellent opportunities to celebrate the new medium of photography and to assess the benefits of the rival processes. Brunet noted the paradoxical situation where the “French led in the English process of the calotype and England excelled in the glass process, then considered partly French in origin” (Brunet 2011: 102-3). This reversal of the conventional views was found in the official Report of the Juries published after the exhibition. The Jury noted:

for daguerreotype portraits, America stands prominently forward; - France, first in order of merit for calotypes, or sun pictures; - England, for possessing a distinct character of her own, and presenting illustrations of nearly all the processes which have as yet been adopted (Reports from the Juries Volume I, 1852: 244).

The Daguerreotype had gained the reputation of infallible accuracy. *The Times* had written enthusiastically that the Great Exhibition [of 1851] “will at once become a perfect epitome of the world’s industry – a Daguerreotype

likeness, struck off in one moment, with mathematical precision, of the true ‘organization de travail’” (*The Times*, 17 March 1851: 8 quoted in Young 2009: 3)

Brunet identified three areas where differences between the photographs of Britain and France seemed to operate in the 1850s. In the first area, he claimed that the simplistic correlation of the mode of photography – daguerreotype or calotype, glass or paper etc – with a particular nationality, even if it had had some merit in the very earliest days, was largely discredited during the latter decades of the nineteenth-century. The great advances in camera and lens design, the adoption of new technologies, improvements in chemical processes had all led to the removal of some of the more obvious differences in the photographs of different nationalities. The introduction of Dry Plate technologies and their very rapid spread, meant that smaller scale differences, such as the introduction of variants of the gum processes, assumed a greater importance. Nevertheless there remained a need within each country for some way of recognizing national photographic identity in order to project it to a wider public and to protect it from foreign incursions. The pressure to promote a positive identity for its national photography had complex motivations. The expansion of commercial activity as a result of successful performances in photographic competitions was a clear incentive and might be quantified directly in increased sales and indirectly by the reassurance of competence or the “halo effect”. These “marginal benefits” were considerable and much appreciated by such as the American, George Eastman with his innovative Kodak developments.

The International jury for Paris 1855 had noted that French and English photography dominated their section of the exhibition and claimed that the differences between them – a French bias towards picturing monuments and English predilection for photographing landscape – were the result of cultural characteristics and artistic traditions. For Brunet, this view lacked substance although he accepted that the character of a national photography



might be shaped by its heritage from other visual arts, especially painting (Brunet 2011: 103). This has a resonance with the description of the work of Samuel Bourne who worked extensively in India but whose work appears to be fundamentally British.

Brunet's third possible element distinguishing national photographs from each other was climate and atmospheric conditions. Lady Eastlake had claimed that the "murky atmosphere of London" was to be preferred for photography over the more intense light of other countries: "Upon the whole, the temperate skies of this country may be pronounced most favourable to photographic action" (Eastlake 1857: 442-468). Lady Eastlake's reference to "murky atmosphere" was a reminder of what later attracted Monet and other painters to London. It was also one of the distinguishing features of Benington's most important Pictorialist works as discussed in Chapter V – "English air, working upon London smoke, creates the real London. The real London is not a city of uniform brightness" (Symons, 1909: 2). Against this one might put the claim that the success of US daguerreotypes in international competition was because, as a proud but unnamed American photographer stated: "an American sun shines brighter" (quoted in Brunet 2011: 103). Weaver offers a rather more sophisticated interpretation of the very different qualities of light in London and in rural USA (Weaver 1986b: 46-48). His analysis will be discussed in Chapter V.

Beyond the immediate issue of nationality and the type of photographic images exhibited in an internationally competitive environment were the wider concerns related to global political and economic challenges and national status. In her examination of international trade and cultural exhibitions, Jackson (2009) has suggested that the drive to promote them can be attributed to the need to find rational substitutes for other, potentially more aggressive, types of competition. Photography proved to be a powerful weapon in this metaphorical warfare. The political/cultural messages delivered through international exhibitions could be hugely significant. The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia, a decade

after the Civil War “demonstrated to the rest of the world that the United States was able to take its place alongside the most advanced nations of Europe” (Jackson, 2009: 22). This assertiveness, sometimes caricatured in the figure of Uncle Sam, was to be an ever increasing feature at international trade fairs, expositions or exhibitions not only in the USA itself but throughout the world. Without pursuing the issue further at this point one might mention that other symbolic figures such as Marianne, Britannia and John Bull, helped to deliver powerful messages about nationality both to a nation’s own citizens and the peoples of other nations.

The particular characteristics of different national photographs are difficult to quantify although informal evidence of their impact can be found in press reports and elsewhere. The greatly increased confidence of the USA in photography had been building from an early stage and was strongly evident by 1900. British critics of Holland Day’s *The New School of American Photography* (1900) were quick to claim how different American photography was from British photography. Following the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition which deliberately juxtaposed national photographs, there was some anxiety in Britain as to whether British photography was as superior as previously believed. The considerable tensions within the Linked Ring, which eventually led to its collapse had, in addition to a potent aesthetic conflict over what a photographic image should be, a robust nationalist strand which at times verged on the chauvinistic if not xenophobic.

Not unnaturally perhaps, commentary during WWI about the characteristics of German photography was hostile “We can dispense with enemy contributions ... for their gloom and heaviness, and pervading negation” (Guest, 1915b: 252). American work, on the other hand was “virile, trenchant and unsophisticated ... British photography is conscientious, but with a sort of sheep-like conformity to safe custom” (Tilney, 1918b: 435-436). Both of these rather glib generalizations may have some element of truth within them but they are, essentially, expressions of critical prejudice

about the circumstances of the production of the images rather than a description of the images themselves. In part, the comments are about supposed national characteristics as expressed in the photography produced and only in part the aesthetic and pictorial values involved in the production of the images.

### **A Vision of Photography: the development of aesthetic bias**

An important strand within the variety of histories of photography prepared during the nineteenth century was the emergence of an embryonic corpus of criticism of the aesthetic potential of photography. The publication of the views of Sir William Newton (Newton 1853) and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (Eastlake 1857) can be seen in retrospect as possibly of even greater significance than arguments about the characteristics of national photographs. The substance of their argument which concerned the question of how far the photographer might intervene in the photographic process was to become far more significant in later years as the technologies became more sophisticated and Pictorialist photography became a reality.

The wish to add an element of human control over the image produced, seemingly mechanically, by the photographic worker has a long and distinguished history. Russ Young in his survey of the development of soft-focus lenses reports that the desirability of “diffuse photographs” pre-dates the Pictorialist movement by many years. He noted that in 1849, David Octavius Hill had a philosophical preference for the softer images of the calotype process over the “razor-sharp daguerreotype.” Hill’s reason was that the former “look like the imperfect work of man”, the latter appear to be “the much diminished perfect work of God” (Young 2003: 25). This theological distinction demonstrates the profound implications of the impact of photography on society that go well beyond technical or aesthetic considerations.

In 1986, Grace Seiberling presented a very detailed picture of the photographic scene in Britain in the earliest years and noted a number of

significant developments in the 1850s and 1860s. Initially, she observed that:

The vision of the world which early British photographers presented in their pictures was also a vision of what photography was or could be ... Photography, in combining art and science, seemed to provide a way for them to make objective, yet beautiful records of things they found significant. ... Photography was an art-science practiced by experimenters ... [who] produced many striking pictures (Seiberling 1986: 1)

In this world, gentlemen amateurs (together with a few ladies from the aristocracy) shared a common view of the world and their place within it and they also shared the excitement of their discoveries. Although this world was soon to be interrupted by those keen to exploit the commercial opportunities of photography and by hobbyists, even these interlopers had something in common with the ‘art-science experimenters’ – an enthusiasm for exploring new opportunities. The development of professional photography as a way of exploiting the commercial opportunities followed a different path from that followed by those described as amateur. Within this latter group, Seiberling (1986) identified three types of amateur photographer. The most rapidly expanding was the group who benefitted from greatly simplified processes for taking snapshots with automatic cameras with no training and no artistic pretensions. This group created a substantial market not only for new equipment and materials but also for new journals such as *Amateur Photographer* first published in 1884. The second group was made up of serious photographers who wished to exhibit their work but lacked something of the pioneering spirit which had motivated the previous generations and tended to rely on convention to justify their practice. The third and smallest group of amateurs consisted of those who worked against established conventions and institutions in attempting to further the cause of photography as art. “Pictorialism was the late-nineteenth-century manifestation of this direction” (Seiberling 1986: 106). Moore (2005) has identified this group as “art-amateurs ... [who tended to be] well educated, leisured, and wealthy” (Moore 2005: 26-28). He also pointed out that whereas European “art amateur” groups tended to be socially exclusive, the American counterpart was more meritocratic to

the extent, as he remarks humorously, of including “women and even Midwesterners” (Moore 2005; 26-28). Gertrude Käsebier was one of the most significant members of the American Photo-Secession while Clarence H White was born in West Carlisle, Ohio of fairly humble origin.

Notwithstanding the differences in social class or wealth or the motivation and the opportunities to practise photography, the central principle of photography remained the same: “the exposure of a light-sensitive substance to light waves in order to produce a visual object” (Weinstein and Booth 1977: 176). The basic system that enables the photographic process to take place consists of a number of interdependent components. The first group is concerned with the light-proof box itself in which the light-sensitive material was held. The second concerns the aperture, usually fitted with a lens, through which the light passes together with the mechanism for controlling the amount of light admitted. The third concerns the sensitized medium in its holder; significantly different in the case of the Daguerreotype and the variations of the negative-positive process such as the calotype. The presentation of a permanent image from the sensitized medium through to its printing was also the start of another set of procedures for sharing the photographic output with others. Modifications, whether of apparatus or of the types of light-sensitive medium or of printing material, had been regular practice from the very earliest days of photography and initially would have been introduced by the ‘art-science experimenters’ themselves. Subsequently such developments might be brought about independently by a lens designer or a chemist whose work then stimulated new photographic procedures. Alternatively individual photographers initiated technological change by challenging their scientific colleagues. This symbiotic relationship has been very usefully explored by Crawford in his *The Keepers of Light: A History and Working Guide to Early Photographic Processes* (Crawford 1979)

The significant differences between the Daguerreotype and the negative-positive process developed by Fox Talbot and known as the calotype or

Talbotype have been noted earlier. The easy equation of the Daguerreotype with France and America and the calotype with Britain cannot be fully sustained in the light of Brunet's evidence from the Great Exhibition of 1851 and other exhibitions (Brunet 2011: 98-108). Seiberling claims that within the British group of amateurs, whom she categorizes as "experimenters," Daguerreotypes were relatively unimportant. There was, however, a significant use of the Daguerreotype system within the expanding commercial professional photographic portrait world. Russ Young, in introducing a summary of his work on soft-focus lenses suggests that "the choice between the daguerreotype and the calotype was in essence an argument between science and art" (Young 2003: 24). He sees the scientists demanding accuracy and detail and the artists preferring less precision and more room for personal expression. It might be argued that it was because non-Daguerreotype processes allowed a greater artistic freedom that they flourished in Britain and thus contributed to differences in national photographs but the evidence does not support such a simple solution. The daguerreotype could not be retouched in the same way that worked with the calotype, a factor which Beaumont Newhall was to use in his objections to any form of manipulation, claiming that 'straight' photography, of course, "has a tradition as old as the medium" (Newhall 1982: 167). Within the overall principle that any form of manipulation is virtually impossible using the Daguerreotype process and also that non-Daguerreotype photography flourished in Europe and the USA as well as in Britain, we need to seek other explanations for the evident national differences of photographic output.

At the heart of the concerns of the "art-amateurs" (Moore 2005: 26-28) was the need to exercise a degree of "personal expression" in their photographic images. Interest in the subject was first presented by Sir William Newton, the vice-president of the Photographic Society of Great Britain in 1853 when he argued that the photographer should aim to produce "a broad and general effect" rather than securing "every minute detail." The consequence of the subject being "*a little out of focus* ... is to increase the breadth of

effect and consequently, [to be] more suggestive of the true character of nature” (Newton 1853: 6-7, original emphasis). Newton had also commented that photography had “yet to attain that degree of perfection to represent faithfully the effect of colours [recommending that] when a tolerably faithful and picturesque effect can be obtained by a chemical or other process, applied to the negative, the operator is at full liberty to use his own discretion” (Newton 1853: 6-7) Newton’s comments provoked a considerable reaction and Seiberling suggests that he was forced to recant his views in the faces of opposition from within the Photographic Society. The controversy provoked by Newton’s reflections was noted by Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, wife of the first President of the Photographic Society. In her 1857 examination of photographic developments to date, she reported that Newton had “created no little scandal ... by propounding the heresy that pictures taken slightly out of focus, that is, with slightly uncertain and undefined forms, though ‘less chemically, would be found more *artistically* beautiful”” (Eastlake 1857: 442-468, original emphasis). Lady Eastlake argued that Newton could not have chosen a less sympathetic audience for his views. In a lightly mocking characterisation of the “merely scientific photographer ... [who would not be able to] ... comprehend the possible beauty of ‘slight burr”” she claimed that “the suggestion that the worse photography could be the better art was not only strange to him but discordant” (Eastlake 1857: 442-468) She concluded this section of her discussion with the acknowledgement that Sir William Newton had need of “qualifying his meaning to the level of photographic toleration, knowing that, of all the delusions which possess the human breast, few are so intractable as those about art” (Eastlake 1857: 442-468). She believed that there could never be agreement over what is merit-worthy in the field of aesthetics. Lady Eastlake made her position clear – that photography serves its best purpose by being the “proper and therefore perfect medium [for] mere manual correctness, and mere manual slavery without any employment of artistic feeling” (Eastlake 1857: 442-468) She justifies her position by claiming that “the desire for art resides in a small minority, but the craving, or rather necessity for cheap, prompt, and correct facts in the public at large” (Eastlake 1857:442-468)

One feature that she did applaud in photography was its record-keeping capacity which, while it could not do justice to the face of a child would allow the child's toy to be remembered with pleasure. Photography was to be valued for its ability to capture the evanescent moment in the urban scene:

we count the lines in that keen perspective of telegraphic wire, and read the characters on the playbill or manifesto, destined to be torn down on the morrow ... such mundane images, so well furnished by photography, can never be the subject of true art. The business of Photography is 'to give evidence of facts ... as only an unreasoning machine can give' (Eastlake 1857: 442-468).

Lady Eastlake's comments about the depiction of "that keen perspective of telegraphic wire" as an indicator of what she claimed was the inherent barrier to photography becoming an accepted art were turned on their head with Benington's *Among the Housetops* (1900) and *After the Storm* (1906) Benington also argued that the mundane subject must be considered as suitable for artistic treatment in photography as any other "The Beauty of Ugliness" (Benington 1904c: 282)

She was also not alone in expressing the growing confidence that technical improvements had reached the point that photography had reached a level of perfection previously unknown. Whereas the earliest arguments for sharpness and precision would have given the honours to the daguerreotype, the inherent disadvantages of that method meant that once the wet collodion process with the associated albumen prints had established an unparalleled level of excellence of presentation, the daguerreotype was rapidly discounted.

Lady Eastlake's stress on the utilitarian function of photography is reminiscent of the scene in *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens first published in 1854 where the school girl, Sissy Jupe, suggests an imaginative solution to a problem. She is reprimanded by the Inspector for 'fancying' – in the sense of using her imagination – and is warned "But you mustn't fancy ...



You are never to fancy" Thomas Gradgrind grimly repeats this warning demanding only "Fact, fact, fact" (Dickens, 1854: 6)

Striving for pictorial effect was to indulge in Sissy Jupe's crime of imagining. Dickens enlarges on the dangers of allowing the imagination to run too freely and the steps needed to constrain it. Plates with painted foreign birds and butterflies on them are not allowed because foreign birds and butterflies do not perch on plates. Because quadrupeds do not in reality go up and down walls, it is an error to represent them doing so on wall-decorations. Dickens's satire on Benthamite utilitarianism attracted and repelled the original readership in almost equal measure. The comically presented opposition between Fact and Fancy serves as a metaphor for the deeper social critique that is at the heart of the novel. The crushing power of mass industrialisation is set against an individual's need for the world of the imagination. Newton's call for "tolerably faithful and picturesque effect" through manipulation of the photographic process would, in the opinion of his critics, have given the Fancy free range. The development of soft-focus lenses as an antidote to the excessive sharpness and the concept of differential focus expanded opportunities for the photographer to render the image more "suggestive." The need to find ways of exercising some degree of personal control over the supposedly mechanical operation of the photographic process through manipulation seems to have had two purposes. Initially the exercise of a "personal control" or intervention was thought to be artistically permissible to achieve Newton's "tolerably faithful and picturesque effect." This 'permission' then appeared to change to become increasingly a necessity for the achievement of "effect." It was when this wish came to carry the additional burden of demonstrating that photography should be accorded the status of an art in its own right that opinions increasingly divided. Claims that photography could match painting for visual pleasure or might even be superior to it were, in some cases, matched by increasingly extreme interventions in the photographic processes to produce "effects."

The capacity to make an improvement which was deemed to be aesthetically pleasing rather than technically desirable, moved the argument into a different zone concerning the relationship between the photographer as mechanical operative and the photographer as creative artist. This central issue concerning intention needs to be borne in mind when considering how far manipulation might be justified in different circumstances. In 1861 the problem was set out clearly by C Jabez Hughes. He identified three levels of photography

- Mechanical photography “simple representation of the objects to which the camera is pointed. In these, everything is to be depicted exactly as it is, literal photography”
- Art photography ... a higher order “where the photographer (as artist) determines to diffuse his mind in to objects by arranging, modifying or otherwise disposing them, so that they may appear in a more appropriate or beautiful manner”
- High-art photography – certain pictures which aim at a higher purpose than the majority of art photographs and whose purpose is not merely to amuse but to instruct, purify and ennoble (Hughes 1861: 2-3 summarised from Clarke 1997: 43)

The first category is clearly related to the photography approved of by Lady Eastlake. The second category seems to offer the photographer the right to experiment, to push to the limits, to discover what will work but remain aesthetically pleasing. This personal expression is subjective and is driven by the wish to ‘make’ rather than merely ‘take’ a photograph. The third category involving the greater moral purpose of ‘high art’ is at the core of much discussion concerning painting and other visual arts during the Victorian period. The capacity of photography, as a mechanical process, to enable this to happen was addressed extensively in articles such as “The Naissance of Art in Photography” (Pringle 1893: 87-95) The debate continued over many years occupying hundreds of column inches without reaching any definitive conclusion.

A major aid in tackling the issue in this fashion is to work with the concepts explored by Joel Eisinger in *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Eisinger, 1999 particularly 1-12). He presents the argument that if photography provides only “a mechanical trace of nature” then the operator is not a creator but merely a witness. In this case, photography cannot aspire to be an art and the photographer is not an artist. If, on the other hand, photography has a transformative power “under the deliberate control of the photographer” which can allow him or her to provide a “subjective vision” then the artistic potential of photography can be confirmed. In pursuing this “transformative” power, the photographer might “assert the dominance of his or her subjective vision” through one or more of the manipulative devices available including “throwing the lens out of focus, by making a print on rough paper, by locally varying the degree of development of a negative or print, or by drawing on the negative” (Eisinger 1999: 2).

It may be helpful to look in more detail at Eisinger’s brief list of “manipulative devices” noted above. The possibility of “throwing the lens out of focus” had been examined by many but the introduction of the Dallmeyer Patent Portrait lens in 1866 was possibly the most reliable and consistent of the solutions. Russ Young (2008) has reported that this Dallmeyer lens had to wait more than twenty years before becoming widely available. The impact of this lens when reintroduced in 1889 had a profound effect on the events surrounding the publication of Peter Henry Emerson’s *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (Emerson 1889). The other manipulative devices which Eisinger mentions relate to various post-exposure processes including how the sensitized negative is developed and fixed and how the positive print is produced. At any of the stages of the processing and printing sequence there are opportunities for intervention such as hand-work on the negative or on the print itself. Many of these manipulations had a more extended history than has normally been allowed. For instance, initial experiments with gum printing are reported in

1853 whereas the ‘conventional narrative’ has the process being introduced by Robert Demachy in the 1890s.

The significance of this difference in dates lies in the fact that if all the major manipulative devices, both optical and chemical, could be shown to have been brought about by the Pictorialists almost as some kind of conspiracy, it was easier to demonize them as Sadakichi Hartmann does in his “A Plea for Straight Photography” (Hartmann 1904b: 101-109). If, on the other hand, the evidence points to the fact that each of these different devices emerged from a variety of experimental practices operating at different paces, it would be consistent with a view of the history of photography as one of technical advances having a symbiotic relationship with the needs of photographers. The convergence of many of these developments at the end of the 1880s and their significant impact in the years following, needs to be explored as part of the organic growth of photography and not as Newhall believed as “an aberration that should be eliminated” (Newhall, 1993: 46).

The type of methods used to introduce a degree of “picturesque effect” as noted by Eisinger above included mechanical/optical solutions such as soft focus lenses, chemical or physical intervention with the negative or positives and an extensive repertoire of printing processes and papers. Crawford (1979) and more recently Kingsley (2005: 619-620) have highlighted the demands made by the photographers themselves working with scientists and craftsmen on new procedures. Detailed descriptions of these different procedures are to be found in a number of texts including Harker (1979) and Seiberling (1986) with more recent guides to be found under the somewhat misleading heading of “Alternative Processes.” These often demonstrate for the present-day worker the complexity of many of the procedures and the time and skill required of the original photographers.

It may be helpful to note a few antecedents of the Pictorialists in their use of different styles of manipulation. The earliest practitioners of using two or

more negatives for artistic effect in landscapes, included Gustave Le Grey with *The Brig* (1856) and Camille Silvy with *River Scene, France* (1858). They were applauded for overcoming a deficiency in the technology to produce imaginative and artistic images. Oscar Rejlander achieved some celebrity for his “morality *tableau vivant*” *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) and H P Robinson with his *Fading Away* (1858) established a vogue for the photographic imitation of Victorian narrative painting using a number of negatives “stitched together” as seamlessly as possible. The excessive use of composite negatives for “artistic effect” became the object of adverse comment by contemporary critics but opposition to the process was more often related to its repetitiveness and predictability than its lack of adherence to photographic principles. Robinson continued making combination prints into the 1890s with *Ready for the Collier, Morning* (1894) as presented in Harker (1988: plate 102).

The “soft-focus painterly images of some pictorialist photographers” (Johnston 2005: 606) may be taken to include not only those involving the use of soft-focus lenses but also the smearing of grease on the lens reputed to be one of Julia Margaret Cameron’s favoured methods. It has been reported that even kicking the tripod was part of the repertoire of tricks performed by these photographers (Rosenblum 1997: 220) Physical and chemical handwork on the negative ranged from using an engraving stylus to score the surface to the use of gum-bichromate and other materials. The use of textured papers for the final image would add to the effect. Other rather more amateur devices were used. It is interesting to note that the first image by Benington which attracted the attention of the selectors for the second Photographic Salon in 1894 was

a straight carbon print, the blank sky of which had been relieved by means of strips of tissue paper stuck to the negative, giving much the appearance of streaky bacon; there was supplied the “personal expression” (Benington 1924: 537)

Gernsheim was in no doubt that Newton’s well-intentioned advice was a recipe for disaster – the blame for the “perversion of photography rests to a

large extent with critics” (Gernsheim 1962: 75) who encouraged experimentation in the name of artistic expression. Opposition to these interventions were identified with calls for ‘straight’ or pure photography. The first use of the phrase ‘straight’ photography was in the 1880s and is thought to have been a simple statement of opposition to multi-negative methods such as those employed by Rejlander and Robinson (Johnston 2005: 606). The more judgemental use of the word is usually attributed to Sadakichi Hartmann does in his “A Plea for Straight Photography” (Hartmann 1904b: 101-109). The significance of the demand for ‘straight’ photography as articulated by Paul Strand and others and its impact on the creation of different histories of photography will be explored in the following chapters.

Before exploring the making of Newhall’s *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) it may be helpful to note some additional forms of pre-Newhall historical writing. Most of the histories had tended to be chronological surveys of developments in photographic technology and little attention had been paid to the contribution of individual photographers. McCauley (1997b: 87-101) examined the emergence of another style of photographic history – the monograph. In this format, photographic history was explored through the work of an individual photographer who was a unique and possibly heroic figure who had brought about major change. This approach was very much in keeping with similar hero-narratives in ‘Whig’ history. The concept of an individual photographer having a unique style and something personal to convey was clearly at odds with the view that photography was merely a mechanical process. Two figures emerge as early examples of the unique individual photographer D O Hill and Julia Margaret Cameron. Hill was “rediscovered” by J C Annan in the 1890s and was claimed as the founding father of whichever style of photography was being promoted. Whereas Annan attempted to establish a pedigree between Hill’s work and the Linked Ring at the 1909 Photographic Salon, Paul Strand saw Hill as one who remained true to the camera’s unique “photographic” character. In this, he was unlike later workers who were

deemed to have betrayed photography. This theme was developed by Heinrich Schwarz in *Der Meister der Photographie* (Schwarz 1931) where he claimed that Hill's images were genuinely 'photographic' rather than merely 'artistic.' Hill was given an honoured place in Newhall's 1937 exhibition and catalogue essay. Julia Margaret Cameron was rather more problematic for Newhall because she seemed to break nearly all the rules he believed should control photography. Her work was brought to a wider public through an essay by P H Emerson (Emerson 1890) in *Sun Artists* (Boord 1889-1891). A compilation of her work published by her great-niece Virginia Woolf and the art critic Roger Fry as *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* (Woolf and Fry 1927) ensured that she remained in the public eye. Coburn had shown the work of D O Hill and Julia Margaret Cameron in his "An Exhibition of Old Masters" in 1915 as they became increasingly identified as major icons. The work of each became established as early masterpieces in the concept of the canon of great images which developed alongside the pantheon of great photographers.

McCauley (1997b: 87-101) concluded her useful survey of pre-Newhall histories of photography with some notes on the growth of modernist photography in Europe. One major landmark was *Film und Foto* held in Stuttgart in 1929. As a prelude to an extensive display of modern developments in photography, there was an exhibition of nineteenth-century work designed to show the simple original works from which the great works of the present had sprung. European enthusiasm for the new developments saw the publication of much new work including the trilingual *Fototek [Book of Modern Photography]* series published in Munich from 1930. Like many modernist developments, they soon suffered the fate of many other experimental artistic enterprises in Germany when their leading figures fled or their activities were banned. The American photographer and critic, Walker Evans reviewed several contemporary photographic texts from Germany and France in *Hound and Horn* (Evans 1931: 126-127). These included August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit [Face of*

*our Times*] (Sander 1929) and Roh and Tschischold's *Foto-Auge – 76 Fotos der Zeit* [*Photo Eye – 76 photographs of our time*] (Roh and Tschischold 1929). His review was moderately enthusiastic about the European work but it is his statement that “America is really the natural home of photography” (Evans 1931: 126-127) that lodges most firmly in the memory. A history of photography which could “prove” such a statement and which could be purveyed as the history of photography would be a very powerful statement of America's dominant position in world photography. Newhall's *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) is the archetype of such a history.

McCauley's survey of the pre-Newhall scene has provided useful guidance on how Newhall's exhibition fitted into the modernist cultural world particularly in much of Europe. She warned:

the 1930s saw a greater embrace of the photograph by what we would now define as the ‘art establishment’ ... the Museum of Modern Art's 1937 retrospective marked a new level of commitment that made it look progressive by local standards but, as we have seen, still far behind activities in Germany (McCauley 1997b: 97).

McCauley does not give any detail of the response in Britain to these developments. We do know that Newhall had noted the lack of enthusiasm for modernist ideas in photography in Britain as exemplified by the 1933 RPS Symposium on Modern Photography and Dudley Johnston's negative commentary (Johnston 1933: 144-145). Newhall had been on a course at the Courtauld Institute in London and had also met Dudley Johnston at the RPS when he visited Britain in 1936 on his European tour to select works for his 1937 exhibition.

The next chapter will explore how and why Newhall produced his iconic exhibition *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) and how he represented British photography within it. Particular attention will be paid to how he represented Pictorialist photography in Britain from 1890 onwards and the accusations he levelled against it for potentially blocking the natural evolution of photography from the original masterworks towards the



excellence of contemporary photography. The legacy of Newhall's work will be examined with a view to establishing how far his arguments influenced subsequent photographic historians and contributed to the continuing perception that the work of the Linked Ring had little true artistic merit.

### **Chapter III**

## **Newhall's *Photography, 1839-1937* and British Photography**

More strong photographers have come from the United States than from any other part of the world (Newhall 1977: 410)

Newhall's assertion, made some forty years after the appearance of his ground-breaking *Photography 1839-1937*, offers something of a sub-text to the analysis of Newhall's approach to the creation of a history of photography appropriate to the needs of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In the light of the earlier discussion of national bias and aesthetic preference, we shall be examining in some detail two particular themes. The first is how his modernist curatorial vision of photography was translated into the practicalities of the exhibition itself. The second theme is how his vision becomes evident in his treatment of British photography, particularly in his very negative responses to photography in Britain following the introduction of Dry Plate technologies in the 1870s.

The photo-historian Allison Bertrand has observed that there were few amongst the critics or the viewers who imagined that the exhibition and the catalogue it "spawned" would define the history of the medium for the rest of the century (Bertrand 1997: 137). The truth of Bertrand's observation has been borne out in very large measure by the continuing success of subsequent editions of Newhall's original enterprise. Whether he had anticipated the extraordinary outcomes of the exhibition prior to its opening, he was certainly able to capitalize on its success. Much of the material from the 1937 exhibition catalogue was republished the following year as a stand-alone volume *Photography: A Short Critical History* (Newhall 1938). Further revised and enlarged versions followed in 1949, 1964, 1972 and 1982. The 1982 edition remains in print (2015) and is often featured in academic reading lists as a standard and reliable text. However it is the 1937 version which will be examined in detail because it offers the clearest statement of Newhall's original argument.

In creating the exhibition Newhall presented a version of the history of photography whose purpose was the celebration of American Modernism. His modernist agenda was both a personal choice and an institutional and professional requirement. His commitment to the concept of 'straight' photography as the only possible photographic vehicle for the expression of modernist ideals required the establishment of two "truths".

The first "truth" was that there was a vital continuity between the very earliest photography of Daguerre and Fox Talbot and the 'straight' photography of Paul Strand and Ansel Adams. This "truth" could be found in the "fact" that there was a clear connection between "the spontaneous origin of photography [and] ... its future development ... [therefore] all the subsequent applications of photography were clearly envisaged" (Newhall 1938: 9). The claim is that the greatness of modern photography was contained, in embryonic form, in the earliest photography. Therefore anything which interfered with the proper growth of the "photographic embryo" was an offence against the natural order. The second "truth" which Newhall believed he had to prove was that the supposedly 'painterly' or manipulated work of the Pictorialists, particularly in Britain, was the complete antithesis of 'straight' photography and was therefore the enemy of the natural and preordained progress from the original masters to the modern. The grounds for his conclusions, that soft-focus and similar work was total anathema and had no place in photography, was his purely personal judgement: "When I began to make my selection of photographs for the 1937 retrospective exhibition, I treated soft-focus work as an aberration that should be eliminated" (Newhall 1993: 46)

To promote the claims of 'straight' photography as the legitimate heir of photography's founding fathers, it was essential to disprove the pedigree of any other claimants. For Newhall, British photography, particularly after the introduction of the Dry Plate process in the 1870s was increasingly deviant. His profoundly negative view of British Pictorialism will be analysed in the context of his central argument that Pictorialism with its repertoire of manipulation was a betrayal of the first principles of

photography. These, he argued, were that photography should be a truthful representation of what was present before the lens. Newhall appeared to claim that by deviating from the clear path, which he believed linked the first primitive photographers and contemporary ‘straight’ photography, Pictorialism had forfeited its right to be included in “true” history of photography.

As a result of the powerful influence of Newhall’s work on subsequent histories of photography, his rejection of British photography after 1870 has been sustained. His value-judgements became accepted as indisputable “facts” by later photographic historians who made little attempt to investigate the original source material. In doing so they were unable to reach their own conclusions independently. The outcome has been “the publication of several new histories and encyclopaedias of photography, not based on original research but, on the contrary, perpetuating old fallacies” (Weaver 1989b: xv). It becomes clear in the survey of a number of these later histories that Newhall’s dismissive account of Pictorialism has ensured that this significant phase of British photography has remained undervalued. A direct consequence of this has been that the work of many important British photographers of the period, including the photography of Walter Benington, has been marginalised.

### **The design and making of *Photography, 1839-1937***

The origins of the exhibition can be found in the determination of Alfred H Barr, the Director of MoMA in New York, to include photography within the compass of contemporary art practice. Barr had travelled extensively in Europe becoming aware that photography was treated alongside architecture and sculpture as an integral part of modern art (Newhall cited by Bertrand 1997: 145). Newhall’s initial appointment at MoMA was as Librarian in which capacity he prepared the bibliography for the first of Barr’s major exhibitions *Cubism and Abstract Art*. This exhibition was the first of four designed by Barr to establish a corporate institutional view of contemporary art. *Cubism and Abstract Art* was followed by *Fantastic Art, Dada and*

*Surrealism* (1936), then by *Photography 1839-1937* and finally by *Bauhaus 1919-1928* in 1938. Barr was determined to pursue a policy that was to earn MoMA the accolade that it was “without doubt the single most important institution devoted to the history of twentieth-century art” (Grunenberg 1994: 192)

In his autobiography, Newhall recalled the circumstances of Barr’s “invitation” to arrange a photography exhibition. His account suggests a degree of youthful insouciance: “With my training as an art historian I could handle the research in French and German and had developed a sense of stylistic analysis” (Newhall 1993: 45). Even though there seemed to have been agreement that the exhibition should provide an historical overview of photography there was an implied demand that it should meet the institutional needs of the MoMA – a clear statement of photography as a modern art.

The exhibition with 841 exhibits occupied all four floors of the museum and was designed to be “American photography’s most ambitious and consequential event ... a ‘Big Top’ show, in Alfred Barr’s phrase” (Raeburn 2006: 81). There was clearly a potential clash of interest between a genuine ‘overview’ of the history of photography on the one hand and an affirmation of photography’s modernist credentials on the other. This core ambivalence over the real purpose of the exhibition manifests itself in the arguments which Newhall deploys in the Catalogue essay. Each development in the history appears to be given a rating as to how far it may have advanced progress towards the modernist objective and how far it may have prevented progress. This inherent bias in favour of the long term objective – the celebration of American modernism – will be examined below.

What also becomes apparent is the high quality of the support which was afforded to Newhall through the appointment of Honorary Advisors. In part, their responsibility was to reassure the Trustees that the exhibition would be of the highest calibre. The Advisors included D A Spencer, a

senior technologist at Kodak in London and current President of the RPS and Kenneth Mees, Director of Research at the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, NY. They brought a good deal of technical expertise and access to current scientific and technical developments in photography. Other Advisors included Edward Steichen, the fashion and portrait photographer and Alexey Brodovitch, the Art Director of *Harper's Bazaar*. Paul Rotha, the British documentary film maker helped gain access to many of the films shown during the run of the exhibition. Charles Peignot a member of the *Union des Artistes Moderne*, a group dedicated to the principles of modern design, was a director of the French graphic arts publishers *Arts et Métiers Graphiques (AMG)* which published the influential journal *Photographie*. The final member of the Board of Honorary Advisors was László Moholy-Nagy who had a deep understanding of modernist photography and film through his work with the Bauhaus and the *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929. Significantly, the expertise and interests of the Advisors lay very much with modern developments in photography and film and clearly gave Newhall the confidence in developing the modernist platform on which the exhibition was based. The Museum's Trustees included some of the most influential and wealthy members of New York's elite and played a considerable role in promoting its commercial and cultural interests. Newhall thanked the many collectors and photographers together with many others who had contributed to the exhibition.

The entrance installation (Fig. 3.1) was the work of the Swiss-American photographer and designer Herbert Matter (1907-1984) and 'borrowed' something of the style of *Film und Foto* and similar European modernist practice (Fig. 3.2). On arrival the visitor was confronted by a life-size image of a modern photographer dynamically posed with a small hand camera. In contrast a smaller figure bends over his table-bound apparatus and appears to labour over the production of an image. The contrast is repeated in the respective size of the year with 1839 in a smaller and subordinate 'balloon' literally and figuratively beneath 1937. It is suggested that a fundamental message is being stated even before the visitor

has seen a single exhibit. The difference in scale between the two figures and the comparative ease with which the contemporary photographer handles his equipment asserts the superiority of the present over the past. After the initial dramatic display, visitors were invited to pass through a mock-up of a simple *camera obscura* and then view the images and a range of equipment.

Fig. 3.1 Beaumont Newhall, *Installation photograph of Herbert Matter's entrance installation for 'Photography 1839-1937'* Gelatine silver print, 1937 (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)\*

Fig. 3.2 Willi Ruge - Poster for *FiFo - Film und Foto - Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds*, Stuttgart, 1929 (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)\*

The tour of the exhibits was designed to impress the visitor by demonstrating progress from what Newhall called the Primitive (Newhall 1937: 20) to the Contemporary (Newhall 1937: 65). The initial display and the directed tour of the images and artefacts were both visual expressions of the teleological view which Newhall adopted throughout. The same theme was clearly evident in the narrative expounded in the catalogue with similar sections on pre-photography and the different processes during the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century through to the work of contemporary photographers. Also on display were examples of apparatus for the various processes from Talbot's calotype camera (Cat. 138) through to Leica cameras, models A and G (Cat. 622-623). The development of the 'miniature' camera was undoubtedly a pivotal moment in the more recent history of photographic technology. It was a statement of modernity taking precedence over all that had gone before. The Front Cover offered another

statement of Newhall's thinking. He used a number of sections from Muybridge's "Motion Studies" to direct the attention to the fact that one modern development of 'still' photography was the invention of the movies.

Fig.3.3 Beaumont Newhall. *Photography 1839–1937* (New York: MoMA, 1937) Front Cover (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)\*

Fig. 3.4 Beaumont Newhall, *Photography, 1839-1937* (New York: MoMA) Title page (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)\*

The exhibition was technically a loan exhibition in that the Museum did not, at that stage, have a significant collection of photographic images of its own. As such, it was Newhall's responsibility to negotiate loans from collectors and archives in Europe and the USA. He believed that he was well prepared for the responsibility.

Newhall had studied art history at Harvard which he later claimed had not really prepared him for an understanding of modern art (Newhall 1993: 23, 39). His post-graduate training had extended his critical thinking on art history through the study of the work of Alois Riegel and Heinrich Wölfflin. Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915) had offered the model of a progression of art forms from primitive confusion to well-structured order – Newhall transmutes this concept into the spontaneous origins of photography and its evolution to its present excellence. As a student he had also developed an enthusiasm for German modernist film and photography (Newhall 1993: 23, 39). He had visited Europe in 1929 and 1930, spending some time in Paris and Munich. He returned to Paris in the summer of 1933



on a Carnegie Art Scholarship. In 1934 while attending the Courtauld Institute in London, he spent time at the Royal Photographic Society with the Honorary Curator, J Dudley Johnston. Before embarking on his European visit in 1936 to select images for the proposed exhibition he undertook some preparatory reading including Josef Maria Eder's *Geschichte der Photographie*, (Eder 1932) and Georges Potonniée's *Histoire de la découverte de la photographie* (Potonniée 1925). Both texts have already been noted in the earlier discussion of nationalist bias in the writing of histories of photography.

His actual European schedule of visits was quite limited. He was well-entertained in Holland but saw nothing of photographic interest (Newhall 1993: 47). He did not visit Germany even though he had a real interest in German film and photography and had studied a number of important German-language critical texts. Alfred Barr, the Director of MoMA, had also given him the name of a potential contact in Berlin but Newhall later claimed that there were political reasons for his decision for bypassing Germany completely since "none of us would go to that country while Hitler was in power" (Newhall 1993: 49). The omission of Germany from his collecting schedule meant that Newhall lost the opportunity for securing a more representative showing of European photography than that provided by expatriate photographers living in London or the United States. He later expressed some regret for the omission of German work (Hill and Cooper 1979:382). While in Paris he met Potonniée, who was the Curator of the *Société Française de Photographie*. He also met major collectors such as Victor Barthélemy and Albert Gilles who provided him with many of the 'early' photographic images including some 'early' British works. In England, he renewed acquaintance with Dudley Johnston at the RPS and visited Lacock Abbey to select a number of important Fox Talbot works. In London he met Moholy-Nagy who had fled Germany and assisted him greatly as an Honorary Advisor. He also met a number of contemporary British photographers to arrange individual loans. He was helped in his selection of American work by Edward Weston and Edward Steichen who

earlier had been involved in the selection of American images for *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart in 1929. The following tables are intended to provide a general impression of the make-up of the exhibition.

**Table 3.1 *Photography 1839-1937* – Indicative summary of Lenders by nationality**

	American	French	British	German, Austrian,	Others
<b>Lenders</b>	76	37	19	3	4
<b>Images/artefacts loaned</b>	412	271	82	6	25

**Note Table 3.1** is designed to provide a summary of the nationality of the Lenders as an indicator of the relative importance of Newhall's sources. The Lenders to the exhibition included both collectors and living photographers. They are listed without differentiation between collectors who may have contributed many images and living photographers who may have contributed only one of their works. The number of images/artefacts loaned by each national group confirms the overwhelming contribution by American collectors and contemporary photographers as against those of other nationality. A similar imbalance is very evident between French and British collectors and photographers.

**Table 3.2 *Photography 1839-1937* – Indicative summary of Photographers by nationality**

Section	American	French	British	German Austrian	Others
<b>Early to 1914</b>					
Exhibited	56	70	16	8	
In text	28	25	16	3	
<b>Contemporary &amp; Misc.</b>					
Exhibited	70	26	10	10	
In text	24	2	1	0	
<b>Total</b>					
Exhibited	126	96	26	18	
In text	52	27	17	3	

**Note Table 3.2** looks in a little more detail at the distribution of nationalities of the photographers represented. The analysis is broken down into two broad categories similar to those used by Newhall in the catalogue. An important distinction is made between those photographers included in the exhibition and noted in the catalogue and those who are mentioned specifically in the text. Given the essentially temporary nature of the exhibition it may reasonably be argued that a reference in the more

permanent catalogue essay is potentially more significant than a place on the walls. The figures refer to the number of individually named photographers rather than the number of images shown by each photographer e.g. Brady (21), Hill (13) Cameron (4) Havinden (1). One may note the strong representation of the works by Hill and Adamson and the four images from Julia Margaret Cameron. They are however significantly fewer than the number of images by Mathew Brady. John Havinden was one of the few British photographers represented in the Contemporary section of the exhibition. Havinden is not mentioned in the text.

**Table 3.3 British representation in *Photography 1839-1937***

Cat. Nos.	Photographer	Title * illustrated as plate	Comment
<b>1-9 Before Photography</b>			
5		Photographs of a <i>Camera Lucida</i>	Lent by Science Museum, London
<b>10-78 Daguerreotypes and equipment</b> No British representation . Similar numbers of French and American images			
<b>79-138 Calotypes</b>			
81-93	Hill & Adamson	13 images including <i>D O Hill, 1843*</i> and <i>Colonel James Glencairn Burns*</i>	Prints made by Coburn for Buffalo, 1910, P'gravures by Annan from <i>Camera Work</i> 1909
115-125	Fox Talbot	11 images including <i>Latticed Window, Lacock Abbey, 1835*</i> , <i>Cloisters of Lacock Abbey c1843*</i> , <i>Shadowgraph of Lace c1843*</i> ,	Lent by Miss M T Talbot, Lacock
126	Fox Talbot	<i>The Pencil of Nature</i> 1844	Lent by the Smithsonian
138	Fox Talbot	Talbot's Calotype Camera	Lent by the RPS
<b>146-258 The Collodion (Wet Plate) Process</b>			
172-175	Julia Margaret Cameron	<i>Annie, my First Success, 1864</i> ; <i>Sir John F W Herschel, 1867</i> ; <i>Thomas Carlyle, 1867</i> ; <i>Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1868*</i>	Lent by RPS.
187-193	Roger Fenton	7 images inc. <i>York Minster 1854, Lichfield Cathedral, c1854*</i> ; <i>Tewkesbury Abbey, c1854. Balaklava, Crimean War, 1856</i>	Lent by RPS  Lent by V. Barthélemy.
194-198	Alexander Gardner – (noted as English)	5 images inc. <i>President Lincoln, 1862</i> and <i>Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg, 1863*</i>	American lenders
209	J E Mayall	<i>Prince Arthur</i>	Lent by V. Barthélemy.
211	John Moffatt	<i>William Henry Fox Talbot c1860</i>	Lent by Lacock.
224-225	Oscar Rejlander	<i>The Two Ways of Life, 1857*</i> ; <i>Portrait of Himself as</i>	Lent by RPS

		<i>Garibaldi</i> , c1860.	
227-229	Henry Peach Robinson	<i>Fading Away</i> , 1858*; <i>Fisherman</i> , c1865; <i>Portrait Study</i> , 1866	Lent by RPS.
<b>259-347 Dry Plate Photography: 1871-1914</b>			
259-260	Craig Annan	<i>Janet Burnet</i> , 1893 * <i>Lombardy Ploughing Team</i>	<i>Camera Work</i> 1907, Buffalo 1910.
288	De Meyer	<i>The Dresden China Fan</i>	Buffalo, 1910
290-291	P H Emerson	<i>In the Haysel (Norfolk)</i> , 1888; <i>Getting Ready for Fishing</i> , 1890*	Lent by RPS
299-310	Paul Martin	12 London scenes inc. <i>The Magazine Seller</i> , 1893-96*	Lent by the photographer
311-318	Muybridge	8 examples of instantaneous exposures.	Various American lenders
<b>348-624 Contemporary Photography</b>			
364-367	Cecil Beaton	<i>Princess Paley</i> , 1935; <i>Mrs Harrison Williams</i> , 1936; <i>Pavel Tchetlichew</i> , 1936*; <i>M. and Mm. Salvador Dali</i> , 1936.	Lent by the photographer
368-369	Maurice Beck	<i>Fulham Engineering Depot</i> ; <i>Crankshafts at London Transport</i> .	Lent by the photographer
377	Edward Bishop	<i>Peasant Woman</i> .	Lent by the photographer
401-404	W G Briggs	<i>Morning Dew</i> ; <i>Water Butt</i> ; <i>Nature's Pattern</i> ; <i>Thirsty Weather</i> .	Lent by the photographer
453-454	Noel Griggs	<i>Factory Chimney</i> , 1934; <i>Water Tower</i> , 1935	Lent by the photographer
455	John Havinden	<i>Piles of Sand</i> .	Lent by the photographer
487-488	Bedford Lemere & Co.	<i>St Paul's Cathedral</i> ; <i>Royal Masonic Hospital</i> .	Lent by the photographer
<b>652-690 Color Photography Exhibits</b> <b>Subtractive Three-color Processes.</b> Carbro prints using Vivex process.			
665-666	Walter Bird	<i>My Mother</i> , 1936; <i>Marie</i> , <i>Princess Troubetzkoy</i> .	Lent by the photographer
678-679	Charles Moffat	<i>Still Life with Glass of Water and Shell</i> , 1936; <i>Still Life: Books, Flowers and Shells</i> , 1936.	Lent by the photographer
688-690	Madame Yevonde	<i>Queen Mary in Dock</i> , 1936; <i>First Class Bar</i> , <i>Queen Mary</i> , 1936; <i>Portrait of Sir Rayner Goddard (Mr Justice Goddard)</i> , 1936.	Lent by the photographer
<b>716-797 Scientific Photography</b>			
739-743	A E Smith	<b>Photomicrography.</b> Studies ants, bees and flies	Lent by the photographer
796-797	G Clark	<b>Meteorological photography</b> <i>Sunset sky</i> (1936); <i>Bands of cirro-cumulus</i> , 1936*	Lent by the photographer
<b>798-841 Moving Pictures</b>			
798-809. British film-makers <b>Paul Rotha, John Grierson, J B Holmes, Alexander Korda and R H Watt.</b>			

### **Note Table 3.3**

Cat. Nos. refers to the listing subdivided as in the Catalogue.

\*illustrated as plate indicates those images reproduced in the 95 plates collected at the end of the Catalogue. As in other categories there are more American works – 39 images – than work from other countries. France with 24 images is significantly better represented than Britain with 10 images. It must be stressed that the analysis is intended solely as a guide. Nevertheless it offers a number of important clues as to the direction of Newhall's thinking.

### **Themes, sources and influences of *Photography, 1839-1937***

The main text in the catalogue was called "Introduction" and carried the main burden of demonstrating that there was an evolutionary progress of photography from the earliest days to the present. The key idea of linking the Primitive to the Present was possibly derived from the American art critic, Walter Pach. He had suggested establishing an unbroken line or a "chain of tradition" linking the modern works to the great classics of the past (Pach 1936: 5-8). For Newhall, the true destination of photographic evolution was towards the current practice of 'straight' photography.

Anything which interfered with the line of progress or suggested a deviation from it was anathema and the corrupt practices had to be identified, condemned and rooted out. His narrative was directed to identifying the various stages of this evolutionary journey. The following exploration of Newhall's text is designed as a summative impression of his arguments, albeit supported by reference to the text. Unless otherwise noted, references are to the original "Introduction" in the 1937 publication (Newhall 1937: 11-90)

The first section gives a very brief account of photography's Pre-history followed by Primitive Photography and the Daguerreotype in France and its subsequent development in America. In contrast, Fox Talbot was "a lone Englishman ... conducting similar researches" (32). Exhibits included eleven of Talbot's images plus an original copy of *The Pencil of Nature*

(1844). Newhall praised Hill and Adamson, including thirteen images by them, but claimed that the works of Du Camp and Le Secq were “as fine in their way as Hill’s portraits” (38).

Confronted by memorable images which succeed “in spite of defective technique” he argued the need for new “standards of criticism generic to photography” (41) to explain why this had come about. The Basic Laws of Photography, which he invented, see a continuing opposition between Detail: The Daguerreotype and Mass: The Calotype. This schism between the two primitive prototypes, Newhall argued, runs through the entire history of photography” (44) A central weakness of the Calotype was that it allowed the intervention of the photographer in the making of the exposure and this may “mar a perfect negative” (45). The potential for intervention in the photographic process is central to the argument of what is acceptable in ‘true’ photography. Photographers and painters must work with the methods and processes that are appropriate to their chosen medium and there must be no mixing of the two. In essence Newhall was declaring that within ‘true’ photography there is no place for any image-making that partakes of the painterly medium. This then becomes simplified as the ‘schism’ between the ‘photographic’ and the ‘painterly.’

The problem for Newhall was to design a set of rules based on his Basic Laws which could be used to exclude the manipulated or ‘painterly’ and yet be inclusive enough legitimately to contain the work of photographers he admired. To allow for individual vision he introduced a number of potential exemptions such as “If the design ... conveys the conception of the photographer ... it will be successful” (44) He had acknowledged the remarkable work of Hill and of Du Camp and Le Secq notwithstanding their “clumsy technique” (39) and later had to admit Julia Margaret Cameron into the emerging canon of great works in spite of her perceived abuse of process – the “brilliant success of her portraits cannot be due to this technique, however, but rather to her intuitive sense of lighting and character” (56). In effect, Newhall had to make her a special case to whom the Laws did not

apply. Throughout, Newhall promoted national rivalries noting that England was the home of the wet plate process but also of the combination printing of Rejlander and Robinson. Both were represented in the exhibition as examples of British deviations from the true path of photography. British-born Alexander Gardner was represented by five images including *President Lincoln*, 1862 and various Civil War scenes. His work together with that of Mathew Brady showed the devastation and pathos of war which were given an “appalling reality” through the immediacy of the photographic medium. Gardner’s work had a “photographic truthfulness” whereas Robinson’s “painterly contrivance” was at odds with the photographic medium (54)

Newhall’s decision to create a separate section devoted to Dry Plate technology from 1871 to 1914 was indicative of his wish to isolate the exact moment at which photography was at a critical point in its development. As noted below, 1870 was the date chosen by both Bossert and Guttman (1930) and Schwarz (1931) as the year in which true photography – *Kunst* – was replaced by *Kitsch*. Newhall acknowledged the pioneering work of the British scientist Dr R L Maddox in the development of the Dry Plate technology which allowed new freedoms for a growing number of photographers. For Newhall these freedoms could also be abused. With Wet Plate technology one might practise a limited amount of manipulation by using multiple negatives but manipulation by working on the negative itself was virtually impossible. Dry Plate technology gave almost unlimited freedom to use hand-work on the negative to achieve dramatic and creative effects.

Amongst the benefits of Dry Plate technologies of which Newhall did approve were Muybridge’s studies of locomotion which appear on the dust-jacket of the exhibition catalogue. Muybridge’s work was well represented in the exhibition together with an appreciation of other precursors of the moving pictures. The development of the hand-held camera led to the growth of interest in photography amongst the wider public and it also

offered a new way of looking at society. Paul Martin, whom Newhall met in London when selecting work for the exhibition, was well represented by twelve innovative images. This was followed by a brief account of George Eastman's invention of a camera pre-loaded with 'film' and the subsequent development of the Kodak cameras which contributed to the massive expansion of photography as a hobby for all (60).

Newhall constructed an elaborate case in favour of 'straight' photography and against the "painterly." He claimed that a group of dedicated 'non-professional' photographers wished to oppose the growing popularity of photography and the consequent perception of the 'lowering of standards' through careless practice. This elite group took great care and produced some 'remarkable' work. The consequence of this was that the select group attracted many imitators. This in turn led to the demand for competitive exhibitions, the rules for which were derived from the traditions of painting. This therefore encouraged 'painterly' photography causing the rejection of non-painterly photographic images because they did not conform to the 'new' conventions. Newhall concluded that the rejection of non-painterly (i.e. 'straight') photographic images was:

equivalent to rejecting the principles and properties of photography, and denying that straightforward, unmanipulated prints were legitimate works of art (61)

The boldness of Newhall's claim deserves reiteration. He claims that the followers of a few expert 'non-professional' photographers colluded in promoting 'painterly' work and thus rejected 'straight' photography. As Newhall does not specify individuals guilty of such actions or even their nationality, one may only conjecture that his target were the British Pictorialists. He remains determinedly unclear making no reference to the European Secessionist movements such as the Vienna Secession (1891) or the Linked Ring (1892). He does however devote considerable attention to P H Emerson. Newhall claimed that Emerson was one of those who initially had confused painting and photography and in *Naturalistic Photography* (Emerson 1889) had preached "a doctrine of direct



manipulation ... [images] altered by development [and] chemical intensification” (61) Newhall applauded Emerson’s rejection of his previous beliefs and his assertion that the new scientific control of exposure and development removed the need for any human intervention in that part of the photographic process. In effect he asserted that Emerson endorsed ‘straight’ photography. Emerson also enjoyed high status with Newhall because of his links with Stieglitz to whom he awarded a prize in 1887. In recognizing Stieglitz, Emerson was endowing him with the responsibility for continuing the fight for ‘pure’ photography in a succession that moved from the older generation to the younger and from Europe to the USA. Newhall believed that this was seemingly pre-ordained because it was Emerson, he claimed, who first coined the phrase ‘pure photography’ and therefore it was significant that he should have “singled out the work of a younger man [Stieglitz] who had quite intuitively realized the limitations of his medium but refused to be discouraged by them” (63).

Stieglitz, however, presented Newhall with a real challenge on two fronts. Firstly, he had refused to be an Honorary Advisor, questioning the purpose of the exhibition and refusing to allow any of his ‘later work’ to be included. Newhall could not ignore Stieglitz who retained a talismanic status within the wider American cultural world and this created the more substantial second challenge which was how to accommodate Stieglitz’s work within the Basic Laws he had invented to justify the exclusion of British Pictorialism. Newhall acknowledged that Photo-Secessionist photographers did intervene in the process of making photographs but he decided this was acceptable provided that “the control was ‘photographic’ that is chemical or optical” (64). Any intervention that was ‘painterly’ was, of course, not acceptable. He decided that the frequent use of the phrase ‘pure photography’ in critical essays in *Camera Work* was evidence of Stieglitz’s commitment to the vision of ‘straight’ photography. Most of the images chosen to represent European photography of the period from 1870 to 1914 were either from *Camera Work* or had been chosen by Stieglitz for Buffalo in 1910. Within the exhibition, J Craig Annan, admired for restoring the

work of D O Hill, was represented by two works *Janet Burnet*, 1893 from *Camera Work*, No.19, 1907, plate IV; and *Lombardy Ploughing Team* from Buffalo 1910. The only other British representative included as a Photo-Secessionist was the eccentric Baron A De Meyer, celebrated for his fashion photography with *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* who was represented by *The Dresden China Fan* from Buffalo, 1910. Newhall completed his survey of Dry Plate Photography 1871-1914 with praise for the work of Eugène Atget represented by twenty-three Parisian urban scenes while Paul Martin with twelve of his London street scenes was the photographer with the next greatest number of images in the Dry Plate section. Newhall appeared to be rather more comfortable with the work of Atget and Martin than with that of American Pictorialists like Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence White.

The section headed Contemporary Photography provided Newhall with the opportunity to demonstrate that the pedigree from the primitive past has now resulted in the present excellence. He had dismissed those aberrant features which he believed had threatened the realization of the true nature of photography and could now offer what he believed to be the rich harvest of important images. The parallels between the course of this narrative and the nationalities of the photographers represented in each section are clearly recognizable. Table 3.2 above demonstrated the shift in national representation from the pre-1914 position to the situation where American photography dominated in all categories. In the pre-1914 sections, France and, to a lesser extent, Britain had made significant contributions to the exhibition and their importance was acknowledged by reference within the narrative.

In the Contemporary and Miscellaneous sections of the exhibition, there were few non-American images and artefacts and even less recognition in the commentary. Of the British photographers represented in the catalogue, only Cecil Beaton is mentioned in the main text. Beaton had already established something of a reputation as a fashion photographer with notable aristocratic connections. It is worth noting at this juncture that

Beaton himself published his own commentary on photography in his war-time study *British Photographers* (Beaton 1944) which will be examined in Chapter VII. Other “contemporary” British photographers exhibiting in this section were committed to commercial and advertising photography or adopted a forthright documentary style. John Havinden’s abstract *Piles of Sand* was a notable exception. Havinden’s impatience with the prevailing anti-modernist views of the British photographic establishment will also be discussed in Chapter VII. Within the Miscellaneous section, there was clearer recognition of British contributions to contemporary photography. Colour photography using the Vivex process which had been developed by D A Spencer, President of the RPS and one of the Honorary Advisors, enjoyed good coverage with images from Madame Yvonde and two others. Two British photographers A E Smith and G Clark were included in the Scientific Photography section. The Moving Pictures section included the work of Paul Rotha (another Honorary Advisor), John Grierson, J B Holmes, Alexander Korda and R H Watt.

Newhall drew parallels between contemporary developments in photography and their primitive precursors. In this he was following the pattern of two important European exhibitions which had significant displays of early photography as a prelude to the show of contemporary work. The better known of these two exhibitions was the ambitious *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart in 1929 for which Moholy-Nagy curated the Photography section (Horak 2013). Room 1 of the photography section was devoted to early photography while the main body of the show was concerned with contemporary work. It is interesting to note that the selection of the American work for *Film und Foto* had been split between Edward Weston (West Coast USA) and Edward Steichen (East Coast USA). Neither Stieglitz nor Strand was included – Newhall later recalled that Stieglitz had refused to be involved in any way with *Film und Foto* (Hill and Cooper 1979: 381). The more recent *Exposition internationale de la photographie contemporaine* was held in Paris in the Spring of 1936. Like *Film und Foto*, the Paris exhibition made the vital link between

Contemporary Photography and its antecedents as a way of establishing the notion of pedigree. Georges Potonniée, one of the most important photo-historians had written the introduction to the “section rétrospective 1839-1900” for this exhibition (Potonniée 1936b)

Both *Film und Foto* (1929) and Paris (1936) showed the importance of building on the pedigree linking the ‘objectivity’ of early photography to the *New Objectivity* [*Die neue Sachlichkeit*] to be found in the best contemporary photography. Reflecting his own strong interest in German modernist film and photography, Newhall had recommended not only Moholy-Nagy’s Bauhaus lectures, noted above, but also Werner Gräff’s *Es Kommt der Neue Fotograf!* [*Here Comes the New Photographer!*] (Gräff 1929) which he described as “A successful attempt, in words and pictures, to demonstrate how the camera can be used in a purely photographic manner as a medium for powerful and varied artistic expression” (Newhall 1937: 93). His suggested reading list also included the works by Bossert & Guttmann (1930) and by Schwarz (1928-1929) which had highlighted the 1871 watershed when photography could no longer be considered as *Kunst* but had degenerated into *Kitsch*. The powerful influence of these and other texts is considered below in the analysis of Newhall’s sources.

His enthusiasm for photographic developments in Germany did not result in a significant German representation in the exhibition itself or in his commentary. He noted the experimental work of Dadaist Christian Schad which drew its inspiration from Fox Talbot’s ‘primitive’ photogenic drawing (69) but was more excited by the work of the Paris-based American Man Ray even though his solarisations appear to transgress the rules of ‘true’ photography. He noted that after the war, Steichen – “formerly an active member of the Photo-Secession” (71) – had increasingly sought for detail and maximum control of light values. Stieglitz’s post-1917 work was considered to be “noticeably different from his earlier work and has a precision of detail which gives a special value to this photographer’s always remarkable vision” (71). By locating the early works of Steichen and

Stieglitz as very much in the past, Newhall was, in effect, managing to ‘contain’ the American Photo-Secession movement. Such work clearly had to be recognized by being represented in the exhibition, but the absence of any commentary on individual works is significant – it had been formally acknowledged but was part of the non-useful past and could therefore be marginalised.

Newhall then turned to ‘straight’ photography, claiming that it had two basic requirements. The first was that the photographer should produce “unretouched prints from unmanipulated negatives” the second was that there should also be “the utmost clarity and detail of the image” (71). Impressive attention to detail in the work of Atget had a strong influence on the Group *f64* and others whose work was also well represented both in the exhibition and in the illustrations. Newhall had also admired Strand’s meticulous care for detail and his skill in capturing the “lyrical quality of nature and of man” (71)

One can argue that it was in the display of contemporary photography and the analysis of it in the Introduction, that the exhibition most fully met the institutional objectives of MoMA as mapped out by Barr and Newhall. The presentation of the photography from previous generations was primarily concerned not with its unique qualities but with how far it could be shown as an antecedent of what was to follow. In very simple terms Primitive photography was valued not for itself but for what it presaged. It becomes clear that Newhall planned the exhibition to demonstrate the evolutionary path followed by photography from its very beginnings to its contemporary status within MoMA. This required the construction of a suitable pedigree for ‘straight’ photography as the natural beneficiaries of the best of primitive photography. He needed to provide evidence of a direct link between the “magnificent nineteenth-century work” and the contemporary work he so much admired. He did so by claiming that ‘straight’ photography was the upholder of ‘true’ photographic values which derived from the founding fathers of photography. The ‘photographic values’

inherited from the Primitive Photographers were the use of photographic processes which eschewed the ‘painterly.’

Newhall had claimed Hill as an eminent forbear because his work was “direct and simple ... portraits and genre scenes [which] have an inner life that is profoundly moving (35) and he “sensed the character of his medium intuitively” (41) Newhall explained that the success of Julia Margaret Cameron’s portraits could not be due to her use of poor definition lenses and printing with deliberate lack of precision “but rather to her intuitive sense of lighting and character” (56) For both artists, the key word is ‘intuitive’ with its suggestion of primitive genius. Hill and Cameron had both remained in the public eye through publication of their work in *Camera Work* and through their presentation in Coburn’s 1914 exhibition *Old Masters of Photography*. Both had also featured in important exhibitions in Vienna (1928), Stuttgart (1929) and Paris (1936). Both were therefore integral to the body of evidence which Newhall could mobilize in support of his case.

Newhall concluded his survey with some comments on Moving Pictures about which he accepted that he could give only the “barest outlines of a complex and powerful medium” (88) He acknowledged that film and still photography have very different aesthetics. Film created its own time; the still photograph stopped time, and held it for us. What has been recorded is gone forever.

The faces that look out from the daguerreotypes and calotypes have vanished. Our ways of looking change; the photograph not only documents a subject but records the vision of a person and a period (90)

Ironically, although he claimed these early images document important historical aspects, he used them not for this quality but purely as the primitive prototypes of the newly perfected photographic images. Demonstrating the evolution of photography from its most primitive forms to its contemporary excellence – thus making it worthy of a place within MoMA – was his over-riding objective.

One feature of Newhall's preparation for making the exhibition was his study of German and French texts; their influence is particularly noticeable. In 1931, Heinrich Schwarz had published *David Octavius Hill, Der Meister der Photographie* [*David Octavius Hill, Master of Photography*] (Schwarz 1931). The book was published in an English translation in the same year. Newhall praised it as an "Excellent introductory essay on the sociological reasons for, and technical development of, primitive photography" (Newhall 1937: 95) Schwarz's text was based on his research for the exhibition *Die Kunst in der Photographie der Frühzeit 1840-1880* [*Art in Photography of the Early Period 1840-1880*] in Vienna (Schwarz 1928-1929). The exhibition, in which the majority of images were from Austria with some from France and Britain concluded with a substantial showing of nearly thirty works by D. O. Hill. Schwarz praised these for the way that the photographer had harnessed the medium's "undreamed-of strength and effectiveness" (Schwarz 1931: 17-18). Schwarz applauded the photographers of the *frühzeit* [early] generation, which he designated as pre-1870, for their commitment to the "artistic mission of photography" (Schwarz 1931: 8). From 1870 onwards photographers committed themselves to "the impressionistic view [which] ran counter to ... absolute objectivity" (8) Schwarz dismissed such work as "inartistic aberrations [which violated] the very nature of photography" (11). Schwarz's views are remarkably similar to those expressed by Moholy-Nagy in his 1925 Bauhaus Lectures (Moholy-Nagy 1925: 41) Newhall quoted approvingly Moholy-Nagy's belief that photography had moved from the brilliance of the Daguerreotype through to a period of painterly imitation before it "reached the possibilities of exploiting its own means" (Newhall 1937: 69) Schwarz declared that it was only in the late 1920s that photography came to be acknowledged as a "new, independent medium of artistic creation subject to its own peculiar laws" (Schwarz 1931: 9). The idea of special laws that are 'peculiar' to photography has a good deal in common with the thinking behind Newhall's Basic Laws.

Schwarz dated the crucial turning point in photography to 1870 which was also chosen as the effective terminal date for Early Photography by other German photo-historians whose works were published in the early 1930s and with which Newhall was familiar. Camille Recht concluded his collection of early photography, *Die Alte Photographie* [*Old Photography*] (Recht 1931) in 1870 as did Bossert and Guttman in *Aus der Frühzeit der Photographie 1840-1870* [*From the Early Years of Photography 1840-1870*] (Bossert and Guttman 1930). Both books were cited by Newhall in his recommended reading with the latter praised as “an excellent pictorial survey of calotypy, daguerreotypy and collodion photography” (Newhall 1937: 92). Bossert and Guttman’s book included 200 images with trilingual captions and two essays in German – “Von Niépce bis Nadar,” [*From Niépce to Nadar*] and “Von Kunst zu Kitsch” [*From Kunst to Kitsch*]. Like Schwarz, they declared that ‘true’ photography ended in 1870 because:

whatever came after that date is so untrue, hollow and blown up for our views today, and is so totally opposed to today’s objective photography, that we could not possibly reproduce photographs from after 1870 (Bossert and Guttman 1930 unpaginated quoted in Gasser 1992: 56)

Newhall had, in fact, reviewed Bossert and Guttman’s book in 1932 for *The American Magazine of Art* and had praised the collection for “The high level of the works ... [which] will be a surprising revelation to many, particularly because of the astounding modernity of feeling” (Newhall 1932: 130). Significantly, Rejlander’s *The Two Ways of Life* and Robinson’s *Fading Away* were included in Bossert and Guttman’s selection: both were identified as examples of *Kitsch*.

The use of the word *Kitsch* to define post-1870 photography is particularly powerful. The concept of *Kitsch* originated in Munich in the 1860s to describe cheap and popular works created as imitations of ‘real’ art works. It generally carries a pejorative meaning as in Walter Benjamin’s view that it “offers instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort, without the requirement of distance, without sublimation” (quoted in



Menninghaus 2009: 39-58). The Austrian novelist Hermann Broch (1886-1951) considered that *Kitsch* was parasitic, comparing the difference between art [*Kunst*] and *Kitsch* as the difference between good and evil:

The Anti-Christ looks like Christ, acts and speaks like Christ, but is all the same Lucifer ... The maker of kitsch does not create inferior art, he is not an incompetent or a bungler, he cannot be evaluated by aesthetic standards; rather, he is ethically depraved, a criminal willing radical evil. And since it is radical evil that is manifest here, evil per se, forming the absolute negative pole of every value-system, kitsch will always be evil, not just kitsch in art, but kitsch in every value-system that is not an imitation system (Broch 1933: 62-63).

This depth of feeling against *Kitsch* may seem extreme. However, it is important to note that prior to its current use as a mild reproof of mediocrity, it was central to “debates about mass culture and the fate of modernism confronting the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s” (Tiffany 2011). The *Entarte [Degenerate] Art* exhibition, with its Nazi-led attacks on many aspects of modern art, opened in Munich on 19 July 1937.

In terms of photography, the antidote to the “inartistic aberrations” of *Kitsch* was a return to the origins of photography to gain a fuller understanding of its power and importance:

Today’s time is returning to the origins and wants to find there exemplary achievements where, based on the most thorough [56] technical knowledge and artistic taste, an image is produced which answers to the demand for strictest sobriety without killing the spirit (Bossert and Guttman 1930 quoted in Gasser 1992: 56)

This resonates with Newhall’s admission about his pre-disposition towards ‘straight’ photography when he was making his selections for *Photography 1839-1937*: “I treated soft-focus work as an aberration that should be eliminated. And I found a strong affirmation of straight photography” (Newhall 1993: 46) Although Newhall did not use the specific word *Kitsch* in *Photography 1839-1937* his rejection of soft-focus or ‘painterly’ photography as an aberration was derived from a similar aesthetic context as the earlier critical writing noted above which had no scruples in condemning it. Just as Bossert and Guttman had included Rejlander’s *Two Ways of Life*

and Robinson's *Fading Away* as examples of deviant work which betrayed photographic truth, so Newhall identified Robinson's 'painterly contrivance' as inauthentic and at odds with the true photographic medium (Newhall 1937: 54)

Newhall clearly could not ignore the importance of France and Britain in the origins of photography and he included examples of French and British work in the exhibition. In this he was greatly assisted by a small number of French collectors who supplied a good many examples. He also received support from the RPS in London and the Fox Talbot family in Lacock in Wiltshire. The representation of pre-1870 British work has been noted above, as has the inclusion of the work of Paul Martin. The omission of virtually all British photography after 1871 except that of P H Emerson has also been noted. Craig Annan and De Meyer were included in the exhibition but as part of the Stieglitz-led Photo-Secession and not by virtue of being leading members of the Linked Ring.

One might accept Newhall's selection of contemporary work primarily from the USA on the grounds that work from other countries would have little interest to the American viewing public. Certainly the selection of work and the related commentary in the second 'half' of the exhibition suggests that Newhall had effectively abandoned any idea of an international 'overview' of the history of photography. He later defended his position:

... my history of photography may appear chauvinistic, because, as far as I can see, the strongest photographers have come from this country. Or let us put it another way: more strong photographers have come from the United States than from any other part of the world (Newhall 1977: 410)

Newhall's nationalist bias and of his aesthetic prejudices in favour of "unretouched prints from unmanipulated negatives" (Newhall 1937: 71) are both exemplified in the clarity and definition of the work produced by the American modernist photographers of Group *f/64*. For Newhall they seem to represent the epitome of the photography worthy of taking its place in MoMA as truly representative of Modern Art.

Amongst the artefacts included in the Contemporary Photography section of the exhibition were five current cameras. They were an Eastman 8 x 10” view camera with stand, a popular Kodak model 620, two Leicas, and a Rolleiflex twin lens Reflex camera. The Entrance display designed by Herbert Matter (Fig. 3.1) had featured a modern photographer with a miniature camera, most probably a Leica, as a stark contrast to the clumsy bulk of the old technology. The display clearly indicated that this was the way forward. There is a fundamental problem for Newhall in attempting to rationalize the issues raised by new technologies. Using large plate cameras, “contemporary exponents of pure photography” finalise composition and exposure before the negative is made and then tend to use contact prints in which the final image remains unaltered (Newhall 1937: 72). Miniature cameras offer a different challenge – the need for enlargement – previously considered an abuse of photographic process. Newhall concluded that miniature camera photography appeared to be very different from the precepts of ‘straight’ photography in that most of the key decisions “are determined in the dark room” (75) He accepted the need for both large plate and miniature cameras – though very different in terms of their technology – because both were “entirely conditioned by the very principles of photography; both are honest and straightforward, depending on no other graphic expression” (75) This seems to be a very weak acknowledgement of the need for both technologies. One major difficulty in celebrating continuing and progressive developments is that they do not cease at the point at which the author wishes to draw the line.

### **Critical responses and the legacy of *Photography 1839-1937***

The exhibition was very well received with generally very enthusiastic reviews although Henry McBride of the *New York Sun* argued that photography had no place in an art museum (Raeburn 2006: 90) and traditionalist critics like Royal Cortissoz, long-time art critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, were very hostile. Lewis Mumford of the *New Yorker* was generally very positive. (Newhall 1993: 51) Over the next two years a touring version of the exhibition visited ten cities across the USA.

The Catalogue for *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) was originally published as a limited edition of 3000 copies. This sold out and was not reprinted. The main text of the 1937 catalogue was republished in 1938 as *Photography, A Short Critical History* (Newhall 1938). There was some restructuring to reflect its status as a stand-alone work such as replacing the list of exhibits with a series of biographical studies. The section on Stieglitz in the catalogue essay was completely re-written and he became the dedicatee of the new book and he also supplied the Frontispiece. The suggested reading list was also revised but the illustrative plates were retained.

In 1938 Newhall organized *Walker Evans, American Photographs*. The negative opinions of ‘painterly’ photographic work expressed in the 1937 *Introduction* were reiterated rather more strongly by Lincoln Kirstein in his catalogue essay for the exhibition:

In the swampy margin of the half-arts, the wallowing of painter-photographer and photographer-painter has spawned probably the most odious and humorous objects in the lexicon of our disdain (quoted in Newhall 1993: 45).

In 1940, Newhall was appointed to the newly created post of MoMA’s curator of photography which was an important affirmation of photography’s place within modern art. After war service in Europe, he returned to MoMA in 1945 but resigned in 1947 when the more populist Edward Steichen was appointed as Director of Photography. Steichen’s greatest success was his exhibition *The Family of Man* which opened at MoMA in January 1955 (Steichen 1955). In 1947, Newhall secured a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship to revise *Photography, A Short Critical History* (Newhall 1938) The task of revision proved a major undertaking partly, as Newhall recalled in 1993, because he wished to incorporate a good deal of new material. He also wished to integrate the images within the text which was a much more expensive option, reluctantly accepted by the publishers. However the publishers insisted that the new edition should be called *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* (Newhall 1949) even though Newhall claims that he thought that this was

“somewhat pretentious” (Newhall 1993: 177) Newhall also called on the Hollywood script-writer Ferdinand Reyher to help make his writing more effective (Hill and Cooper 1978: 407) Mary Warner Marien argues with some reason that “this 1949 publication may be regarded as the first edition of a new book” (Marien 1986: 210). In 1948 he had joined the George Eastman House as a curator. At the same time he began work on *The History of the Daguerreotype in America* which was finally published in 1964.

A fourth revised and enlarged edition of *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* was published in New York in 1964 (Newhall 1964) and London in 1972 (Newhall 1972). This larger format edition featured strongly on reading lists at academic institutions in the USA and elsewhere becoming in Nickel’s memorable phrase “the *urtext* for most photo history to follow” (Nickel 2001: 550). It was also claimed that “generations of students used it, partly because little else was available” (Goldberg 1993). A fifth edition, again “completely revised and enlarged” was published in New York and London in 1982 with a fifth printing in 1994. This edition remains in print and is currently (2015) available.

Crucially, although there are some important variations between editions, the core philosophy of the work has remained consistent. There is little doubt that the original exhibition was a considerable success and the Catalogue as it developed into the various editions of *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* has been hugely influential. Newhall (1937) does have the unique status of its direct link to the exhibition it served and because the catalogue essay was the opportunity for the first extended exposition of his thinking.

Nickel’s detailed analysis of the origins and development of the writing of histories of photography “History of Photography: The State of Research” (Nickel 2001) offers several potent criticisms of Newhall’s work. As we have seen, Newhall’s basic premise is that “in the spontaneous origin of photography lies the course of its future development” (Newhall 1938: 9).

We have also seen how Newhall attempted to demonstrate the path from the original primitive works to the best contemporary (American) photography. The essential link between the two ends of spectrum was a supposedly similar aesthetic perspective – a ‘pure’ photographic approach which did not involve manipulation. Anything which impeded progress along this path or which might have broken this vital link was to be condemned.

Such a claim is strikingly reminiscent of the positivist ideas analysed by Herbert Butterfield in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Butterfield 1931). ‘Whig history’, according to Butterfield, tended to be teleological in finding that events appeared to lead to what seemed an inevitable result. The main target for Butterfield’s criticisms was the writing of major historians of the nineteenth century such as Thomas Macaulay who confidently declared “The history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement” (Macaulay, 1848-1853: 1-2). The clear implication of Macaulay’s claim is that England was now (the 1850s) nearing a kind of perfection in constitutional and social affairs that could only have come about because of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The expulsion of James II was seen as the source from which all current benefits stemmed. Butterfield argued that historians who adopted such an interpretation of historical events had a tendency to abridge the history by oversimplification and also that they favoured a belief in the agency of individuals to bring about change. When the change is perceived by the historian as beneficial, the agent effecting change was given positive or even heroic status. The reverse was equally dramatic. If an individual or a group was seen as the agent of change of which the historian disapproved, then the individual or group was seen in negative terms and was given the status of a villain. In photographic terms this can be read as – Pictorialism with its stress on personal insights and expression was considered to have been a dangerous deviation from the pursuit of ‘pure’ photography and therefore had to be rejected. A possible result of this polarisation into

heroes and villains was the attachment of moral values to actions and events and thus to individuals.

A further major criticism of 'Whig history' has been its "presentism" – the anachronistic judging of past events by the values of the present day. Butterfield characterized a typical 'Whig historian' as one who "very quickly busies himself with dividing the world into the friends and enemies of progress" (Butterfield 1931: 11). In Newhall's terms, Pictorialism was the enemy. The 'Whig historian', Butterfield argued takes "his short cut through ... complexity and has a tendency to over-simplify and rely on hindsight" (Butterfield 1931: 23). Newhall brusquely asserted, with no attempt to provide evidence, that British critical preference for "painterly photography" was designed to deny that 'straight' photographic works were "legitimate works of art" (Newhall 1937: 61). More seriously, the 'Whig historian' introduced a moral bias into his judgements (Butterfield 1973: np). Such 'Whig history' narratives could be damaging to those whose activities did not conform to the prerequisite patterns. They were rejected or marginalized on the grounds that they were unsuitable or in some way flawed. In general terms, this might be regarded as bias against the non-conforming elements and a strong preference for the norms of the ones able to exercise the power of selection. The choice of inclusion or exclusion is the essence of this power. As we have seen, Newhall exercised this power most visibly in his selections of images and artefacts for the exhibition *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) and in the arguments he put forward in the catalogue essay.

Nickel also described *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) as an *urtext* in recognition of the profound influence it has had on subsequent histories (Nickel 2001: 550). The word 'urtext' is generally understood to mean a seminal or foundational text which has great authority because it is closest to the events described. As such the text might be treated as containing the basic truths which help to form an ideological movement. One implication of this description is that the text is treated as if it were absolute in its

authority and therefore should not be questioned. Nickel argued that as a model for future histories it was deeply flawed because of “its lack of novelty, its pronounced aesthetic bias, the model of historical causation that drives it, and its essential untenability” (Nickel 2001: 550). The strong reservations that Nickel registered about Newhall’s work appear not to have deterred subsequent historians of photography. The success of his style of history encouraged the publication of many more photographic histories providing similar canonical ‘master narratives.’ These were produced by “textbook publishers and sesquicentennial museum shows ... [because] ... the general public ... wants a linear, abridged and palatable summary” (McCauley 1997: 87). The adjectives used by McCauley – linear, abridged and palatable – are particularly telling as a description of Newhall’s approach. It is linear in seeking to trace a direct path between the primitive and the present, it is abridged in that many developments are bypassed or rejected and it is palatable in meeting the needs of its potential ‘clients’ at MoMA and a wider American audience. A further concern about treating Newhall’s work as so authoritative was that it encouraged reliance on it as being an accurate account based on thorough original research. By his own admission, he did not engage in a good deal of analysis of original materials but relied heavily on secondary sources.

In a number of subsequent interviews and autobiographical reflections, Newhall elaborated on how he approached his commission. He praised the intensively researched history of Helmut Gernsheim (1955) but he considered it to be more “archaeological and encyclopaedic” than his own (Hill and Cooper 1979: 402) He identified the problem of writing a history of photography as starting “with a body [of work] collected by somebody else” (Hill and Cooper 1979: 402-403) He explained that although he had the opportunity of handling original documents during his ‘intense research’ visits to London and Paris, he, like many historians, relied on secondary sources when writing his own history. He acknowledged relying heavily on Eder’s *Geschichte der Photographie*, (Eder 1932) and Potonniée’s *Histoire de la découverte de la photographie* (Potonniée 1925). Forty years on from



his original borrowing, he also admitted that “Many of the illustrations in my book were the same images that they [Eder and Potonniée] had published” (Hill and Cooper 1979: 402-403). He then noted, seemingly without rancour, that “My collection of pictures has been drawn upon very heavily by Peter Pollack in his *Picture History of Photography*” (Pollack 1958, 1961, 1977). Newhall also acknowledged that the consequence of his ‘borrowing’ is that the “same old pictures” – or ‘chestnuts’” as Nancy Newhall called them – are repeatedly chosen. He claimed that there is a “definite demand for a certain number of masterpieces to be reproduced” (Hill and Cooper 1979: 402-403). He suggested, in justification, that a history of architecture which did not include the Parthenon or famous Gothic cathedrals would be unthinkable.

The widespread acceptance of Newhall’s version of events perpetuated his antipathy towards pictorialist work and thus ensured that a good deal of valuable and interesting work found no place in subsequent histories. After some success in the USA, a revised edition of Pollack’s *History* was published in Britain in 1977. In it he declared his purposes quite succinctly with an almost direct crib from Newhall’s opening to his 1938 edition: “It is with Photography as an Art and with photographers as artists – with the vision of the man behind the camera ... Photography was invented by nineteenth-century artists for their own purposes” (Pollack 1977: 7). Pollack continued in what seems almost a pastiche of Newhall’s version of events declaring that he would tell the reader why certain images were noteworthy and others were to be condemned. He argued that “art photography [in Europe] ... was concocted by Rejlander and Robinson ... enmeshed in the stubborn conservatism and heavy sentimentality of the academic painting that its practitioners imitated and revered” (Pollack 1977: 77) Pollack then declared that American photographers were not interested in this British decadence they were more concerned with being free to explore the “wonders of the American West” (Pollack 1977: 77). One can find many similar examples of Pollack’s “imaginative narrative.” P H Emerson was an American physician living in London and in 1892, “in

company with other earnest amateurs ... formed the Linked Ring, an international group dedicated to photography as art ...” (Pollack 1977: 77-78). Newhall had not been vexed by Pollack’s cavalier plagiarizing, nor, seemingly, by his narrative inventiveness (Hill and Cooper 1979: 402-403).

Newhall was also modifying his own version of the narrative. It has been argued throughout that Newhall had clear motives for promoting ‘straight’ photography and the modern styles of contemporary photography of which he approved. It has also been stressed that to support the notion of a clear pedigree from the founding figures of photography to their ‘natural successors’ – ‘straight’ photographers, Newhall had to discredit those whom he believed were false to the true nature of photography. The strength of his original thinking in 1937 may have diminished as the cause for which he was fighting had become the accepted norm but the results of his actions persisted. By 1949 he had abandoned his Basic Laws and made other significant changes to the text. His idea of a group of ‘painterly’ workers, especially in Great Britain, conspiring to suppress ‘straight’ photography, was effectively forgotten. In its place, there was a more nuanced account in which Stieglitz, suitably blessed by Emerson, carried forward his important work. By 1982 Newhall had given more extended coverage to the importance of the Photo-Secession in New York and in London and 1908 “American” Photographic Salon. Newhall claimed that Stieglitz and other Photo-Secessionists immediately resigned from the Linked Ring in protest at Mortimer’s creation of the *Salon des Refusés* (Newhall 1982: 162-163). In his detailed study of the *Salon des Refusés*, John Taylor has demonstrated that the resignations did not follow immediately but, as can be ascertained from the correspondence between Stieglitz and Davison, they followed some months later (Taylor 1984: 277-298). Of itself, the difference between the narratives might seem quite minor, and as the outcome was eventually much the same, might even be considered irrelevant. However, as Taylor has argued, Newhall’s adjustment of the chronology was designed to confirm the strength and boldness of the American position. This is very much in line with Butterfield’s criticisms of ‘Whig historians’ who shape

the facts to suit their needs. For Taylor, Newhall's reporting was designed to promote the conflict between "the progressive modernists and the photographers they saw as regressive diehards. In England, the regressive diehards won a Pyrrhic victory and, as a result, are widely neglected in modern histories of photography" (Taylor 1984: 277). Newhall's delineation of the two groups in such stark terms is similar to the comment concerning the post-1910 phases of Pictorialism which have been described as "the most despised art movement of the twentieth century" (Naef 1978: 57).

It has been argued that Newhall had created a history of photography which enjoyed an enormous influence on subsequent generations of historians including Pollack as noted above. To a greater or lesser extent, the same pattern can be noted in other histories. As McCauley has observed, these tended to be built round a narrative which highlights the canon and an acceptance that a history of photography is most often the history of "art" photography (McCauley 1997b: 87). To this might be added the fact that these general histories of photography tended to concentrate on early nineteenth-century photographic activity in France and Britain and subsequently the USA with the latter being increasingly dominant in twentieth century photography. Notwithstanding the 1980s post-modernist negative reactions to Newhall-style single volume histories of photography, they continue to sell. *A History of Photography - From 1839 to the present* (Wooters and Mulligan 2010) with copious illustrations and an informative and coherent text carries much the same pattern as that established by Newhall. The images throughout the book are drawn from the George Eastman Collection's 400,000 prints and negatives and such a massive resource ought to be considered sufficiently complete to provide a fully representative selection. However, if works by an individual photographer are not held in the collection, then there is clearly no chance of inclusion for that photographer in any selection made from the specific collection. Writing of Newhall's ideas first expounded in *Photography 1839-1937* as they translated into museum practice, Mulligan noted that developments in

photographic scholarship and connoisseurship grew out of his modernist teleological approach which created “a historical framework grounded in institutional authority ... [he] firmly posited the museum at the center of photographic discourse, formulating its presence as the primary voice of the study of photography both nationally and internationally” (Wooters and Mulligan 2010: 12-13)

Reflecting continuity with its Newhallian heritage, the narrative remained consistently within an American frame of reference. What the publication also highlights is that attitudes to collecting and exhibition making had developed in different ways in the USA compared with the position in Great Britain over the same period, a point to which we shall return in Chapters VII and VIII when we discuss how British photography from 1890 was represented to the public in Britain.

In retrospective mode in 1993, Newhall recalled the great success of the 1937 exhibition and restated its central message that photography was a fine art on a par with all the other arts. He was also proud that the exhibition and the catalogue had changed the way people viewed the medium of photography thus stimulating collecting and promoting photographic exhibitions in galleries. He boasted that the changes wrought by the exhibition finally reached the point where photography was taught at universities. One might also add to the list a rather different legacy. The photography of the past was valued not for itself but for what it might become. The importance of Primitive Photography as a precursor was greater than the pleasure it might give on its own merits. In meeting MoMA's institutional needs, Newhall presented a history of photography which served its particular purposes. Its subsequent status in academic teaching programmes and its enlargement and re-publication has given it enormous influence which has perpetuated a view of photography's history which has not yet been entirely discredited and continues to satisfy the general public that wanted “a linear, abridged and palatable summary” of photographic history (McCauley 1997b: 87). Whether such well-illustrated

texts begin to do justice to photographs outside the main path mapped out initially by Newhall is far from certain.

The fact remains that *Photography 1839-1937* has had an enormously powerful influence on subsequent histories of photography and by enshrining his crucial declaration that he had “treated soft-focus work as an aberration that should be eliminated” (Newhall 1993: 46) the work has created an almost insuperable barrier to the proper appreciation of British photography especially of the period from 1890. Even when trends in the writing of photographic histories began to change, the position with regard to British photography post-1890 did not appear to have been much improved. Newhall’s dismissive account of Pictorialism has ensured that this significant phase of British photography has continued to be undervalued. The prevalence of such views can be found in one of the most influential critiques of British photography – John Szarkowski’s declaration

For purposes of approximate truth, it might be said that photographic tradition died in England sometime around 1905 (Szarkowski, 1973: 120)

Szarkowski’s comment will be examined in more detail later but it serves as a suitable transition to the next section of the study which will explore the crucial period of British photography from 1890. The following chapters will provide a study of aspects of the life and work of Walter Benington within the context of post-1890 British photography which will directly challenge Newhall and others. It will demonstrate that the photographic history of the period was a good deal more complex than has previously reported. Above all the following chapters will celebrate Benington’s work and provide the evidence that his oeuvre is deserving of a full reappraisal.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Walter Benington and British Photography from 1890**

three dots and a smear don't make a foreground, nor do four fat finger marks and a black line a tree (*British Journal of Photography* 1899a: 615-617)

The following three chapters will examine the work of Walter Benington within the rich photographic activity in Britain from 1890. We shall offer an extensive review of events in Britain during one of most momentous period of its photographic history as a riposte to the versions of events promoted by Newhall and others. In doing so, we shall call for a far more nuanced interpretation of the ways in which different themes intertwine than has usually prevailed. Without some level of objective analysis to open up the events, there is a real danger that the conventional stories will prevail and much fine and exciting work will remain hidden. The use of original sources is an antidote to Newhall's somewhat cavalier treatment of British photography. It will also help to counteract later versions of the history of photography which have incorporated Newhall's vision into their own narrative without attempting to verify the accuracy of his account or the validity of his conclusions. Mike Weaver's key warning concerning the danger of "perpetuating old fallacies" (Weaver 1989b: xv) is a reminder of the absolute necessity of examining original sources to counter the possibility of any misreading of events.

As noted in the previous chapter, Newhall's rejection of what he characterised as painterly "soft-focus work" on the grounds that it was "an aberration that should be eliminated" (Newhall 1993: 46) has proved enormously damaging to a proper appreciation of British photography from 1890. As a consequence, the period has remained little known outside the fields of specialist research. Only certain of the more detailed studies of British photography of the period from 1890 such as Jeffrey (1975), Taylor (1978), Harker (1979), Weaver (1986a) and Roberts (1996a) and more recently Liddy (2003 and 2006) have explored the subject in any depth and have included Benington amongst those who made important contributions to the development of Pictorialism in Britain. Apart from a number of

studies by Mellor (1975, 1978, 1980) little attention has been paid to what may be called the immediate post-Pictorialist period of British photography. It was during this period that Benington continued to produce a range of impressive images in a wide variety of genres.

These chapters will examine a number of pivotal moments when British photography was under intense scrutiny and when the cast of events helped to define how photography in Britain was perceived both by the British public and within the wider international community. Benington was deeply involved in this complex scenario and his efforts to remain true to his own photographic identity during this period directed him along new paths and offered him a number of significant challenges. In broad terms, this chapter will explore the period during which the Linked Ring Brotherhood was established in 1892 and Pictorialism became the driving force of photographic expression. It was during this period that Benington started to build his reputation as a major figure within the Linked Ring. Chapter V will examine in some detail three of his key Pictorialist images before following his career through to the final years of the Linked Ring. Chapter VI will review the aftermath of the break-up of the Linked Ring and his move to professional portrait photography and other projects. This chapter will provide the opportunity to share and celebrate some of his post-Pictorialist work which has remained even less noticed than his earlier Pictorialist masterpieces.

### **Benington's Formative Years and the rise of the Linked Ring**

Benington was born into a strongly committed Quaker family in Stockton-on-Tees where his father was involved in the Tea Importing and Wholesale Grocery trade. On the death of his mother, the family moved to London when Benington was still a boy. He attended University College School a leading non-conformist school attached to University College within the University of London. In addition to the standard curriculum, he was trained in draughtsmanship and drawing by teachers from the adjacent Slade School of Art. He was introduced to photography while still at school

where he experimented with a number of different cameras and with a variety of printing processes (Benington 1924:540 ff and 1929: 299). On leaving school in 1891, he was employed by A T Clarke Photographic Engraving Co. of 35/36 Shoe Lane, EC adjacent to St Paul's Cathedral. It was from the roof of the Shoe Lane buildings that he took a number of his most important images – a fact recognized in the name *Housetopper* which he chose as his *nom de guerre* on his election to the Linked Ring in 1902.

Benington also found support for his interest in photography at the Camera Club which provided a stimulating environment in which to learn and make use of the extensive range of equipment available. George Davison, a founder member of the Club, was keen to encourage young photographers and the Club's facilities would have been invaluable to Benington at the start of his career. In 1892, the Camera Club hosted the seminal exhibition of new work by sixty-eight British photographers. Its limited edition Catalogue, illustrated by platinum prints of selected exhibits, was produced in January 1893. Its Foreword stated

The intention of the promoters of this exhibition has been to gather together, by careful invitation and selection, the best photographic pictures of the year. The invitations have been limited, and addressed to those photographers only who are known to produce artistic results" (*Photographic Pictures of the Year 1893*, quoted in Harker 1979: 66).

This group of the leading photographers who wished to pursue "artistic results" resolved to break-away from the Photographic Society of Great Britain (PSGB) which they believed showed too little interest in the artistic possibilities of photography to form the movement later to be known as the Linked Ring. Dr Margaret Harker's excellent study *The Linked Ring; The Secession in Photography, 1892-1910* (Harker 1979) gives a good modern account of the background to the dispute with the PSGB and of the "Robinson Row" (Harker 1979: 1-42 and 52-54). The new group held its first meeting on 9 May 1892 (Harker 1979: 83) and its first exhibition, The Photographic Salon of the Linked Ring Brotherhood, followed in 1893. Benington recalled his first contacts with the Linked Ring.



By and by, came along the first exhibition of the Linked Ring, [First Photographic Salon, 1893] and I said, 'I will be in this next year.' And I was; and sold my picture for 15s. It was a straight carbon print, the blank sky of which had been relieved by means of strips of tissue paper stuck to the negative, giving much the appearance of streaky bacon; there was supplied the 'personal expression' (Benington, 1924: 539-540)

His search for 'personal expression' was paramount in his Pictorialist work as he explored a range of processes to achieve the desired impact. His subsequent progress can be traced in the catalogues of the annual Photographic Salons and the extensive coverage in the photographic press and elsewhere. The Salon itself was considered to be the showcase for some of the most advanced photographic practice of the day whereas the annual exhibition of the PSGB which in 1894 became the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) included some pictorial work within a mass of scientific and technical exhibits. Methods to secure 'pictorial quality' included the use of pinhole cameras which produced a soft-edged image without the use of a lens as in Davison's *The Onion Field* (Fig. 4.1).



Fig. 4.1 George Davison, *The Onion Field* (1889) Photogravure print 154 x 205 mm. Gift of Alvin Langdon Coburn GEH NEG: 23472 67:0080:0006 (photo: George Eastman House)

The use of specially prepared soft-focus lenses was favoured by many photographers determined to secure an artistic effect. Many explored the post-exposure treatment of the negative during the process of development and/or used special papers and other materials for the printing of the image.

The use of multiple negatives to create dramatic effect or to compensate for the different colour absorption rates of the current film stock remained popular but these required great skill and patience if the mosaic of images was to be successfully composed. H P Robinson continued to practise the process as seen in *Morning Mists* Fig. 4.2 while Horsley Hinton in *Threatening Weather* (Fig. 4.3) secured his effects by careful control of the post-exposure negative. Benington's rather crude device of using tissue paper on the negative may have been effective but sadly the finished print is no longer extant so it is impossible to judge the result.

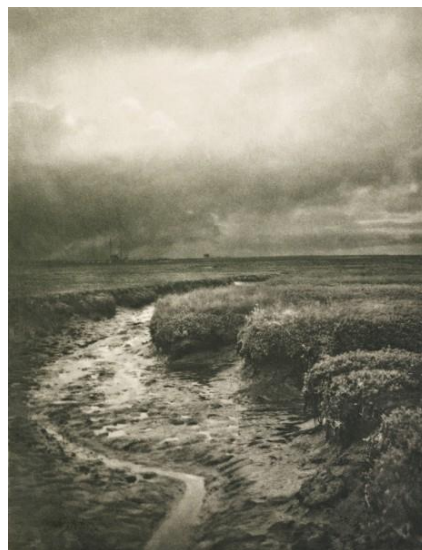


Fig. 4.2 H P Robinson, *Morning Mists* (1893) from *Die Kunst in der Photographie* 1902 (photo: courtesy PhotoSeed Archive)

Fig.4.3 A Horsley Hinton, *Threatening Weather* (1901) from *Photographische Rundschau* (photo: courtesy PhotoSeed Archive)

Critical reception of some of the experimental work at the Salons was not always favourable. It was noted of the First Photographic Salon in 1893 that “sharp focussing has few disciples ... [neither has] the extreme “fuzzy” school ... the majority of pictures have been produced by soft focussing, some by lenses and some without” (*Photography*, 1893b: 645-646). Unlike his earlier *The Onion Field*, George Davison's sheep pictures were criticised for their ‘wooliness’: “We do not mind woolly sheep at all, but we protest against the loss of form in trees, in sheep, in everything, in order to depict wooliness which when obtained, is untrue to Nature as we see it even in her softest moods” (*Amateur Photographer*, 1893c: 300-301).

The importance of the Salon was that it gave an opportunity for more challenging work to be displayed even at the expense of alienating the majority of “ordinary” amateur photographers. Hinton offered a real hostage to fortune by declaring that “Probably pictorial photography has reached a stage when any very striking departure upwards is difficult, if not impossible” (Hinton 1896: 259). There were, however, suggestions that the Salon was losing touch with the “innate conservatism of the ordinary humdrum photographer [for whom] ... Turner’s third period, and a Whistlerian arrangement [is] an abomination [because he] goes out in the middle of the day, and loves the strong light and sharp shadow (Severn 1896: 248-249). These ordinary photographers were the paying visitors at the Salon and the core readership of the host of photographic magazines. Their potential rejection of experimental work was a constant challenge to the advance of British photography. The original objectives of the Linked Ring had been restated in the Foreword to the catalogue of the 5<sup>th</sup> Photographic Salon in 1897:

Released from mechanical trammels, photography is capable of dealing with the subtleties of pictorial effect ... of producing a documentary fact [that] does not preclude the power of exercising fancy and imagination (quoted in *Photography* 1897a: 633).

The phrase “the subtleties of pictorial effect” directs attention to the delicate balance within Pictorialism between the composition of the image and the processes used to present it to the viewer. The constant quest of the pictorialist photographer was for “beauty, composition, craftsmanship, and, eventually, the sensuous quality of a good print” (Wentzel 1994: 279-281). To keep this quest alive required a constant renewal in terms of choice of process and the selection of subject matter. This gave rise to the potential charge of pursuing “originality at any price” (Lockett 1901: 104-105).

Benington’s *Fleet Street* of 1897 (Fig. 4.4) stood out from the preponderance of watery landscapes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Salon. He introduced several features which become familiar in later images including the high viewpoint and the off-set placing of St Paul’s which helps to draw the eye through the picture towards the main centre of interest, the cathedral. The detail in the

foreground is sufficiently distinct even in the shadows to provide a springboard for the move upward to the brighter and more dominant features of St Paul's. *Fleet Street* was quite well received: "a telling example of street pictures" (*Photography* 1897a: 635). "Street pictures" were something of a novelty and regarded with some suspicion as being close to the mundane. Benington's particular skill lies in recording the everyday scene with considerable pictorial effect. It achieves its impact through composition and the management of the tonal planes rather than any overt manipulation. In retrospect, *Fleet Street* (1897) can be seen as a bold statement of intent from a photographer soon to make his mark with urban scenes of even greater force.

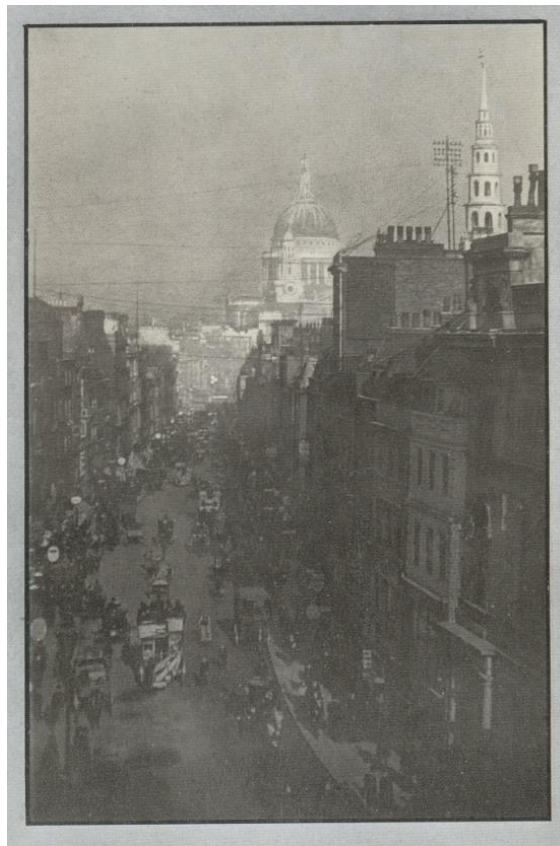


Fig. 4.4 Walter Benington, *Fleet Street* (1897) from *Amateur Photographer* 16 June 1908: 608. See also Plate II

Fig. 4.4 is the original un-cropped version of *Fleet Street* which includes the tower of St Bride's Church on the right. The tower is cropped from the RPS image reproduced as Plate II. This cropped version also appears in the unpublished portfolio, *Thirty-two Views of St Paul's* (Benington 1931)

prepared by Benington for his daughter on her twenty-first birthday in 1931. One may reasonably assume that this was his “final thought” on the image.

Benington was not represented at the 1898 Salon but the exhibition attracted considerable criticism for “the meretricious auxiliary ‘hand work’ ... the flagrant touching up and painting in on the print which the operator’s clumsiness could not produce by photographic means” (*Amateur Photographer* 1898a: 791-792). Similar criticisms were raised the following year about Benington’s *Twilight; The Windmill – Evening* and *The Windmill – Morning*. Unfortunately none of these images is extant and they were not illustrated in the photographic journals so it has not been possible to assess the validity of the comments such as:

*The Windmill* studies are somewhat distressing. In the morning scene there is an ill-assorted jumble of flocks and herds and the eye focuses on two or three dabs of white, presumably pet lambs (*Photograms of the Year 1899*: 92.)

Ward Muir’s comment: “*The Windmill – Morning*, if I remember rightly, has a brown paper frame” (Muir 1899: 305) was particularly telling. Muir was to play an important part in a later stage of British photography with his 1919 exhibition *The Fact of Beauty* (Muir 1919b) as discussed in Chapter VIII. One commentary divided the exhibits at the 1899 show into “real” photographs and others that are “utterly without the bounds of legitimate photography” indicating that *The Windmill – Morning* was clearly in the second category – “three dots and a smear don’t make a foreground, nor do four fat finger marks and a black line a tree” (*British Journal of Photography* 1899a: 615-617). Another critic was also unimpressed – “*The Windmill – Evening* is broad, but broad to baldness ... *The Windmill – Morning* so scrubbed and rubbed that the sheep much more resemble pigs, except two which look like white pigeons because the surface of the paper has completely come away and left white spots.” *Twilight* fared little better: “unfortunate as a print [and] as a composition” (*Photography* 1899c: 654-664).

The experimental gum bichromate process had been reintroduced by Robert Demachy (Faure-Conorton 2015: 5-10) and others including Alfred Maskell (Demachy and Maskell 1897) and Charles Moss. Benington acknowledged the influence of Maskell and Moss who “by their beautiful work led me into the paths of gum-bichromate printing in which I wandered for several years” (Benington 1924: 540). In the same article it was noted that he claimed to have been the first to make an oil transfer print but no evidence has been found to confirm this (*Amateur Photographer* 1924: 540). Nevertheless, Benington’s experiments with gum-bichromate were included in the 1899 Salon and subsequently selected to represent British photography in a number of International exhibitions including Demachy’s Gum-Bichromate Exhibition in Paris in 1902 (*Amateur Photographer* 1902a: 81 etc). He continued to use gum-bichromate for a number of years as well as other processes. Examples of his work such as *Over the Hills and Faraway* and *Rye Marshes* will be examined below. Soft-focus pastoral images with an appropriately picturesque atmosphere continued to dominate the Salon. In 1899 there were warnings that the experimental work was unpopular because it was not “‘kiss mammy’ enough; it does not appeal to the man in the street” (*Amateur Photographer* 1899b: 243-244). The phrase ‘kiss mammy’ was later used by the artist Harold Speed to describe paintings which were “extremely characteristic of the middle class ... [in contrast to] the hobnailed-boot paintings of modern art” (Speed [1924] 1987: 38). The warning of the potential conflict between the ‘kiss mammy’ style and more challenging approaches to photographic composition and presentation became a reality in the years leading to the collapse of the Linked Ring.

The Photographic Salon was an open invitation exhibition and, in theory, Links and non-Links enjoyed the same rights to be selected. Nevertheless the selection committee, known as the Hanging Committee, tended to favour the work of the elected Links and of their like-minded friends. To be elected to the Linked Ring required the unanimous agreement of existing Links. In recognition of his growing reputation, Benington was elected to the Linked Ring in 1902 taking the name *Housetopper* in recognition of his

trademark location on the roof of his works in Shoe Lane. From 1899 he had been a regular choice as one of those representing Great Britain at International exhibitions such as the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 (*Amateur Photographer* 1900c: 103 etc) and the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 (*Amateur Photographer* 1901c: 312 etc).

Among the many other issues raised in the photographic press and elsewhere concerned the relationship between photography and painting and whether photography should be accorded the status of a Fine Art. The debate continued to occupy many column inches including contributions from George Bernard Shaw who provided two entertaining articles “The Unmechanicalness of Photography” (1902a: 286-289) and “The ‘Life Study,’ ‘The Fuzzygraph,’ and ‘The Under-Exposed’” (1902b: 305-307). Benington added to the discussion with a brief article “Photography and the Painter” (1903a: 63) when he argued that photography and painting each had separate lives and one should not be subservient to the other. Benington’s views on the craft and art of photography and his espousal of modernist views in, for instance, “The Beauty of Ugliness” (1904b: 282) will be examined below.

Another source of friction was the increasing presence of non-British work at the Salons which critics claimed was included at the expense of British work. Since its foundation, the Salon had thrived on international cooperation and competition and the Linked Ring included in its membership many of the leading figures from Austria, Germany, France and the USA. The benefits were mutual with British work represented at a variety of International exhibitions and foreign photographers making a strong showing in the Photographic Salons and elsewhere. However, as will become evident in the examination of the three major exhibitions held during 1900 and 1901 and the Salons of those years, the tensions already identified began to be more fully revealed as British photography was confronted by the challenge of developments from abroad.

## **1900-1901 – Paris and an American “Invasion” plus Glasgow and a European Warning**

1900 was significant for two exhibitions which were to have a considerable impact on the development of British photography over the next decade. The Paris *Exposition Universelle* was held in the Spring of 1900 and Fred Holland Day's *The New School of American Photography* exhibition opened in London in the Autumn coinciding with the 8<sup>th</sup> Photographic Salon and the RPS Annual exhibition of 1900. The Glasgow *International Exhibition* opened on 2 May 1901 with 9<sup>th</sup> Photographic Salon and the annual RPS exhibition following in the Autumn of that year. An examination of these exhibitions provides a useful measure for determining the international strength of British photography at the turn of the century. The findings point to a sharp divide between an increasing insularity and complacency amongst those who applauded much British photography and an eagerness amongst others who believed that full engagement with international colleagues would benefit the development of British photography by learning from others.

British representation for the photographic section of Paris 1900 was something of a mixture of pictorial prints alongside examples of scientific and medical photography, work from professional studios, experiments in colour photography and of different printing techniques. In one sense, therefore it could be said to represent that true state of British photography. The Pictorial section was selected by Reginald Craigie acting on behalf of the Camera Club/Linked Ring. Included in Craigie's selections were images from the 1899 Salon by George Davison, F H Evans, Alfred Maskell, Charles Moss, Walter Benington and Alex. Keighley. Their work had already been shown at the Photo-Club de Paris. In effect, the group had become the elite of British Pictorialists.

A major issue was where the Photography section would be located in the overall plan of the *Exposition*. Robert Demachy, on behalf of the Photo-Club de Paris, complained that Photography had been located in Liberal



Arts, “alongside of geography, musical instruments, etc” (Demachy 1900a: 463-464). This was regarded as a retrograde step by those who believed that photography should be placed alongside its sister arts such as painting. American photography was not represented in Paris at all. This was not because of a deliberate boycott as some claimed but simply, so Stieglitz explained, through lack of time to prepare a representative selection (Stieglitz 1900a: 44). Germany and Belgium were also absent although there was a good representation from Austria. A further complaint was that exhibits from the different countries were haphazard in arrangement making it impossible to get a sense of national identity amongst the exhibits. Demachy commented that the British exhibits had a “peculiar interest ... covering ten years of fructuous (sic) labour, and showing the widely diverging tracks followed by the pictorial workers of the decade” (Demachy 1900a: 463-464)

Benington’s selection as a ‘national representative’ at the first major International exhibition of the new century marked a real step forward and his reputation was further enhanced by his contributions to the 1900 Salon – *Among the Housetops* and *Peace*. The Salon itself was praised because

there is nothing commonplace ... a few extreme but nothing excessive ... [it] holds out encouragement to those who are working on unconventional lines, seeking to give expression to ideas which were formerly considered outside the pale of photography (*Amateur Photographer* 1900h: 243-244).

The strong American presence was generally welcomed and was linked to the concurrent *The New School of American Photography* exhibition organized by Fred Holland Day. Stieglitz’s absence through “ill-health and pre-occupation” was noted with the comment that “His work has always appeared most closely allied to the best British work” (*Amateur Photographer* 1900h: 243-244). Hinton had earlier claimed Stieglitz’s affinity to British photography because his work “has been known, honoured and repeatedly medalled in this country” well before these newer photographers came forward and “Stieglitz is as fine and vigorous in his pictures today as ever” (Hinton 1900a: 261). The antagonism between

Stieglitz and Day as to who might best represent American photography is an interesting sub-text to the commentary.

*The British Journal of Photography* launched a violent attack on the 1900 Salon and particularly on the American work on show. It is worth quoting a typical passage of Thomas Bedding's editorial diatribe, in part because of its extravagant language and in part because, despite its bluster, it actually taps into the same vein of criticism that identified post-1870 manipulation with moral deviancy. This resonates strongly with the views of the German photographic historians such as Bossert and Guttman cited by Beaumont Newhall in 1937 as discussed in the previous chapter. Bedding complained of:

Deplorable travesties of photographic work ... We saw it coming, this Cult of the Spoilt Print and now it has infected the Photographic Salon.... an insult to the public ... incalculable harm to photography by attracting to it the contempt of those who have no sympathy with the prostitution of a beautiful method of graphic expression to the lamentable idiosyncrasies of those whom Nature, for some inscrutable purpose, has endowed with a passion for the grotesque and the ugly, which may deserve our pity, but neither our admiration nor our imitation ... there is no law to forbid people debasing the powers which sixty years of photographic research and progress have placed within their grasp; but when the painful productions of these perverted uses of photography are dragged from the impregnable security of privacy and held up to public view, then, in the minds of all sensible photographers, scorn, disgust, and contempt dispute for pride of place (Bedding 1900b: 613-615)

The strong American presence at the 1900 Salon did not entirely dominate the reviews of the exhibition. The press response to Benington's two exhibits, *Among the Housetops* (Fig. 5.2 see also Plate VII) and *Peace* (no image available) was indicative of a widening gap between those who favoured a soft pastoralism and those few who looked for something more challenging. *Among the Housetops* "shows to what lengths some people will go for the sake of obtaining out-of-the-way subjects, and is a bad view photographically of roofs and chimney-pots" (*Photographic News* 1900b: 655-656) *Peace* was considered to be rather better: "most romantic and

convincing ... fine breadth and largeness, and the light and shade are splendidly rendered (*Photography* 1900b: 651-659)

Steichen's response to *Among the Housetops* is significant for what it tells us of the international view of British photography: "Its very unpretentious subject ... lack of 'prettiness', its simplicity of treatment ... and the unique composition makes it a striking note among the many conventional things at the show" (Steichen 1900: 343-345). Steichen dismissed Benington's *Peace* for the very reasons that most of the British critics liked it – its prettiness and romantic idealism. The fact that Steichen was a young American artist newly arrived from Paris and was associated with Fred Holland Day and *The New School of American Photography* did not ingratiate him with many in the British photographic establishment. Steichen's views on the problems in British photography will be explored in more detail as part of the wider survey of the state of British photography triggered by the responses to the Glasgow International of 1901. *Among the Housetops* (1900) itself will be examined, together with *The Church of England* (1903) and *After the Storm* (1906), as part of the more detailed survey of Benington's work as a Pictorialist photographer in the next chapter.

Overlapping the 8<sup>th</sup> Photographic Salon was the seminal exhibition billed as "An exhibition of prints by *The New School of American Photography*, supplemented by an additional collection of one hundred examples of the work of F Holland Day, of Boston, USA, held by the Royal Photographic Society" (*Amateur Photographer* 1900j: 281-283). Its declared intention was to represent American photography to Europe – specifically to Britain and France, the cradle of photography. As an assertion of national independence, it challenged the old order and did so at its very heart in London and Paris. The exhibition and strong representation of work from the USA at the Salon and at the Royal caused Horsley Hinton to dub 1900 as "the year of the American Invasion" (Hinton 1900a: 261) The exhibition also played a significant role in the struggle for control of developments in

photography in the USA, reflecting as it did the intense personal conflict between the major protagonists, Day and Alfred Stieglitz. Hinton made the point that in the absence of Stieglitz, the exhibition was not truly representative of American photography because it presents the work of a “particular cult, very interesting and by no means to be put aside as the ‘Cult of the spoilt print’” (Hinton 1900a: 261). The majority of press coverage was reasonably favourable. R Child Bayley, one of the most percipient of commentators and editor of *Photography* welcomed it as

something absolutely new, new in aims and ideals, new in methods, new and startling in its results ... the most interesting photographic exhibition it has ever been our lot to see ... [Holland Day] had done British photography and photographers a service which it would be difficult to exaggerate (Bayley 1900b: 693-694)

A similarly radical view came from Haldane Macfall, the art critic and literary luminary and a keen amateur photographer urged the public not to miss the show (Dane, Hal [pseud. Macfall, H] 1900: 323). Macfall re-enters the account of Benington’s photographic activities some years later with his introduction to Gaudier-Brzeska in 1912. Bedding’s editorial tirade about “the Cult of the Spoilt Print,” condemning the American contributions to the Salon as quoted above, was followed by an excoriation of Day’s ‘blasphemous’ images and his morality. Bedding argued that the show would do nothing to further the claims that photography could or ever would be a fine art. His final criticism was particularly telling: “To the very end ... this show upsets all the old-fashioned ideals of the English photographer” (Bedding 1900c: 677-678).

The sense of moral outrage may be associated with the decadence of “the mysterious darks, the decorative velvet textures of the subdued platinum prints, and the generally high aesthetic tone of the subjects” (Jussim 1981: 144-145). Jussim claimed that the English wanted no part of anything that reminded them of aestheticism and the Oscar Wilde scandals. She also considered that the English regarded the *New School* “as an affront to robust, hearty, realist, masculine England” (Jussim 1981: 145).

Unfortunately, she has offered no evidence for her caricature of the British

beyond her interpretation of Bedding's diatribe. Nevertheless both Bedding's comments and Jussim's interpretation of them emphasised the continuing issue relating to national bias almost amounting to xenophobia which dogged much of the critical responses to photography in 1900.



Fig. 4.5 Fred Holland Day, *Nubian Chief* (1897) Platinum print 207 x 184 mm. Gift of 3M Company: ex-collection Louis Walton Siple GEH NEGS: 28794 25877. 77:0211:0001 (photo: George Eastman House)

Fig. 4.6 Edward Steichen, *In Memoriam* (1901, printed 1904) Gum over platinum print 498 x 403 mm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1933. Accession Number: 33.43.48 (photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)\*

Fig. 4.7 Fred Holland Day, *Beauty is Truth* (1900) Photogravure. 187 x 172 mm, The Camera Club, New York. Gift of Albert Boni. Object number 115.1944.1 (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)\*

Robert Doty, a respected authority on Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession considered that Day's *New School* show was "unquestionably the final move in establishing the reputation of American pictorial photography before the previously hostile stare of the European public and press" (Doty 1978: 25). To a considerable extent it achieved Day's ambition of creating a positive interest in American photography in London and Paris.



Fig. 4.8 Walter Benington *Keeper of the Harem* (nd) from *Amateur Photographer*, 16 June 1908: 598

Harker has identified, in very broad terms, some of the features of the New American School. These included:

the sacrifice of almost all detail for strength of effect ... the reduction of tonal value gradation to as few tones as possible ... very free use of deep shadow with proportionately small space for light ... very limited use of the middle tone range ... emphasis on strong rather than graceful lines of composition" (Harker 1979: 111).

Some critics and photographers, felt threatened by "the voluptuous shadowy subject matter emerging from the low-key platinum prints" (Jussim 1981: 144-145). Harker has identified a further important difference between the *New American School* and the prevailing British modes, namely the diversity of subject matter that could be treated pictorially (Harker 1979: 111). Images such as Steichen's *In Memoriam* (Fig. 4.6) and Holland Day's

*Beauty is Truth* (Fig. 4.7) provoked a deep unease amongst many British viewers. Benington was one who responded positively to this particular challenge with *Keeper of the Harem* (Fig. 4.8) which is strongly reminiscent of Day's *Nubian Chief* (Fig. 4.5) exhibited at the 1900 Salon. Although *Keeper of the Harem* (Fig. 4.8) was not exhibited until his retrospective One-Man Show at the RPS in 1908, it may possibly have been taken earlier. Sadly the original is no longer extant and we therefore have to rely on a half-tone reproduction from *Amateur Photographer*.

Benington was attracted to Day's work and owned twelve original prints by Day. These were later donated to the RPS in 1937 (*Photographic Journal*, May 1937: 352). *The New School* exhibition also had a profound impact on Benington as an individual. He recalled in his brief autobiographical note in 1924 that he had been powerfully influenced by:

the sermon preached by Holland Day when he brought over that fine inspiring collection of American work ... [he demanded] that the whole of the composition, pattern and tones, should be in the negative, and that the ideal print should be absolutely straight (Benington 1924: 539-540)

At first sight, the comment seems counter-intuitive because much of Day's work appears to be very contrived with the subject carefully staged and the whole manner of the image highly stylized. In fact, Day's argument concerns composition of the whole image and he stresses that photography might only aspire to the same status as the finest painting or etching if it adopted the same intense training as that undertaken by the painter or etcher. Day particularly identified the major weakness of much photography – the lack of understanding of “the elementary rules of a picture's anatomy” (Day 1900a:74-79). He argued that the failure to master line, mass and tonal values arose because too many photographers believed that the camera would do the work for them. Day stressed that “to produce art with the camera, just as much serious thought, just as much hard study, just as much rigorous training, is necessary as to produce the same end through any other medium is indispensable” (Day 1900a: 74-79). Benington's summary of Day's argument “that the whole of the composition, pattern and tones,

should be in the negative” (Benington 1924: 539-540) captures the key point that the photographer must have created the picture in his mind before the plate is exposed. Benington made this point about planning in the article “Housetop Photography” (Benington 1906) which will be discussed later.

Amongst the many critical comments about the Paris *Exposition Universelle* in the Spring of 1900 was the difficulty of comparing the different national schools of photography. This was, of course, exacerbated by the absence of the Americans and some other important photographic nations. *The New School of American Photography* presented a strong selection of work from the USA but it was somewhat compromised by the absence of Stieglitz. Some measure of comparison in national standing was, of course, possible by the presence of a good deal of non-British work at the Photographic Salons. It was only at the Glasgow *International Exhibition* which opened on 2 May 1901 that work from many nations was exhibited in a manner allowing for direct comparisons between the different national schools of photography.

The declared intention of the Glasgow exhibition was to present “the best international exhibition of Pictorial Photography ever seen in this or any country” (*Amateur Photographer* 1900f: 163) The selection was made by a committee chaired by Craig Annan. Although a founding member of the Linked Ring, he enjoyed the confidence of senior members of the RPS. He travelled throughout Europe including meeting with Ernst Jühl who had been responsible for a number of major photographic exhibitions in Hamburg. Annan corresponded with Alfred Stieglitz to secure the best representation of American photography making a considerable play of their shared membership of the Linked Ring to secure a thoroughly representative collection of American work. Stieglitz, it turn, praised the exhibition for offering no prizes; the invitation to exhibit being reward enough. Even more pleasing was that photographers were crucially

on an equal footing with painters, sculptors, architects ... the first time in the history of Pictorial Photography that it found itself



welcomed and officially recognised in the cathedral of Fine Art simultaneously with its older sisters (Stieglitz 1902a: 217-218).

There were over 500 works from 200+ photographers drawn from Britain (108), France (41), America (34) plus others from Germany, Belgium, Russia, Italy, Austria and India. The Linked Ring was very well represented with 45 of its 75 members having works on show. Annan drew on the Salons of 1899 and 1900 for the majority of the British selection with Benington showing *The Windmill – Morning* (1899), *The Windmill – Evening* (1899) and *Among the Housetops* (1900).

*The British Journal of Photography* carried a lengthy and largely favourable review of the Glasgow exhibition, although it made the point that the pictorial photography in the Fine Arts section was not as interesting as the wide range of British work in Applied Arts and Science and Technological sections. It also noted the marked differences between the national schools: “the French may be termed beautiful and *chic*, the German massive and strong, the American intellectual and poetic, whilst our own school may be characterized as strong in landscape” (*British Journal of Photography* 1901f: 280-281). Craig Annan also introduced the work of D O Hill to a wider audience than it had previously enjoyed. The French Arts and Crafts commentator, H C Marillier claimed that Hill’s “little scene in the Grey Friars Churchyard ... is beaten by few of the modern things in the room” (Marillier 1901: 102-104). Exhibiting Hill’s work alongside later work tended to provoke comparisons unfavourable to the modern works on show. This happened in 1909 when the Linked Ring tried to demonstrate its pedigree by claiming a direct line from Hill. Beaumont Newhall, who rated Hill’s work as vastly superior to anything produced after 1870, used much the same device in *Photography 1839-1937*.

The most trenchant criticism of British photography in Glasgow and elsewhere came from Ernst Jühl of Hamburg. He felt that although English work was of a generally good standard there was too much reliance on “extraordinarily *thorough pictorial photographers*, who in their time have

been epoch making” (Jühl 1901: 368-369, original emphasis) Britain lacked inspirational people like Clarence White and Steichen in America, Hofmeister in Germany, Henneberg, Kühn and Watzek in Austria. Jühl argued that rather than resting on its laurels, Britain needed revolutionaries who had sufficient individuality to “create new and valuable things.” Instead, Britain had very low sights celebrating that “definition is finally defeated, and only different degrees of diffusion are recognised” (368-369.) He stressed how little England seemed to recognize the dangers of stagnation and warned that if she wished to regain her status as:

a leading photographic nation ... [befitting] the birthplace of artistic photography – then young forces must develop, they must break with what has already been accomplished, by taking new paths – they must resolve to seek further afield (Jühl 1901: 368-369.)

This was a considerable indictment. J C Warburg, who had translated the article from the German, urged readers to study Jühl’s text in its entirety and to use the remarks as a good opportunity to review the current situation (Warburg 1901: 370-374.) Surprisingly, perhaps, Jühl’s commentary seemed to be accepted by many as a fair reflection of how things stood. The veteran Frank Sutcliffe, one of the earliest members of the Linked Ring, rejected a good deal of the article but did observe, perhaps rather mischievously, that the call for originality was:

too much to expect [of] a solid beef-eating Briton to put any poetry into his work ... he hears of common-sense being so much better than sentiment or feeling ... British photographers have become too machine-like to be artists but we have one consolation, ‘we are eminently respectable. Original, progressive, artistic, we dare not be’ (Sutcliffe 1901: 429-430.)

Much of Jühl’s commentary concerning the stagnation of British photography had been foreshadowed by Steichen’s comments the previous November (Steichen 1900: 343-345). Hinton had little time for the twenty-one year old Steichen, Day’s “more joyous and impetuous companion” (Hinton 1900b: 283). He dismissed Steichen’s images as those of a young American upstart, complaining rather peevishly that “Few have attracted so much attention or made so big a reputation in so short a time ... *Pool – Evening* [fails because] when evenings are as dark as this they are called

night” (Hinton 1901g: 244-5). Jühl, a much respected senior European with known Pictorialist credentials, could not be ignored. His comments were met not so much with outright rejection but by a suggestion from Hinton that it is not “stagnation” to continue to enjoy the English countryside which “wipes out the dolorous touch of city life ... [we need] a little pause to look around and weigh things carefully ... [and] avoid being engulfed in a quagmire of eccentricity” (Hinton 1901i: 470-471). Dismissing the innovative as “eccentricity” runs as a constant theme in much of the history of British photography of this period.

The 1901 Salon was accepted as “singularly free from both the commonplace and the merely bizarre” (*Photography* 1901b: 650-658). Benington continued to make a strong impression with *Over the Hills and Far Away* (Fig. 4.9) “This little view is a grand and illimitable landscape ... It has the appearance of an untouched negative straightforwardly printed” (*Photography* 1901b: 650-658). Unlike his strong gum-bichromate prints, this was a platinum print of very modest dimensions.



Fig. 4.9 Walter Benington, *Over the Hills and Far Away* (1901) (aka *Across the Valley*) Platinum 84 x 112 mm. RPS collection, gift of F H Evans 1937. (photo: RPS) See also Plate III



Fig. 4.10 Walter Benington, *Rye Marshes*, (c. 1907) Gum 108 x 195 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS) See also Plate IV

Fig. 4.10 provoked the exasperated inquiry:

what is happening at Winchelsea? The visitor will have some difficulty in deciding whether it is a volcanic eruption, a terrific squall or merely heavy passing cloud (*Focus* 1907c: 318).

It is important to register that the marked contrast between *Over the Hills and Far Away* and *Rye Marshes* demonstrates Benington's technical versatility and his imaginative treatment of the pastoral genre within the broad pictorialist frame.

*Rye Marshes* is an excellent example of the quite extreme approach about which many of the critics were concerned. There seem to be two issues in particular involved in criticising it. One is the question of whether the level of manipulation is in keeping with photographic principles – which relates to the argument about 'straight' photography expounded by Strand, Newhall and many others. The other issue is whether it "works" as an image – whether, in fact, it is a pleasing picture. That is essentially a subjective judgement. In its original state in the RPS archive, it is perhaps rather easier to respond to its tactile qualities than in the current reproduction – see Plates III and IV. The two images also confirm the wisdom of Nickel's comment that:

the pictorialist movement, reflecting contemporary Arts and Crafts philosophy, wished to disavow photography's technological basis--its adherents took great pains to make the by now industrialized photograph appear to be a handmade, unique object, expressing the sensibility of the artist (Nickel 2001: 549)

### **Forthcoming battles**

In a perceptive analysis, Antony Guest warned of the forthcoming battle between “the vulgar popularisers and the small but steadfast group who wish to raise their craft into a medium for the exposition of beauty and art ... Such a fight [was needed] for the clearance of the pictorial rubbish that is undermining the artistic standard of the day” (Guest 1901b: 242-244). Included in the “pictorial rubbish” were the populist “kiss-mammy” images complained of two years earlier. Those keen to promote only the more advanced work and to maintain the highest of technical and aesthetic standards were determined to apply rigorous selection policies and thus to exclude much work that they considered weak. To encourage greater international participation in the Salon it was mooted that there should be pre-selection panels in USA, Germany/Austria and France and that their recommendations should be accepted without any interference from the British Selection Committee. This was strongly contested by those fearing the foreign takeover of a “British exhibition.” The constant battle for the Linked Ring was therefore one of trying to resolve these issues in ways that would satisfy all parties. The photographic journals followed developments with partisan interest.

Similar struggles between the experimental and populist factions were taking place in Germany where Ernst Jühl of Hamburg who acted as an unofficial co-ordinator of a major Pictorialist annual exhibition in Hamburg was forced to resign from editing the monthly journal *Photographische Rundschau*, effectively the showpiece of many German photographic societies. His “crime” was to have supported Fred Holland Day (Warburg 1902a: 287-288) Warburg reflected on the lack of public understanding of the more experimental forms of art including photography. The significance

of Warburg's commentary is that it encapsulates problems that were clearly applicable to Britain. These issues included the mass v the elite, the mechanical v the hand-worked, the aesthetic v the philistine and realism v impressionism.

Benington was increasingly making his mark both in the Salon and on the international round of exhibitions such as Demachy's Paris Gum-Bichromate Exhibition and at the annual exhibition of the Photo-Club de Paris in May 1902. There was also a strong British representation at the Turin International exhibition with all those participating receiving a commemorative medal. Benington had been elected to the Linked Ring on 29 April 1902 and installed on 22 September 1902 with all the solemn rituals of the Brotherhood. The 1902 Salon had a number of innovations including a more sympathetic arrangement of the gallery designed by F H Evans. Evans was also noted for an unexpected diversion into the gum bichromate process with a landscape which he acknowledged had stretched his ingenuity.



Fig. 4.11 Walter Benington, *The Mere* (c. 1902) (aka *The Silent Pool*) Platinum 110 x 202 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924). (photo: RPS) See also Plate V

Benington showed three works which demonstrated his versatility in the process. *Water Babies* was “pleasantly and decoratively arranged ... a nice piece of tone.” *A Cornish Coombe* was a landscape of great scope, but followed the “bad fashion and print[ed] in treacle” (*Photography* 1902a:

663-672). The same commentator was more appreciative of the platinum print, *The Mere* (aka *The Silent Pool*) Fig. 4.11 which “depicts a romantic piece of water over which trees meet on all sides, made full of dreaminess and mystery by the low light that percolates through the thick verdure” (*Photography* 1902a: 663-672). Others also disliked the trend of “painting in treacle, sometimes of dirty blotting paper, sometimes of a soiled duster. We hardly know which is most inartistic and tasteless, the grit or the treacle” (*Photographic News* 1902b: 614-616)

*The British Journal of Photography* was still very grudging about the Photographic Salon but recognized that there is “an almost entire absence of the common place stuff which used to form the padding of the exhibition” (*British Journal of Photography* 1902a: 773). However, in a declaration which would have gladdened Newhall’s heart, the journal declared that it was concerned about what it considered to be the fraudulent attempt to pass images using a variety of painterly processes as photographs. It argued that if a painting disguised as a photograph was rejected so should a photograph masquerading as a painting. The campaign against foreign work also continued with the claim that:

there is a sentiment in British work which is entirely different from that of any other nation ... It is a clean, healthy sentiment which finds no necessity for mythiuous (sic) suggestions, but it is not the fashion and receives scant encouragement at the Salon (*British Journal of Photography* 1902a: 773).

In contrast, *Amateur Photographer* reminded readers why the Salon had been established and reviewed the developments, warning the reader not to be too hasty to condemn foreign workers, especially not the Americans. The journal argued that the public should be grateful to the Linked Ring for the opportunity to see the best French, German, Austrian and American Pictorial photography (*Amateur Photographer* 1902f: 223-224 and 1902g: 276-277). In remarks very similar to Ernst Jühl’s comments after the Glasgow exhibition of 1901, *Photography* sounded a warning note about the Salon “Six years ago this exhibition would have taken the world by storm ... Freshness, pioneering and naivety are conspicuous by their absence ... There

is no youth ... The Salon is outworn, blasé ... Amateur photography of the artistic sort has got stuck” (*Photography* 1903b: 254-262).

One exception to this jeremiad was Benington’s *The Church of England* (Fig. 1.1, Plate 1) “a striking effect of smoke and atmosphere” (Brookes 1903: 287-288) in which “the murkiness and peculiar picturesqueness of London are forcibly realised ... St Paul’s Cathedral looming beyond the smoke-encumbered housetops” (Guest 1903a: 243-245). Others joined in the praise: “It represents St Paul’s Cathedral rising into clear air out of the sea of roofs and fog ... it is a cleverly handled print, and has pictorial qualities of a high degree” (*Photography* 1903b: 254-262) There were similar responses to *The Church of England* in other photographic journals and in the national press. The image was selected as the *Picture of the Year* in 1903 with a note that Benington had prepared the half-tone block and border from which it was printed (*Amateur Photographer* 1903j: 473). The note is an important reminder that Benington was working full-time as a glass block maker and that he fitted his photographic activities into his free time. He explained the exact circumstances of taking the image in his 1906 article “Housetop Photography” (Benington 1906) which will be examined in the next chapter. His other contributions to the 1903 Salon were less successful. There was praise for his *Portrait* of a young girl but the landscapes were not well-liked. *Browsing* is “a gum bichromate disaster ... [and] there is a wide margin between *The Field Path* and a successful landscape” (*Photography* 1903b: 254-262)

Details of the World Exposition to be held in St Louis, Missouri in 1904 had begun to emerge in 1902. One of the major issues was whether photography would be exhibited within the Fine Arts as in Glasgow 1901 or whether it would be located with the Liberal Arts as in Paris 1900 where it had been housed with musical instruments. Stieglitz believed that photography would be placed within Fine Arts but when the organizers reneged on this “agreement” Stieglitz, together with his Photo-Secessionist colleagues, boycotted the Exposition. In April 1904, Stieglitz provided a



brief article justifying his actions and blaming the organizers (Stieglitz 1904: 287-288). Hinton justified British acceptance of photography being with the Liberal Arts as a reasonable compromise and explained that the Photo-Secession was the American equivalent of the Linked Ring, but not international. Hinton also suggested that the Photo-Secession claimed to be “much more radical and definite in its aims, policy, and claims” (Hinton 1903b: 484). Hinton’s acceptance of the organizers’ decision irked Stieglitz who later cited it as an example of British lack of commitment to the ‘cause’ (Beinecke Letters 285/1 and 285/2, Davison to Stieglitz, 2 April 1909 and 6 April 1909 and 285/3 and 285/4 Stieglitz to Davison 10 April 1909 and 15 April 1909). For Benington, St Louis had been a personal triumph with the award of a Grand Prix for *The Church of England*. In other respects it was, at best, rather disappointing. The difficulties at St Louis seemed to exemplify the growing differences between British and American approaches to photography and perhaps give a foretaste of what was to come over the next few years as the Linked Ring struggled to resolve the conflict between its international aspirations and the domestic demands of showing British photography.

The St Louis affair continued to dominate the photographic press on both sides of the Atlantic. In Great Britain the major issue concerned the respective roles of the RPS and the Linked Ring as being the representative body for the ‘pictorial branch’ of British photography. *Amateur Photographer* called for senior figures within both bodies and any others interested to determine the best way forward. The replies were published over three weeks with some suggesting reconciliation between the two bodies. Others, such as Benington, argued that The Linked Ring should be solely responsible for pictorial photography and that the RPS should hold its own exhibition of non-Pictorialist matters once every three years (Benington 1904d: 76). Argument continued over how far the pursuit of pictorial interest might justify intervention in the photographic processes in view of the remarkable range of options available. These included the use of soft-focus lenses or working on the negative or in printing using special papers.

The photographic press was generous in its advice on the dangers of excessive manipulation in the pursuit of “personal expression.” This was matched by arguments as to the propriety of the processes and whether they remained within the true realm of photography.

*The British Journal of Photography* maintained its long-standing opposition to the Linked Ring and declared the 1904 Salon:

a triumph for the American School and the gum bichromate process [which] pervades this little collection of bastardised outcomes of superfluous lenses and cameras ... The majority of exhibits, pay the handsomest tributes to the manipulative skill of their producers (*British Journal of Photography* 1904a: 828-829).

There was also concern about the Britishness of the exhibition where out of 223 pictures, 83 were from America and 27 from Europe. The cleverness of foreign workers “producing ingenious fakes mystifying the uninitiated and amusing the expert” was roundly condemned for bringing photography into disrepute (*Photographic News* 1904b: 632). In a mock-serious appendix, it was suggested that future Salons should be divided into three classes labelled (1) Photographs; (2) Faked Photographs; (3) Paintings.

A major step forward in the acceptance of photography as an equal to other arts was the publication of *Art in Photography with selected examples of European and American Work*. (Holme, 1905) The book was well-received with praise for the excellence of the reproductions which were equal to those in *Camera Work* or illustrated photographic volumes from Germany (*Amateur Photographer* 1905c: 66). Writing of the British photographic scene, the novelist Clive Holland noted that Benington was now in the front-rank of modern pictorial photographers and *Among the Housetops* shows how “the ‘spirit’ of London meets with artistic expression” (Holland 1905: 1-16)

There were, however, tensions within and beyond the Linked Ring. A number of themes were carried forward from previous years including the continuing rivalry between the RPS and the Linked Ring as to which body

might best represent British photography. As in the previous year, *Photographic News* complained about foreign domination because nearly half the frames at the 1905 Salon – 117 out of 254 – came from European and American workers and that of the 137 non-foreign works, 72 frames came from just eighteen Links leaving only 65 pictures to represent “the great body of workers all over the country” (*Photographic News* 1905a: 603). The demand by Stieglitz for the Americans to be exhibited as a pre-selected group accentuated the problem of defining the purpose of the Linked Ring. Little was resolved during a period which seemed to be a mixture of complacency and confusion. Before we explore the turbulence of the final years of the Linked Ring, we shall examine three key images in Benington’s oeuvre.

## Chapter V

### Walter Benington and British Pictorialism

the ‘spirit’ of London meets with artistic expression  
(Holland 1905: 1-16)

Insofar as Benington is known to the wider public it is most probably through one or other of his major Pictorialist works – *Among the Housetops* (1900), *The Church of England* (1903) and *After the Storm* (aka *A Tangle after a Storm*). He discussed important aspects of the work in two articles, “Housetop Photography” (Benington 1906b: 565-566, 570, 584) and “My Best Picture and why I think so” (Benington 1907a: 108). Both articles appeared in *The Photographic News* edited by F J Mortimer who was establishing himself not only as a skilled photographer but also as an authoritative voice on British photography.

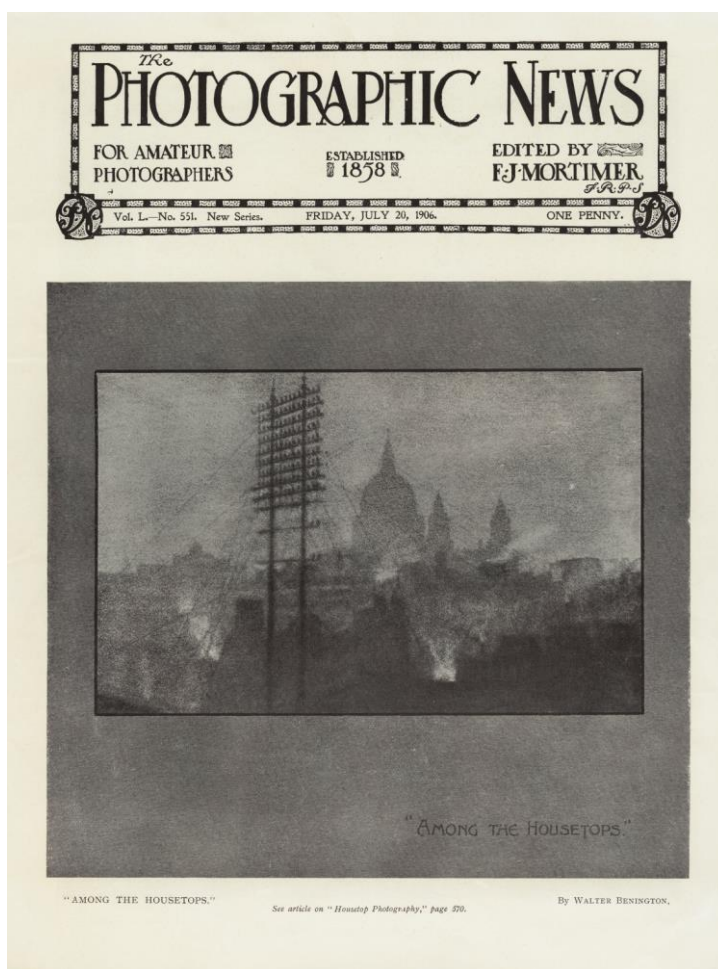


Fig. 5.1 *The Photographic News*, 20 July 1906. (photo: © Benington Collections)

### “Housetop Photography” and the RPS One-Man Show

For ease of reference, prints of the three major images discussed in the article are reproduced within the text. However better quality prints of these images have been provided as a supplement – see Plates I, VII, VIII and IX. Prints from other sources have also been used within the text, including images from an unpublished portfolio *Thirty-two Views of St Paul’s* (Benington 1931).



Fig. 5.2 Walter Benington, *Among the Housetops* (1900) Gum 350 x 240 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS)  
See also Plate VII

The editorial Introduction to Benington’s 1906 article noted that the pictures used in the article had “secured universal encomiums wherever exhibited ... *The Church of England* has often been described as the finest pictorial impression of the ‘heart of London’ ever made by photography” (*Photographic News* 1906b: 565-566). The three images under discussion offer a useful conspectus of some of the themes which thread through many of Benington’s London works – the high roof-top view-point, the London sky-line, the compositional technique, the mastery of planes and values and the handling of the special London atmosphere. Many of Benington’s images discussed so far are representative of British Pictorialist photography

of the period at its best, but the three images under present consideration have a number of very special qualities which set them somewhat apart from his other work of the same period. It is interesting to note that in curating his seminal 1987 Arts Council exhibition *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920* (Taylor 1987) John Taylor selected these three images to represent Benington's important contribution to British photography. Not only is each image deeply impressive on its own terms, but the combination of the three also generates considerable additional interest.



Fig. 5.3 Walter Benington, *The Church of England* (1903) Platinum 192 x 143 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans 1937. (photo: RPS)  
See also Plate VIII

The article, "Housetop Photography" was aimed at encouraging amateur photographers to be more perceptive of the photographic opportunities surrounding them in their work-place and always to think photographically. The title makes reference to Benington's status as a leading member of the

Linked Ring where he was known as “Housetopper.” His intended readership was:

the vast army of amateur photographers ... who have to work at other employment throughout the day, sometimes going home only to bed and breakfast, though most of us get an occasional Sunday and Saturday afternoon for recreation (Benington 1906b: 565)

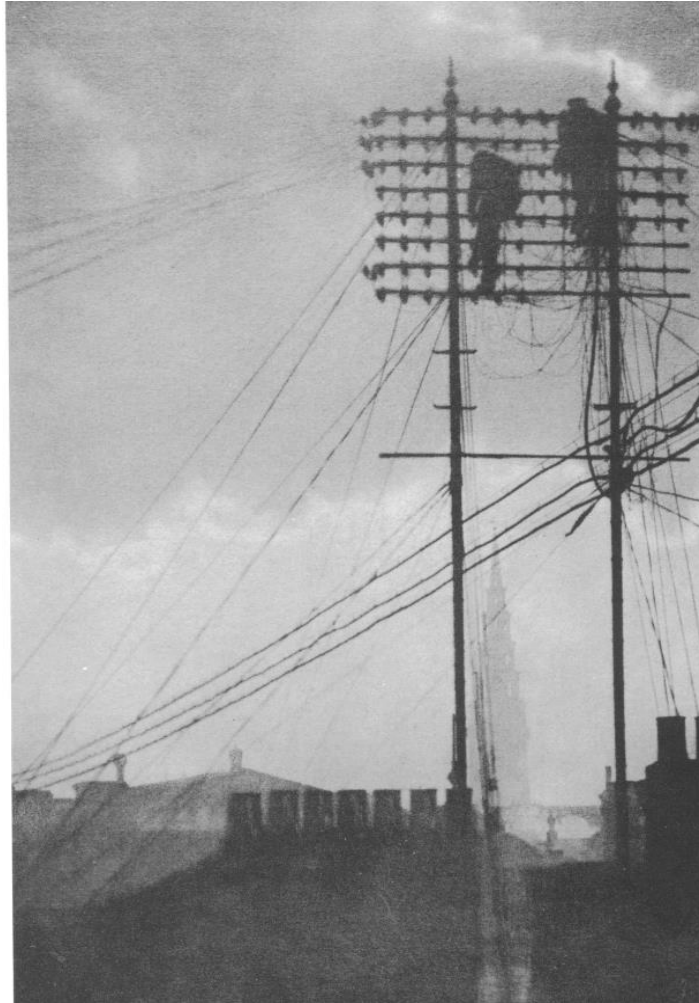


Fig. 5.4 Walter Benington, *After the Storm* (1906) (aka *A Tangle after the Storm*) Gum 280 x 190 mm RPS collection, acquired 1928 (photo: RPS)  
See also Plate IX

The “us” was not a patronising device pretending a bond between author and his readers that did not exist but a heartfelt plea that these men, deprived of the opportunity to photograph on a regular basis should act wisely. The tone is neither hectoring nor condescending but encouraging in its advice to avoid exposing plate after plate regardless of quality. He warned his readers always to make mental notes: “Pre-planning and pre-visualisation are

essential to making effective use of limited opportunities when they do come about” (Benington 1906b: 566-567) His advice directly reflected his own experience of commuting from north London to the City and his work in Shoe Lane near St Paul’s Cathedral. The extensive views from the roof of Shoe Lane provided the ideal stimulus for his photographic imagination. His description is worth quoting at length because it gives what might be called the raw material out of which he created his images:

Looking west, one sees the towers of the Record Office, which looks fine against a red sunset; to the south, the spire of St Bride’s Church peeps between two telephone poles; in the north-east the huge buildings of Holborn Viaduct Hotel and Railway Station rear up gigantic; and in the east the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral rises up and dominates the entire scene. Chimneys abound of all shapes and sizes, telegraph poles are plentiful almost as grass, the varieties of roofs are endless, and the trains of the S E and C Railway can just be seen through a gap in the chimneys, puffing forth great clouds of smoke and steam. Here surely is an inexhaustible store of subjects (Benington 1906b: 566-567)

Benington’s skill lies in translating this mass of visual activity into specific and permanent records of what was before the lens. He attempted to clarify some of the challenges he had confronted in photographing from his rooftop position. He acknowledged that he was particularly attracted to St Paul’s Cathedral:

in the forenoon, when the sun is slightly behind it, and throws it up in silhouette, when the details in the foreground roofs are not too evident with their cucumber-frame skylights, and the bricks and slates are not so distinctly seen that one feels an irresistible desire to count them, the whole being subdued and outlines softened by a light smoky veil of mist which the sun has not been up long enough to dispel (Benington 1906b: 566-567)

In a later article, he explained that he did not set out in “a scientific, reasoning frame of mind .... [the photograph] fairly well suggests the spirit of the scene ... I simply ‘feel’ my picture ... a sensation of emotion ... the shadow of a more or less poetical idea” (Benington 1907: 108) He identifies the superiority of “mind over matter, or the spiritual over the bodily [in which] the cathedral dome was suggestive of the mind or the spiritual while the roofs and buildings with their sordid smoky chimneys,



will stand for the bodily matter” (Benington 1907: 108) Such nebulous thoughts are translated into practical issues related to composition and technique. The gist of his argument was that the cathedral as the “dominant idea” must be the “chief point of interest in the composition.” This may seem obvious but it is important to remember that his lay readership would not be trained as art critics. The eye moves from the busy foreground through the different planes:

first, the foreground, with its medley of chimneys and roofs quite distinguishable; then the middle distance, in which these details, though still present, are less evident; then the cathedral dome and pinnacles, just a flat grey silhouette forming the distance; and, lastly, the grey sky of early morning forming a filmy curtain behind all. This same grey sky, though flat in tone, is yet not blank paper. The puffs of white steam give it its right value, and it suggests a luminous haze with no over-emphasised cloud effect to detract from the importance of the distant dome (Benington 1907: 108)

In both literal and metaphorical senses, the light triumphs over the darkness allowing Benington to conclude with the confident assertion – “this is the right and legitimate aim of the picture-maker – to suggest, and not to portray with too close fidelity” (Benington 1907: 108)

One critic declared: “*The Church of England* has often been described as the finest pictorial impression of the ‘heart’ of London ever made by photography” (*Photographic News* 1906b: 565-566) while another claimed that the image had become so iconic that Benington should be accorded the title of “Church of England Benington” (Blake 1908b, : 605). Its popularity became something of a two-edged sword, with critics sometimes devaluing his later images in comparison to *The Church of England*. Many of the initial reviews of *The Church of England* concentrated on his success in capturing the very special London atmosphere which, it was claimed, would “be dear to the heart of Londoners who have learned to see beauty and romance which the murky air of the metropolis often weaves around its prosaic exteriors” (*Country Life* 1903: 447-448) Others commented on “the murkiness and peculiar picturesqueness of London [with] St Paul’s Cathedral looming beyond the smoke encumbered housetops” (*Amateur*

*Photographer* 1903g: 243-245) and “the smoky foreground of roofs [which] is properly kept low in tone, sending into fine relief the dome and towers against a strong sky” (*Photograms of the Year 1903*: 136). The idea that there was a “peculiar picturesqueness” about the “murky air of the metropolis” had a long history in the visual arts and in literature. It was argued that under particular “soft” lighting conditions “things most offensively glittering, gaudy, and harsh, become beautifully rich, splendid and mellow ... though if seen or represented in the glare of the mid-day sun, they would be disgustingly ugly” (Knight 1808: 97-8 quoted in Weaver 1986: 46). An example of this proposition is provided by the contrast between two closely linked views of St Paul’s Cathedral from Benington’s *Thirty-two Views of St Paul’s* (1931)



Fig. 5.5 Walter Benington, *The Church of England – Morning* (1903) Gravure 240 x 178 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)

Fig. 5.6 Walter Benington, *From a roof in Shoe Lane – Afternoon* (1903) Gravure 235 x 180 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)

The juxtaposition of the two images illustrates the need for careful planning and precision timing to capture the moment when “the roofs and chimneys delightfully subdued by haze ... and the beautiful dome soaring up high into the heavens, pale and silvery, seeming to sing to one ... [within minutes the effect has gone] the haze has cleared off, and the dome is cold and hard and prosaic” (Benington 1907: 108) He had earlier warned that “The most

beautiful effects are almost impossible to photograph [noting that] ... when St Paul's is like a wonderful translucent silver film, not much more visible, it makes no impression on the dry plate, or so slight an image as not to print" (Benington 1906b: 566-567) The photographer must have the confidence to wait until "the dome is just a little more distinct than it is required to show in the picture" (Benington 1906b: 566-567) Benington's skill lay in being able to visualize the compositional possibilities of the scene and to recognize the special moment *before* it arrived – in essence waiting for the exact moment when the early morning light, the smoke and steam from the railway and the polluted London atmosphere all combined to produce the impression of St Paul's that he wished to secure.

He also argued that it was vital to have some idea of what one wanted to achieve and the impression one wished to convey. He returned to the subject in a later article where he attempted to explain how in creating the image, he hoped to convey:

something of the superiority of mind over matter, or the spiritual over the bodily ... the effect of restfulness and solemnity is greatly helped by the entire absence of any niggling character in the details ... *this is the right and legitimate aim of the picture-maker – to suggest, and not to portray with too close fidelity* (Benington 1907: 108 emphasis added).

This is a key statement of the Pictorialist aesthetic. Mike Weaver has offered a similar definition of Pictorial Photography:

the aim of which is to make a picture in which sensuous beauty of the fine print is consonant with the moral beauty of the fine image, without particular reference to documentary or design values, and without specific regard to personal or topographical identity (Weaver 1986: 8)

Benington's phrase "the beautiful dome soaring up high into the heavens, pale and silvery" (Benington 1907: 108) is matched by Weaver's description:

Benington's dome and spires rise up like cloudy mountain peaks, the distances are magnified, details minimized ... the smoky atmosphere

of Walter Benington's St Paul's [is] a significant example of the British Impressionist tradition (Weaver 1986: 46).

The context of Weaver's comments was an exhibition in which he pursued an ambitious course of identifying some twenty small clusters of images by British and American photographers to illustrate contrasting aspects of the two national photographic traditions. Weaver identified "the sensuous beauty of the fine print" as one of the prime essentials of an effective Pictorialist image. *The Church of England* was first exhibited as a Gum Bichromate print but Benington also made a number of Platinum prints two of which are in the RPS archive and reproduced as Plate I and Plate VIII. The quality of these prints demonstrates the confidence which Benington had in the original negative. In 1924 he reminded the public of "the sermon preached by Holland Day ... that the whole of the composition, pattern and tones, should be in the negative" (Benington 1924: 537-539). In its Platinum print format it is both a physically fine image and one which provokes an imaginative and creative response to its Impressionist vision. Its deliberate avoidance of niggling detail allows "suggestion" to command communication of "the moral beauty of the fine image." We may know precisely when Benington made the picture, the state of the weather, the compass bearing and the position of the camera and details of exposure, but none of these "facts" actually helps us to respond imaginatively to the image.

The same "suggestiveness" that Benington identified in the atmosphere of *The Church of England* is recorded by Arthur Symons who noted that the London atmosphere which:

makes and unmakes this vast and solid city every morning and every evening with a natural magic peculiar to it. English air, working upon London smoke, creates the real London ... The English mist is always at work like a subtle painter, and London is a vast canvas (Symons 1909: 2).

The delicate layering of the planes perceived as the eye moves through *The Church of England* appears to be the consequence of the unique atmosphere

that Henry James described as “the low, magnificent medium of the sky, where the smoke and fog of the weather ... all hang together ... the city makes its own system of weather and its own optical laws” (James 1905: 16). Weaver argued that London’s unique atmospheric quality discouraged attention to particularities because it “generalises the scene in order to form an idea or type in the mind” (Weaver 1986: 8) This equates to Benington’s “not to portray with too close fidelity” (Benington 1907: 108). This freedom is vital to the artist wishing to explore the ‘idea’ of the city through one of its most iconic features. The opposite effect is found in the afternoon image Fig. 5.6 above which locates St Paul’s precisely behind Cassells & Company Limited, Publishers which occupies the middle ground. The afternoon light gives sufficient detail to allow the chimneys to be counted and the overall effect is to flatten the previous depth of the scene. Little is left to the imagination. Weaver has argued that apart from the period between 1890-1915 when American photographers turned more towards Europe, the classic American tradition in pictorial photography had been committed to ‘truth to facts’. He suggests that the British proclivity to pursue ‘truth to appearances’ and the American tendency towards ‘truth to facts’ “may be explained culturally” (Weaver 1986: 8). The implications of Weaver’s observations deserve much fuller discussion than is possible in this study but one can note that Benington’s *The Church of England* is a classic example of Weaver’s definition of British “truth to appearances.”

As a work of creative imagination, *The Church of England* excited much attention from its first appearance in 1903. It was awarded the Grand Prix at the St Louis World Exposition in 1904. However, Benington was not alone in attempting to capture the special character of London. In 1909 Alvin Langdon Coburn published a fine limited Folio edition of 20 specially prepared photogravures called *London* with an Introduction by Hilaire Belloc (Coburn 1909). One image, *St Paul’s from Ludgate Circus*, (Fig. 5.7) offers an interesting contrast to Benington’s treatment of the same subject. There is some uncertainty as to exactly when Coburn made his image before *London* was published in 1909 so it would be unwise to claim

one influenced the other. We do know, however, that Coburn had a fine platinum print of *The Church of England* (Plate I) used as our Frontispiece (Fig. 1.1). It may have been a happy coincidence that two great photographers should tackle the same scene with remarkably contrasting results. There are a number of other London images by Coburn which have a strong similarity to earlier Benington works. The familiar trope of imitation and flattery comes to mind. However, the purpose of drawing attention to the contrasts is not to claim superiority of one over the other but to celebrate the rich rewards for the photographer who plans ahead and waits for precisely the right moment.



Fig. 5.7 A L Coburn, St. Paul's from Ludgate Circus (1907) from *London*, 1909, Introduction by Hilaire Belloc, plate 20. Photogravure print 385 x 287 mm. George Eastman House L1982:0064:0001 (photo: George Eastman House)

Benington's image subsequently enjoyed a life beyond the gallery being reproduced in several contemporary books on photography such as R Child Bayley's *The Complete Photographer* (Bayley 1926: 343) The image was chosen as the dust-jacket illustration for H V Morton's *The Heart of London* published in June 1925 (Morton 1925). This remained in print through to its 25<sup>th</sup> edition in 1949. *The Church of England* was also published as the

Frontispiece for *H V Morton's London* in 1940 (Morton 1940). An American edition, with the same Frontispiece and the addition of a short Introduction, *The Battle of London*, was published in New York in 1941 with an 18<sup>th</sup> edition in 1949. In spite of his original aspirations, that it expressed “something of the superiority of mind over matter, or the spiritual over the bodily” (Benington 1907: 108) his iconic image of St Paul’s was now being deployed as propaganda for the British war effort. In spite of such uses *The Church of England* remains a major example of British photographic art.

The popularity of *The Church of England* (1903) has tended to relegate *Among the Housetops* (1900) to the position of an interesting precursor. The following comparison between the two key images is intended to highlight a number of significant differences between them as well as to identify several important shared characteristics. Analysing the two in terms of compositional arrangement highlights one obvious difference between the two. *Among the Housetops* was presented in landscape format compared with the portrait format of *The Church of England*. Compositional conventions are challenged. Taylor (1978) has noted that many photographers and critics of the period claimed that rules of composition were too rigid and should be used only for guidance although, in practice, they tended to stick rigidly to them (Taylor 1978: 13). One guide to what was “acceptable” was Antony Guest, the regular reviewer and critic for *Amateur Photographer*. Having discounted rigid rules as undesirable because composition is a matter of individual taste and decorative feeling, he prescribed that:

a picture before it is an illustration of any particular subject, should be a pattern composed of lines and of masses of light and shade ... the object of composition is to gratify the eye and to keep it in the picture (Guest 1907a: 71)

He also emphasised “The dignity, solemnity, and strength of vertical lines, the repose of horizontal ones ...” (Guest 1907a: 76) More recent comments on photographic composition have noted that such conventional thinking

concerning formats persists because the eye normally scans from left to right

an image appears more balanced, more stable if it is placed in the horizontal, because this frame corresponds to a human vision ... The eye is less accustomed to vertical compositions because it must scan the picture from top to bottom ... Vertical framing gives an impression of action (*cours-photophiles*, 2012: np.).

If such an analysis is broadly correct, then *Among the Housetops* sets viewers, as they scan the image, the challenge of negotiating the massive telegraph poles which effectively block the eye's direction of travel. Rather than giving a sense of stability which the landscape format was supposed to provide, it gives a sense of aggressive imbalance – of confrontation between the two major components of the picture, the telegraph poles and St Paul's.

In the earlier analysis of *The Church of England* above, Henry James was noted for his enthusiasm for the “special London atmosphere.” In the same essay, he memorably described London as a “strangely mingled monster” (James 1905: 19) James was not alone in finding London confusing and threatening. Ford Madox Ford wrote *The Soul of London* (Ford 1905) as an account of his search for the meaning of the city. One commentator has suggested that Ford “seems to see London as an object which is soulless in the sense of being unsympathetic, or just oblivious, to the enquiring and perceiving eye” (Sabbagh 2009: np) Equally determined to explore the variously contrasted states within London, E M Forster wrote of the world of “telegrams and anger” (Forster, 1910: 27). The phrase epitomised the coarse commercial world of the Wilcoxes which seemed to be eroding the cultured world of the Schlegels. The aggression contained within the phrase “telegrams and anger” is given an almost literal truth in *Among the Housetops* as the telegraph poles appear to overpower St Paul's as representative of spiritual values.

The reaction to *Among the Housetops* when first exhibited in 1900 was largely one of confusion. However, Edward Steichen recognized that it was



“one of the strongest things in the show ... the unique composition makes it a striking note among the many conventional things at the show” (Steichen 1900: 343-345) Amongst these “many conventional things” was Benington’s *Peace* which Steichen believed lacked any merit but which most critics had applauded. For another critic *Among the Housetops* was

a well managed gum print of roofs dominated by the distant dome of St Paul’s ... entirely dwarfed by the towering structure right in front, which cuts up the sweeping breadth of the sky and altogether drives out the romance of the otherwise capital subject” (*Photography* 1900b: 651-659).

Rather than seeking to “gratify the eye” as Guest later recommended as the primary purpose of composition (Guest 1907a: 71), Benington appeared determined to challenge the viewer with “the bewildering cross-mass of telegraph wires ... from which there is no escape” (*Photograms of the Year 1900*: 123). The commentator clearly recognized the power of the image but could not accept the deliberate discordance which Benington had introduced. There seemed to be a breach in compositional propriety – important rules had been broken. This modernist characteristic of challenging the *status quo* marks *Among the Housetops* as one of the most original images of the period.

Although Fig. 5.4 was exhibited in 1906 as *A Tangle after a Storm*, it later featured as *After a Storm* in Benington’s “Little One Man Show” in 1924. The gum-bichromate print of the image in the RPS archive (Plate IX) is also called *After the Storm*. In his summary of the panoramic view from his roof-top viewpoint Benington had specifically mentioned that “to the south, the spire of St Bride’s Church peeps between two telephone poles” (Benington 1906b: 566-567). St Bride’s and the telegraph poles are central to *After the Storm* but their relationship is far harsher than the word “peeps” would imply. St Bride’s Church in Fleet Street was widely acknowledged as one of Sir Christopher Wren’s masterpieces. It was described by the poet W E Henley as “that madrigal in stone” (Henley 1892: 24). A H Blake had referenced the quotation in his review of *Fleet Street* (1897) (Fig. 4.4) and

later described the whole image as “... beautifully conveyed ... London intimately expressed at its best and daintiest” (Blake 1908b: 605).

Much of the success of *After the Storm* is due to its low horizon line and the force with which the telegraph poles and wires are presented to the viewer. There is a stark rigidity in the right-angles between the telegraph poles and the lines of the crossbars. This is paralleled in the row of chimneys below. The telegraph wires themselves lead the eye in a confusion of directions while the two workmen are seemingly trapped in the web of wires. There is little sense of ease that would come from “graceful and sweeping curves” of a pleasing composition (Guest 1907a: 76). St Bride’s Church is a shadowy presence, its faint outline a contrast to the definition of the structure which partially hides it. The telegraph wires are, like their counterparts in *Among the Husetop*, seemingly inescapable. The marginal displacement of the spire from a central position between the uprights introduces a further disturbing quality to the picture. This dissonance could have been ‘corrected’ by shifting the camera position slightly to the right. By doing so, Benington would have created a conventionally balanced section of the overall image with the church appearing more symmetrically between the uprights. Although a relatively minor feature, the slight displacement of St Bride’s serves to heighten the tensions within the overall image.

Benington clearly considered *After the Storm* to be one of his most important images because he chose to include it in his mini-retrospective in 1924 alongside *The Church of England*. *After the Storm* is a complex image in which he seemed to be experimenting with several issues simultaneously. It makes few concessions to Antony Guest’s demand that the aim of composition is to “gratify the eye” (Guest 1907a: 71). Its use of harsh angles is unsettling and discomfiting. The tonal gradations are also treated far more abruptly than in either *Among the Husetops* or *The Church of England*. It is, however, the choice of the very mundane subject that is so powerful with Benington exploring all the dramatic potential of the dominant technological artefact suppressing the icon of cultural beauty. In his 1904 article, “The Beauty of Ugliness” (Benington 1904c: 282),

Benington had written that his aim was to represent *the artistic idea* suggested by the object portrayed not merely to “present facts pretty or otherwise.” *After the Storm* is not an objective documentary report of damage to the telephone and telegraphic systems, but an imaginative response to the scene before the lens. The image presents the men trapped in a web where technological advance has reduced the human to the status of an insect. Its modernism lies in its choice of subject and the harsh angularity of its presentation rather than any deliberate objectivity. The proto-modernist status of *After the Storm* is well-illustrated in its juxtaposition to Paul Strand’s *Telegraph Poles* (1916) see Fig. 5.8 amongst the illustrative Plates in the catalogue for *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920* (Taylor 1978, Plates 25 and 26) Taylor’s purpose in placing the two images together is not merely to claim some sort of visual and aesthetic kinship between the two but also to assert that there was strong and challenging work being produced in Britain in the post-1890 period worthy of the fullest respect and attention.



Fig. 5.8 Paul Strand, *Telegraph Poles* (1916) Photogravure off an original negative 202 x 137 mm from *Camera Work*, October 1916, 48:27 Purchased 1976 Accession No: NGA 76.333.48.3 (photo: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)

Benington's contemporaries clearly found that the three images discussed in this review were clearly very challenging. Referring to *The Church of England* and *Across the Housetops* (sic) A H Blake commented on:

the uncompromising nature of the material here woven into a picture ... housetops and telegraph wires are what, till recently at any rate, the photographer would have done his best to exclude as eyesores ... they are rather dreadful in their baldness at times, but the artist comes along and boldly includes them in his picture and produces a delightful result, full of poetry and suggestion (Blake 1908c: 605)

Blake's conclusion that Benington deserves full credit for "redeeming this ordinary and prosaic aspect of London for the pictorial and suggestive" also demonstrates how determined the critic was to locate the images within the continuing traditions of Pictorialism. Of the One-Man Show, he commented that "This exhibition will undoubtedly help the cause of pictorial photography, and bring the name of Walter Benington and his position in pictorial photography into greater prominence (Blake 1908c: 629) In retrospect, we can see that both *The Church of England* and *Among the Housetops* had, in their different ways broken free from some of the more traditional aspects of Pictorialism. *After the Storm*, which Blake does not mention specifically, is even more determined to drive forward into new territory.

Benington's One-Man Show at the RPS in June 1908 was his first opportunity to gather a selection of his works as a conspectus of his achievements so far and set out to challenge as well as to celebrate his work. He was very clear as to the direction he was travelling and of the work he had already completed. The show of fifty images was opened by the RPS President, J C S Mummery who congratulated him on a "very representative and beautiful collection, and one to be enjoyed at leisure ... very wide diversity of subject and catholicity of taste made evident in this exhibition" (Mummery 1908: 282-91). Benington bluntly declared

All that I have to say is upon the walls ... The President has remarked upon the catholicity of taste shown. Well, I see beauty, or

think I do, in a great many subjects of very different kinds, and I do my best to show it. If my prints show it at all I succeed, if they do not, I suppose I fail (Benington 1908: 282)

The not so veiled reference to the controversial theme of the “Cult of the Ugly,” about which he had written forcefully in 1904 (Benington 1904b: 85) would not have been lost on his audience. There is some irony in the fact that the official opening of Benington’s show was the occasion of a Presidential lecture, “The Artistic Impulse.” During his lecture, Mummery had declared that the “ugly” photograph was “however deplorable ... only the exaggerated and diseased side of a wide and catholic acceptance which is the hope of modern art” (Mummery 1908: 282-91). Benington's robust response – “all I have to say is upon the walls” (Benington 1908: 282) – was a clear declaration of the growing divide within the British photographic world.

*The British Journal of Photography* was typically grudging in its praise of any member of the Linked Ring:

Mr Benington has made some excellent pictures in his time, and they, in turn have duly made for him a good reputation. Why are people not more content to rest upon their laurels? These fifty pictures are perhaps twenty-five more than necessary” (*British Journal of Photography* 1908c: 497).

Nevertheless at a personal level, Benington was now established as one of the most important British photographers whose work was exhibited successfully both nationally and internationally. One such event was the Franco-British Exhibition at Shepherd's Bush. Exhibits for this show were chosen by Reginald Craigie, the Secretary of the Photographic Salon and of the Camera Club. The show was considered to be “one of the most homogeneous and striking exhibitions of pictorial photography it has been our lot to see ... Walter Benington is another man who appears to the best advantage in this exhibition” (*Amateur Photographer* 1908b: 581). The Linked Ring remained hugely important to Benington and he was fully

committed to maintaining its international status. Although the Franco-British Exhibition appeared to be a statement of harmony within the ranks of British photography, it was to be the last public statement of unity for a number of years.

### **The “American” Salon and the Salon des Refusés**

Rumblings of discontent had been noted over the selection processes at recent Salons which seemed to favour American participants and appeared to neglect British talents who were not part of the Linked Ring. One can identify three major strands in the developing narrative of confusion and growing animosity between the various parties. The first was concerned with the struggles within the Linked Ring to define its purpose and to clarify whose needs it was intended to serve. The second was the relationship of British photography to international developments and in particular to the growing power of Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession. The third strand concerns Benington both in his pivotal role within the Linked Ring and in his own photographic development. Inevitably, the strands often become tangled because the sequence of events is complicated and accounts vary depending on the position and perceptions of the reporters. It has been important to re-examine both published and unpublished sources to seek some sort of clarity about how and why British photography followed a course which led to future isolation and neglect.

Earlier concerns over the Salon continued with the 1906 Salon being noted for its “chilly sobriety” (*British Journal of Photography* 1906b: 745). For some it was “a remarkably sane show” (Tilney 1906: 753) or “very thin and poor ... [more than half the pictures were] without interest” (*Photography* 1906b: 261). Coburn’s image of the naked George Bernard Shaw as Rodin’s *Le Penseur* “added to the gaiety of the world” (Guest 1906a: 268) but was the “high water-mark of fatuity” (*Focus* 1906b: 298-299). Horsley Hinton celebrated the absence of the Americans and with it the danger of the “forthcoming complete Americanization of the Salon [arguing that] the absence of Stieglitz, Steichen and Clarence White [ensures that] the Salon is

the better for it” (Hinton 1906a: 245-246). Hinton did warn that there were some lessons to be learned from the Americans about commitment and hard work “I am convinced that the average English worker does not take himself or his work seriously enough” (Hinton 1905e: 195).

The ambivalent attitude towards American photography had been growing strongly since Holland Day’s ground-breaking *New School* exhibition in 1900. Some of the antipathy may have had its roots in Stieglitz’s personal disregard of the Linked Ring’s arcane and gentlemanly understanding about loyalty. It may also derive from Stieglitz’s absolute determination to promote the Photo-Secessionist programme. Stieglitz jealously guarded his control of the Photo-Secession and would only sanction the participation of its members if pre-selection were arranged, thus, he would argue, ensuring that standards were maintained. The withdrawal of his group from the 1904 St Louis Exposition was adversely criticized by Hinton, one of the many issues recalled by Stieglitz when he finally resigned from the Linked Ring in 1909.

In essence, the argument was about the continuing purpose of the Linked Ring and whether it should devote itself to fostering British photography to the exclusion of others or whether it should attempt to retain a strong international identity. Leading members of the Linked Ring were in discussion over the creation of a genuinely International Pictorialist organization with Craig Annan proposed as Chairman. Davison was a leading proponent in his discussions with Stieglitz (Beinecke Letter 283/29 Davison to Stieglitz 18 October 1904 et al) It was argued that awareness of the photography of other nationalities through international exhibitions and the presence of foreign work at the Salon were vital if British photography was to flourish. R Child Bayley, probably the most forward thinking of the editors of the photographic press, questioned the continued purpose of the Linked Ring in his *The Complete Photographer* in his chapter on “Pictorial Photography” (Bayley 1906) This chapter was later reproduced in *Camera Work* 18, April 1907 (Bayley 1907)

The absence of the Americans from the 1906 Salon was of great concern to the leading members of the Linked Ring and ways of attracting them to exhibit in Britain were discussed. Benington was elected to serve on the new Selection and Hanging Committee for the 1907 and was Centre Link in June as plans were finalised. In spite of their best efforts, very few Americans pictures were on show at the 1907 Salon. The sense that the Salon was losing its drive and sense of purpose was noted in several reports. It was described as “intensely humdrum ... there has never been a Salon without a few outstanding pictures ... this year we cannot single out any one that deserves to be called notable” (*Photography* 1907b: 285)

Guest claimed that on the evidence of positive reviews of his book *Art and the Camera* (Guest 1907a) the battle for acceptance of photography among the arts had largely been won. He argued that the time was now ripe to forge ahead rather than settling into a respectable groove and wondered where the impetus would come from. He suggested that the continued absence of the Americans may have accentuated the “restrained character of the show.” In a passage which illustrates all too well the extraordinarily patronising tone some British commentators adopted towards the Americans, he praised:

the exuberance of the Columbian enthusiasts [which] often takes them off the right path and leads them into daring error, [but their] vitality [is] a motive force of much promise” (Guest 1907b: 325-327).

In looking for possible reasons for the breakdown of relations between British photography and its American counterparts, one might not need to look much further than Guest’s comment. It vies for insensitivity with a later comment by another very influential British photographic writer who claimed “The American is really a very simple person” (Tilney 1918b: 435-436).

There had been considerable disappointment that the Americans Links had made little effort to support the 1907 Salon. There was also a feeling that a



number of long-established Links who had not exhibited recently, might, perhaps, be weeded out. On 11 July 1908 Davison wrote to all Links explaining the arrangements for the next [1908] Salon. British Links and other UK domiciled photographers were invited to submit prints for consideration by the Selection Committee. Unlike previous Salons, there was to be no pre-selection for any foreign national group but invitations were to be extended to specific individuals. The outcome of the various negotiations and meetings was a Salon markedly different from the previous year and of even greater contrast to its traditional rival, the RPS Annual Exhibition. The exhibits chosen for the Salon strongly reflected the make-up of the Selection Committee – Craig Annan, Arbuthnot, Benington, Coburn, Davison, Demachy, Kühn, de Meyer, Steichen, Stieglitz and Clarence White.

*Photography* remarked somewhat ruefully:

The galling thing is that the exhibition is all the better for it ... it is no longer an echo of the pictorial section of the 'Royal' ... It may shock and startle many, but at least it is representative ... [and] we hope that the resumption by the Linked Ring of its natural sphere of activity will lead to its increased strength and prosperity (*Photography* 1908a: 384).

The sense that the 1908 Salon was a return to the original enthusiasm of its founding members was one strand of a complex of arguments generated by the selection. One major objection was the exclusion of many loyal contributors and this, coupled with what was considered to be the excessive presence of foreign work, particularly from the USA angered many. Antony Guest was concerned that British members of the Selection Committee had ensured that they were well represented while other British workers had only a very limited presence. He complained that the “foreign genius ... however, imposing, is not quite in accord with the English” (Guest 1908a: 271-272). The foreign element represented by Coburn with twenty-one pictures and Steichen with thirty-nine certainly dominated. Baron de Meyer exhibited twenty-eight prints many of which had already been seen in London and were therefore not unique to The Linked Ring. By doing so

de Meyer was judged by those hostile to the Salon to have been disrespectful to its traditions and therefore dishonourable in his conduct.

Another striking feature of the 1908 Salon was the decision to include a collection of ninety autochromes by Stieglitz and Clarence White as a “show within a show.” Guest suggested that a few autochromes to “exemplify a novelty” would have been preferable to the mass of slides that needed special viewing facilities. The following week, Guest complained that Landscape, the most characteristic phase of English art, was inadequately represented. He argued that Benington’s “bold design, *The Bridge*, requires a graduated tone for the structure as it recedes in aerial perspective. His *Night* would be better in monochrome than in colour for he misses the cool lights and warm shadows which produce the mysterious glow of moonlight” (Guest 1908b: 305-306). Benington had previously experimented with hand-colouring images such as *The Gates of the West* at the 1905 Salon which did not please at least one critic (Carter 1905: 95). The one example of Benington’s hand-colour work which survives, *The Tate Gallery*, also shown at his One-Man Show in 1908, does not greatly benefit from the treatment.

Fairly predictably, *The British Journal of Photography* commented that “There are scarcely three works here which satisfy intellectually as well as emotionally ... [it is a pity] that so many people of culture should interest themselves in the mere top froth of the artistic deeps” (*British Journal of Photography* 1908c: 725-728) Arbuthnot’s *The Labourer* and *The Topsail Yard* are “cheerless things” while Benington’s prints are “uniformly dark and unpleasantly granular and his subjects too often follow the latest craze of camera workers for taking at close quarters some wretched object of no intrinsic beauty” (*British Journal of Photography* 1908c: 725-728) Some of Coburn’s work was well-liked except for *The Flip Flap* which was “ugly in every respect.” Mortimer, who had been elected to the Linked Ring on 20 May 1908 taking the name *Bromoiler*, was congratulated on his excellent Bromoils but he was considered lucky, as such a newcomer, to

have gained a place at the expense of more worthy Links who had been ousted. As part of its criticisms, *The British Journal of Photography* offered a brief summary of “The Lay Press on the Salon” with quotations such as “The prints ...are for the most part of a depressing and uninteresting character” (*Daily Telegraph*), “many of the prints will be beyond the comprehension of the average visitor” (*The Morning Post*) and “a kind of spurious impressionism” (*The Daily Graphic*).

*The Times* however offered a rather different view with praise for “a very small committee of most advanced views ... [and] the almost complete disappearance of the more orthodox and humdrum photography ... [it is] more like the Salon of a dozen years ago in its relative freshness and modernity” (*The Times*, 10 September 1908: 4). The review considered that in recent years the Salon had become more like the “Royal” and the Linked Ring, like all elderly bodies, had been settling down into “somnolence and respectability.” It argued that the 1908 Salon “is more fully representative of the most modern side of photography... it will promote thought and arouse discussion ... pictorial photography at large can only benefit by the process” (*The Times*, 10 September 1908: 4).

The intensity of the argument both in the photographic press and more generally, is almost palpable. On one side were those who saw in most of the images the degeneration of photography and the awful incursion of modern crazes such as Benington’s habit of “taking at close quarters some wretched object of no intrinsic beauty” (*British Journal of Photography* 1908c: 725-728). Rather fewer critics saw in the 1908 Salon a return to the adventurousness of the early days of the Linked Ring and a proper recognition of the demands of modern practice in the arts as a whole. The great contrast was between freshness and modernity and somnolence and respectability. The majority conclusion was that the public would not understand the work of those with such “advanced views.”

The analysis in *The Times* was remarkably prescient in offering a major proviso that none of these exciting developments would be possible if *the*

*system could not survive the strain of conflicting interests* (*The Times*, 10 September 1908: 4, emphasis added) In the event the Linked Ring could not “stand the strain” and the months following the 1908 Salon were filled with acrimonious debate and the eventual collapse of the Brotherhood.

As noted in the previous chapter, there had been recurring tensions between what Antony Guest had earlier called “the vulgar popularisers and the small but steadfast group who wish to raise their craft into a medium for the exposition of beauty and art.” Guest had recommended the clearance of the “pictorial rubbish that is undermining the artistic standard of the day” (Guest 1901b: 242-244). In 1910, H Snowden Ward, editor of the influential *Photograms of the Year* introduced the terms of Latitudinarians and Perfectionists to describe the similar rival parties as they emerged in 1908 (Ward 1910b: 21-22). The clearest evidence that the Linked Ring was approaching collapse was the creation of the *Salon des Refusés* by F J Mortimer. The unexpected death of Horsley Hinton, editor of *The Amateur Photographer*, in February 1908 had created a vacancy which was filled by Mortimer then editor of *Photographic News* who became editor when the journals merged as *The Amateur Photographer and Photographic News*. This “interesting show of purely British pictorial work” as the *Salon des Refusés* was modestly called by its organizer (Mortimer 1908b: 267) was arranged by Mortimer when he “rescued” the frames rejected by the 1908 Salon Selection Committee. He presented himself as the man who had rescued British photography from the American threat.

In his detailed study, John Taylor has argued that the *Salon des Refusés* should not be seen as “an irrelevancy or as a small set-back for the progressives whom we revere today as the originators of modernism” (Taylor 1984: 277-298) He claimed that to do so would be to adopt the thinking of conventional historians of photography who only wish to see the progress of photography “as a rising curve or a ladder, each rung of which is the previous success of a lower form of practitioner” (Taylor 1984: 278) He identified Beaumont Newhall as typical of those who, in the interests of

boosting Stieglitz's progressive ways, arranged the evidence in the most favourable way even where the facts told a different story. Taylor particularly referenced Newhall's inaccurate claim that with the resignation of Stieglitz, "the Photographic Salon at once lost the effectiveness it had built up over the past fifteen years" (Newhall 1982: 163). Taylor also argued that the innately conservative nature of photography in Edwardian Britain had a parallel in the critique of the wider art world view offered by the highly respected art journal *The Studio*. Reviewing the twentieth anniversary exhibition of the New English Art Club, the commentator had complained: "The whole of modern art is affected by this somnolence and a drowsy inclination to let things stay as they are is one of the most disappointing peculiarities of the present day" (*The Studio*, 1907: 50)

### **International developments and the 1909 Salon**

The period from 1908 onwards was one of considerable turbulence with events leading to the collapse of the Linked Ring being a central concern. Harker has provided a helpful summary of events following the 1908 Salon and the *Salon des Refusés* through to the 1909 Salon and on to the decision to give the Ring an 'honourable burial' (Harker 1979: 121-123). The Linked Ring Papers (RPS Archive) give some detail of the confusion that existed following the 1908 Salon. At a meeting on 22 October 1908 – "one of the largest attendances since the Flood" – major rule changes were adopted stipulating that there would be no pre-selection and that individuals could send what they thought appropriate with no jury intervention. The not un-expected consequence of this move was the resignation of De Meyer, Stieglitz, Clarence White, Kühn, Henneberg, Coburn, Eugene and Keiley on the grounds that without rigorous selection, standards would inevitably suffer and interests of photography would not be well-served. The resignations were considered at the meeting of the Ring on 10 May 1909 but no attempt was made to seek a rapprochement. Benington, Annan, Arbuthnot and Davison who had served on the 1908 committee were joined by Mortimer, Craigie, Dudley Johnston and F H Evans on the 1909 Selection committee.

Davison tried to persuade Stieglitz to reconsider his resignation but the latter was adamant – there could be no turning back because too much damage had been done to the cause of Pictorial Photography by the *Salon des Refusés*. For Stieglitz, the vital integrity and trust needed for the Linked Ring to survive had been destroyed. He also explained, in reference to the forthcoming exhibition at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo, that “The work begun 26 years ago by me is about to be finished ... we can’t be identified with anything which we ourselves do not believe in” (Beinecke Letters 285/1, and 285/2, Davison to Stieglitz, 2 April 1909 and 6 April 1909 and 285/3 and 285/4 Stieglitz to Davison, 10 April 1909 and 15 April 1909). There were further letters exploring some of the other factors but Stieglitz could not and would not change his mind (Beinecke Letters 285/5 and 285/7 Davison to Stieglitz, 4 May 1909 and 30 June 1909).

British photography continued to be represented at international exhibitions. Benington and a number of other major British Pictorialists were invited to exhibit at the International exhibition held in New York by the Photo-Secessionists in February 1909. Significantly, the British selection at this New York exhibition also included several works by D O Hill in versions prepared by Craig Annan. As noted below, these images were also presented at the 1909 Photographic Salon as a way of demonstrating the pedigree of Pictorialism from the acknowledged prime source of art photography, David Octavius Hill. The need to claim a direct descent from the first masters of photography was one of the key features of Beaumont Newhall’s argument in *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) as examined earlier.

British photography was also represented at the *Internationale Photographische Ausstellung* (IPHAD) at Dresden in 1909. The exhibition was regarded as something of a landmark because of its size and the magnificence of its presentation. Its significance is that it not only offered an impressive retrospective of international Pictorialist work but that it also presented a range of exhibits covering many areas of photographic activity.

Crucially, the organizers gave equal status to scientific photography, art photography and advances in a variety of photographic technologies. Rocco (2009) has argued that Dresden 1909 should be seen as the precursor of major photographic installations such as *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart in 1929 because of its “dismantling of hierarchies in displaying photography” (Rocco 2009: 383-402). The drive behind such a change was caused by a growing sense that Pictorialism had outlived its usefulness. Rocco claimed that compared with other photographic exhibitions, the “socio-cultural” values of Pictorialism had significantly diminished. She offered this idea as a more coherent explanation for Pictorialism’s increasing irrelevance than that offered by Newhall in *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937). He had rejected Pictorialism on the grounds that its processes, such as soft-focus lenses and hand-work on negatives, were a contravention of the ‘photographic’ nature of photography. Rocco’s explanation pays more attention to the content of the images than to their formalist properties.

Much of the “Art” photography section at Dresden, organized by Heinrich Kühn was from within the Pictorialist tradition. The British representation had been selected by E O Hoppé and was generally well-regarded. “The pictures are mostly well tried and already exhibited specimens of the work of their makers. The most noteworthy are those of Walter Benington, the late A Horsley Hinton ....” (Fraprie 1909: 516-518). Dresden 1909 was taken by some to demonstrate the strength of British photography on the world stage and that somehow it was a virtue that no particular British school could be identified as such because “Narrowness of outlook and similar mannerism of treatment by numerous workers are likely to prove the downfall of many foreign ‘schools’, brilliant though much of their work may be” (*Amateur Photographer* 1909f: 240). American critics were not enthusiastic about the work from the USA chosen for Dresden. Charles Caffin argued that the American Photo-Secessionist contributions lacked originality and were “in danger of becoming common-place” (Caffin 1909: 33) Fraprie, who had maintained great hostility towards Stieglitz in his monthly periodical *American Photography*, complained of Stieglitz’s

baleful influence and the damage which the Photo-Secession had done by preventing a true representation of American photography (Fraprie 1910a: 476). Doty believed that Dresden was effectively the penultimate stage in Stieglitz's journey towards the acceptance of photography and that "the end was in sight. Stieglitz was planning a finale. The means was to be an exhibition at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York" (Doty 1978: 54) This seminal exhibition will be discussed in the next chapter as part of the examination of the collapse of the Linked Ring.

It is a measure of the difference between British and American photographic voices that different levels of satisfaction with Dresden should be so evident. For F J Mortimer and *Amateur Photographer*, Dresden seemed to offer confirmation that all was well. Another commentator opined that:

all would be well because as a nation we 'muddle through' ... let us hope that the photographic suffragettes of today ... [who] pursue notoriety at any price ... may be prevailed upon to revert to the less eccentric and more attractive paths of the *via media, via tuta*." (Lambert 1909: 607-609)

Such comments were to typify much British reaction to modern photography for many years to come. The 1909 Photographic Salon seemed to be the best possible riposte to the dissensions following the 1908 "American" Salon and it went ahead without Stieglitz and the Photo-Secessionists. One of its most striking features was the inclusion of twenty-eight prints by D O Hill prepared by Craig Annan. The intention behind the "show within a show" was to demonstrate that the Linked Ring had inherited the photographic mantle from Hill and Adamson. For at least one commentator the comparison was not at all to the advantage of the present: "the obvious conclusion is to the detriment of the modern man" (*British Journal of Photography* 1909f: 720-723). The use of Hill's work to complement contemporary work was not unique. Craig Annan had included some examples of Hill's images in the British selection at the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1901. Hill was also included in the British contribution to the International exhibition held in New York by the Photo-Secessionists in February 1909 and later at Stieglitz's 1910 Albright show.





Fig. 5.9 Walter Benington *The Cab Rank* (1909) Gum 488 x 379 mm  
RPS collection, gift of J Holcroft (1910) (photo: RPS). See also Plate XII  
Variant print – Gravure 129 x 101mm. RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn  
(1930) (photo: RPS) See Plate XIII

The 1909 Salon was not exclusively British with contributions from Gertrude Kasebier of the USA, Miss Minna Keene of Canada and from Robert Demachy from France. Another non-British photographer was W H Porterfield, a member of the Photo-Pictorialists of Buffalo, New York, a group who remained at odds with Stieglitz in his efforts to manage the international presence of American photography. Some relative newcomers such as E O Hoppé, J Dudley Johnston and F J Mortimer emerged strongly while long-term contributors to the Salon such as Alex. Keighley

and F H Evans were welcomed on their return. *Photography* recalled the excellence of the 1908 Salon, regretting the absence of the Americans and believing that the Salon had made no real progress.

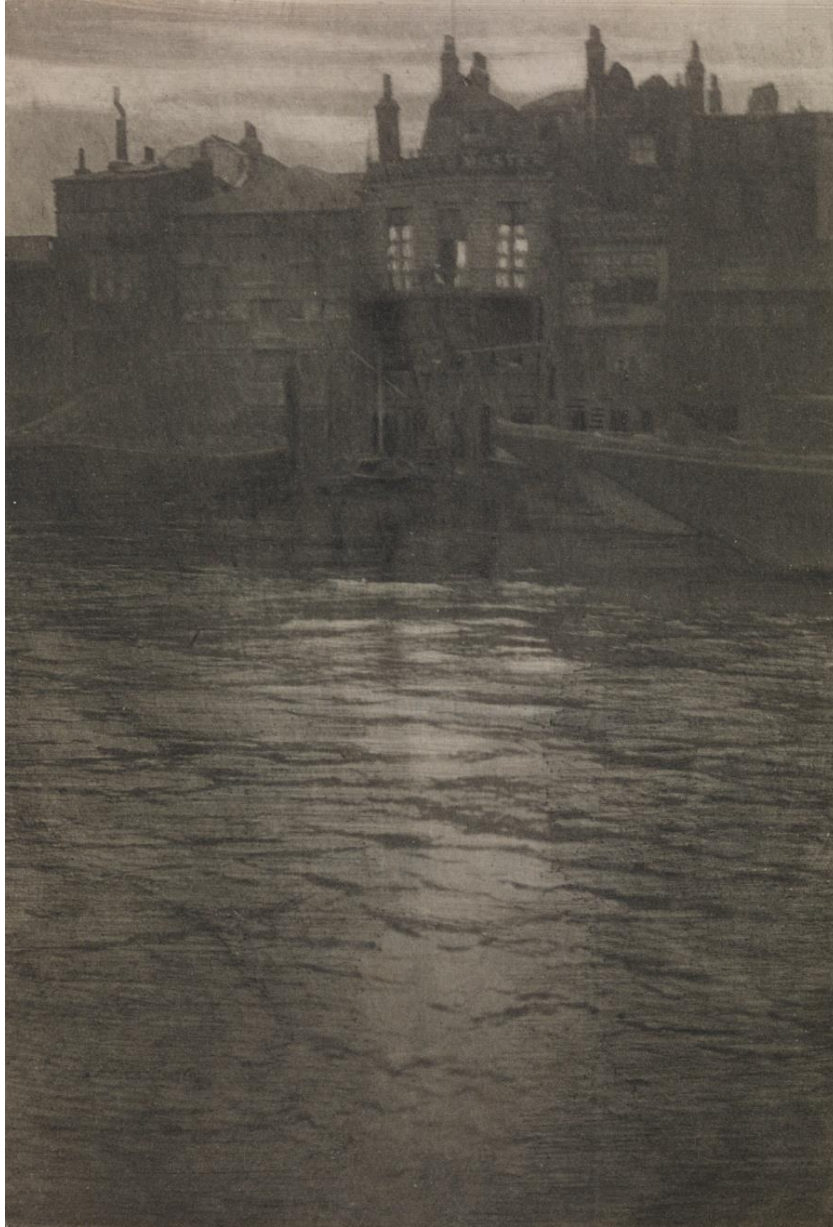


Fig. 5 10 Walter Benington, *Riverside Houses* (1909) (aka *Limehouse Hole*) Gravure 134 x 91 mm. RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn 1930 (photo: RPS) See also Plate XIV

*The British Journal of Photography* maintained its long-term opposition to the Linked Ring complaining that the contemporary works in the show lacked any real character summarizing the thought with “O for Steichens, Stieglitzes, Coburns and Meyers again if this is what creeps in their absence!” (*British Journal of Photography* 1909f: 720-723). There were,

however, some images that caught the attention. Benington's *The Cab Rank* (Fig. 5.9) was considered to be a *tour de force*. It was praised for "the richness of its quality [which] proves that the gum process is still able to hold its own against the now popular 'oil'" (*Country Life* 1909: 378-380). It was also reproduced in the exhibition catalogue as an example of the best of modern British photography on a par with the examples of the work of D O Hill also in the exhibition. The discriminating critic R Child Bayley declared that Benington had done nothing better than *The Cab Rank*, "an interior at one of the big railway stations, with a distant glimpse of daylight beyond" (Bayley 1909: 205-206). A H Blake suggested that it "will take its place as one of his best efforts and will rank with *The Church of England* as one of the pictures by which he will be remembered" (Blake 1909: 652) *The Cab Rank* was also applauded by the non-photographic press: "a remarkable photographic *tour de force*" (*The Times* 9 September 1909) and "of really wonderful quality ... so skilfully treated it is as great in effect as if it were a rich etching" (*The Queen*, 2 October 1909)

*Riverside Houses* aka *Limehouse Hole* (Fig. 5.10) divided critical opinion with one commentator complaining that "this absolutely unpictorial elevation of ugly houses is without any interest to our minds, and the lights in a window, childishly picked out, have not saved the situation" (*British Journal of Photography* 1909f: 720-723). The hostility towards *Riverside Houses* may have arisen from its extreme technical complexity but its alternative title, *Limehouse Hole*, may suggest that the subject matter was also felt to be "un-photographic." Dickens makes reference in *Our Mutual Friend* to unsavoury goings-on "deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, among the riggers, and the mast, oar and block makers, and the boat-builders, and the sail-lofts" (Dickens [1864] 2008: 351). It was allowable for such an evil place to excite interest when described by the deceased master of fiction but when brought to life in a modern photograph, it might be considered to be too disturbing. *Riverside Houses* had an interesting subsequent history being chosen for *New Paths* (Beaumont and Sadler 1918) an anthology of modern art and literature dedicated to artists killed in WWI. The anthology

also included examples of Benington's photographic record of the sculptures by Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein.

*The Cab Rank* and *Riverside Houses* marked both an end and a beginning. Benington had begun to redefine his photographic purposes and seemingly had come to the conclusion that he had explored the possibilities of Pictorialism as fully as he could. The opportunities that opened up for him through the traumatic events of the break-up of the Linked Ring and his decision to become a professional photographer had a profound impact on his work. What we might call his post-Pictorialist work has received very little attention within his oeuvre although a number of its different elements such as his portrait work and his photographic record of the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska have attracted some notice. On the wider front, the context for Benington's new beginnings was the turbulent period when British photography as a whole became irrevocably committed to a path which took it further and further from the international main-stream.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Walter Benington and his post-Pictorialist work**

We have put nationality before quality (Davison 1909: 574-577)

George Davison's rueful comment might well be taken as an epitaph for British photography as it went through the crisis of the collapse of the Linked Ring and the different efforts to find a way forward. At one level it can be seen as a dispute over the nature of photography in Britain and the concept of Britishness in photography. At another level it was a power struggle between the "old" original experimental spirit of the founding members of the Linked Ring who demanded that photography must move forward into new territory and the "new" voices demanding a return to the old certainties of comfortable and picturesque pictorialism. A third level of dispute involved the clash of individual personalities – neither Mortimer nor Stieglitz emerges with much credit from the disputes. A fourth possible level might see this photographic battle as a proxy for the much wider commercial and economic, cultural, social and political disputes between Britain and the USA in much the same way that Marien (2011) had argued in relation to the disputes between Britain and France in the earliest days of photography.

The traditional version of events is that British photography as a whole, having rejected the experimentalism of the 1908 "American" Salon, turned its back on the future that was being mapped out by Stieglitz and formulated by Paul Strand. Such a version takes no account of the detail of events that can be discovered by exploring the original sources. These sources include the unpublished correspondence between Davison, Benington, Arbuthnot and Stieglitz.

The 1909 Photographic Salon had not been a financial success and there was a general feeling that the Linked Ring had lost all sense of direction. Davison had kept Stieglitz fully informed about the Salon and other events. In October 1909 he reported dejectedly about Mortimer's outlook.

(Beinecke Letter 285/12, Davison to Stieglitz, 22 October 1909). Benington had written to Davison warning him that the meeting of the Linked Ring on 24 November 1909 would be crucial:

we shall have a kind of hash up of the L.R. in the very wrongest of lines. Rather than that we must dissolve – but it must be done [if not] then God help the cause of Pictorial Photography in this country ... Yours very truly and in great tribulation (Beinecke Letter 285/14 Benington to Davison, 19 October 1909).

Davison accepted his fears “I quite see the danger and the objectionableness of the “rump” deciding to go on with Linked Ring and the Salon” (Beinecke Letter 285/15 Davison to Benington, 20 October 1909). Davison copied Benington’s letter and his own reply to Stieglitz, commenting that he would not grieve over the honourable burial of the Ring as it would have served its purpose. He held out the hope that “in time a new group with the co-operation of the brotherhood in the States and on the Continent, will no doubt naturally arrive” (Beinecke Letter 285/17 Davison to Stieglitz, 7 December 1909). The seeds of the London Secession were being sown. At the November meeting of the Linked Ring, Davison proposed that the Brotherhood should be immediately wound up and given an “honourable burial” but this was rejected by 5 votes to 6. An attempt to plan for a Photographic Salon in 1910 was also defeated leaving matters somewhat in limbo. It was agreed that a postal ballot should be arranged to determine the future of the Linked Ring.

In a shrewd move to manage events, Mortimer had offered the columns of *Amateur Photographer* to forty of the leading photographers and critics to contribute to a three week series called “The Future of Pictorial Photography in Great Britain: A Symposium by the leading British Pictorial Workers” (*Amateur Photographer* 1909j: 574-577; 1909k: 607-609; 1909l: 631-632). In the first week, Davison argued “We have put nationality before quality ... allowed personality to govern our judgement ... the natural result ... an apotheosis of mediocrity ... It is of no use pretending that casual workers, the dabblers deserve the same recognition as the real experts” (Davison 1909: 574-577) F H Evans argued for “*small* bi-annual exhibitions

in the spring and autumn ... confined to pioneer work” (Evans 1909: 574-577) to encourage new-comers and to ensure that they were not swamped by mediocrity. The following week Benington argued that the public had been taught that photography was easy and therefore had no respect for it. Photography must appeal to artists and poets and public exhibitions designed to promote pictorial photography would not be those “primarily addressed to photographers *per se*” (Benington 1909b: 607-609). Most contributors however warmly supported the move to make the Salon more open and with it a return of common sense and an end to eccentricity (Lambert 1909: 607-609)

The result of the Postal Ballot was reported – 11 to 10 votes with 5 abstentions in favour of bringing the Linked Ring to an end. It was also agreed that there would be no Photographic Salon in 1910 and that the name should not be used in conjunction with any other photographic exhibition in the future. There was some further discussion about maintaining the concept of the Brotherhood but in effect, the Linked Ring had ceased to operate. The *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linked Ring* (RPS Archive) had kept a lively account of the many meetings and the record of this January 1910 meeting notes that *Housetopper* (Benington) was to be the next Centre Link. In spite of the gravity of the situation, the Minute concluded with a sort of gallows humour: “the Links performed *Ju Jitsu* as usual and then scattered” (Linked Ring Papers, RPS Archive). The next Union took place on 17 February 1910. Apart from confirming the Minutes of the January meeting, no other business was conducted. The final entry in the *Journal* is therefore Benington’s signature dated 17 February 1910.

The venue of this final meeting of the Linked Ring was Benington’s studios at 14 Conduit Street – a prestigious address just off Bond Street. Benington had recently acquired The Photographic Association, the studios of the late John Le Couteur in the fashionable West End. After working at the Shoe Lane works since leaving school in 1891, Benington had moved from being an amateur for whom photography was a personal indulgence to earning his

living as a professional photographer. The crucial vote to end the Linked Ring and Benington's decision to change direction in his photographic activity were clearly vitally connected. There was something almost symbolic in the juxtaposition of the venue and the decision. For British photography it marked a vital move away from adventure, for Benington it offered confirmation of the need to pursue new directions.

### **Latitudinarians, Perfectionists and the London Secession**

As far back as 1901, Antony Guest had warned of forthcoming battles between "the vulgar popularisers and the small but steadfast group who wish to raise their craft into a medium for the exposition of beauty and art" (Guest 1901b: 242-244). H Snowden Ward later introduced the terms of Perfectionists and Latitudinarians to describe the rival parties (Ward 1910b: 21-22). The Perfectionists, led by George Davison with Walter Benington and Malcolm Arbuthnot began planning what became the London Secession which held its one and only exhibition in 1911. The Latitudinarians, led by F J Mortimer, moved swiftly to form the London Salon Club as a "temporary expedient, for the holding of exhibitions annually until the Linked Ring shall see fit to resume the Salon" (Ward 1910b: 21-22).

This "temporary expedient" was the initial London Salon, publicized as "organized by English photographers ... to bring together an exhibition thoroughly British in character ... steady and wholesome" (*Amateur Photographer* 1910a: 62). A H Blake assured his American readers that as far as British photography was concerned, "the pioneering days are over and the standard has risen so greatly in the past few years, no very new or startling developments are to be expected" (Blake 1910b: 152). The statement is reminiscent of Horsley Hinton's confident assertion in 1896 that "Probably pictorial photography has reached a stage when any very striking departure upwards is difficult, if not impossible" (Hinton 1896: 259). Davison reported to Stieglitz that it had amused him to visit the London Salon "it was a mighty poor exhibition ... I could find no more than 12 exhibitable pictures at the outside in the whole show" (Beinecke Letter



285/25. Davison to Stieglitz 2 November 1910). *Photography* listed all those workers who were not exhibiting at the London Salon and commented “This is not *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark; it is *Hamlet* with no one in the cast beyond the cock and a few gravediggers” (Bayley 1910a: 216) Roy Fraprie, the editor of the monthly *American Photography*, observed that “in spite of the refusal to participate by a number of well-known photographers, the show is probably the finest and strongest show that has ever been held in England” (Fraprie 1910b: 658). Writing in the same journal, the British commentator A H Blake reassured his readers that “there are no freak pictures ... nothing to make a splash ... good, well-considered work ... of the highest order” (Blake 1910c: 666-667). Snowden Ward noted that the principal members of the Linked Ring who objected to the proposed exhibition “held aloof” but they were “represented in Mr Stieglitz’s exhibition at the Albright Galleries in Buffalo” (Ward 1910a: 692-698).

In his letter to Davison in April 1909, Stieglitz had given reasons for not withdrawing his resignation from the Linked Ring declaring “The work begun 26 years ago by me is about to be finished ... Our strength has been that we have had faith in our work & that we have had a definite goal” (Beinecke Letter 285/3 Stieglitz to Davison, 10 April 1909). This objective was *The Albright Art Gallery International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography* which ran from 3 November to 1 December 1910. Writing to Ernst Jühl after the exhibition, Stieglitz felt able to claim, “so at last the dream I had in Berlin in 1885 has become a reality – the complete acknowledgement of photography by an important institution” (Stieglitz 1911)

Coburn had agreed to act as Stieglitz’s agent in approaching the selected British photographers. Benington was suitably pleased to have been selected but wanted to be sure that what he sent would actually be hung – a reminder of Stieglitz’s own practice of setting conditions for his participation. In his letter to Stieglitz, Benington then reflected on the

contrast between the situation in America and in Britain “I wish the art bodies in England would support the pretensions of Photography in the same way, but I fear there are hardly enough of us over here” (Beinecke Letter 102/1 Benington to Stieglitz, 14 June 1910). In later correspondence with Stieglitz, Benington stressed the problems confronting the small group which had argued for the honourable burial of the Linked Ring. British representation at Buffalo 1910 included forty images from D O Hill and Davison’s *The Onion Field*, arguably one of the original Pictorialist masterpieces. Benington sent ten pictures of which seven were shown including *Fleet Street* (1897), *The Church of England* (1903) and *The Cab Rank* (1909). Hartmann was typically ironic about Benington’s work, noting his “suave poetic treatment in a number of gray tonalities” (Hartmann 1911b: 2-12).

Other British exhibitors at Buffalo were Craig Annan, Arbuthnot, Cochrane, Dudley Johnston and Frank H Read. F H Evans, though not a member of the Perfectionist group, was also invited to exhibit – he had enjoyed substantial coverage in *Camera Work* in 1903. Reports on Buffalo 1910 in the British press were generally appreciative. “The aim of the promoters has been to appeal to the art lover rather than to the photographic public ... this has been achieved. The exhibition [is] a revelation” (*Photography* 1910a: 423). In a subsequent article, the paper acknowledged “there is no doubt that, as a collection of all that is highest in pictorial photography, it has never been equalled, or even approached” (*Photography* 1910b: 463). Snowden Ward believed that “Never has photography been represented by a collection combining so many works with such high standards” (Ward 1910b: 15). He later praised it as “Undoubtedly the greatest show of pictorial photography the world has ever seen” (Ward 1911a: 102). In 1939 Dudley Johnston remembered it as one of the three most significant exhibitions in recent photographic history (Johnston 1939a: 179-203). Negative comments came, almost inevitably, from Roy Fraprie, who claimed that Stieglitz had introduced “jealousies and difficulties” and that the Photo-Secession had become “a reactionary force of the most

dangerous type ... a detriment to the progress of photography” (Frappie 1910a: 476). For Stieglitz, the Buffalo exhibition was the final statement about securing photography’s place within the world of the other visual arts. Thereafter he pursued his interests in other art movements and the emerging talents of Paul Strand with his very different style of photography. He did, however, honour what seems to have been a personal commitment to Davison and Craig Annan by supporting the London Secession of 1911.

The original plan of the Perfectionists had been to match the first London Salon with an exhibition of their own to be called the London Secession. For a variety of reasons including the difficulty of finding a suitable venue, there were serious delays before the exhibition was held. The greatest difficulty was Stieglitz’s refusal to cooperate, ostensibly on the grounds of a clash with the Buffalo exhibition. Some of these difficulties are examined below in the discussion about Benington’s concerns for the future of British photography. In the event, the London Secession was postponed until May 1911 and Stieglitz felt able to cooperate. The formal notice of the exhibition, signed by Arbuthnot, appeared in various photographic journals (Arbuthnot 1911: 185) The exhibition was generally warmly welcomed, particularly the decision to restrict each worker to three images each. The original notification listed the members as J Craig Annan, Malcolm Arbuthnot, Walter Benington, Eustace Calland, A L Coburn, George Davison, J D Johnston, Baron A de Meyer, Frank H Read and the following had also been invited: Frank Eugene, Heinrich Kühn, George Seeley, Eduard Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Clarence H White. In the event, Archibald Cochrane and Mrs. Annie W Brigman and Mrs. Käsebier were now represented but George Seeley did not exhibit.

R Child Bayley noted that the collapse of the Linked Ring had been inevitable once the original ideals had been abandoned through the indiscriminate admission “irrespective of the quality and aims of their work.” He continued by arguing that:

no serious attempt has been made to fill the gap until now and the list of those involved ... comprehends the name of no one who has not amply justified his inclusion by his photographic work, and forms a catalogue of those who are at the very top of pictorial photography” (Bayley 1911a: 107)

Frank Rutter, one of the leading writers on the arts and the organiser of the AAA Exhibitions at the Royal Albert Hall, noted that in pursuit of being ‘widely representative’ the London Salon had really been championing “the mediocre and common place” but now the London Secession had been organised with the object of “holding periodical displays of only the most original, interesting and progressive work available” (Rutter 1911: 63). Rutter’s appreciation of the new group was indicative of its potential appeal to a world beyond the photographer as Benington had recommended in his earlier comments (Benington 1909b: 607-609). Child Bayley commented that the exhibition’s appeal “is much more to the art lover in general than to the photographer ... quite the most distinctive and distinguished exhibition that has been got together” (Bayley 1911b: Cover + 409). The paper also supported the Secession by reproducing eight images from the exhibition including Benington’s *The Thames Embankment* (Fig. 6.1).

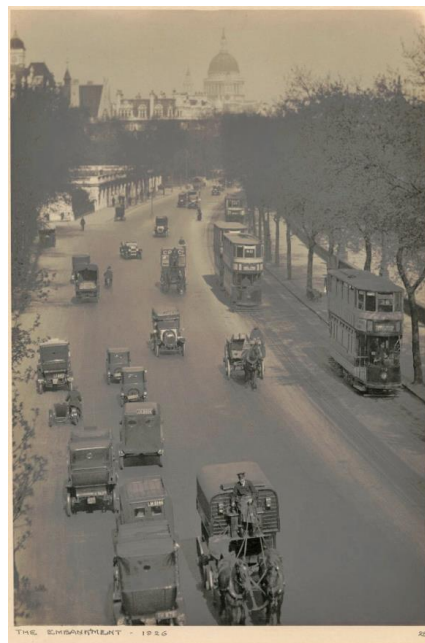
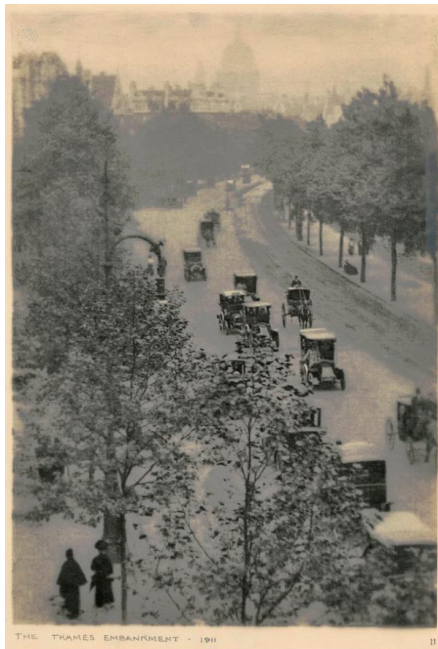


Fig. 6.1 Walter Benington, *The Thames Embankment* (1911)

Gravure 230 x 158 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)

Fig. 6.2 Walter Benington, *The Embankment* (1925)

Gravure 248 x 168 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)

*The British Journal of Photography* offered its congratulations to the London Secession:

The fine old fighting spirit is still heaving the breasts of at least ten of the old Links ... the first exhibition must unhesitatingly be pronounced a success from the point of view of photographic art [which] ... if it has a future, will find it in such frank and unsophisticated expressions as Walter Benington's *Thames Embankment* (*British Journal of Photography* 1911a: 362-363).

Mortimer in *Amateur Photographer* responded with a predictable mix of seeming cordiality and finely judged malice: "A little exhibition of pictorial work by the small coterie of photographers calling themselves The London Secession" (Mortimer 1911c: 476). Somewhat mockingly he congratulated the exhibitors on the uniform excellence of the frames. He then offered a few platitudes on the work of each photographer: "Walter Benington gives us another St Paul's, but still not up to his classic of this subject. His *Tony* is big and compels attention by its simplicity of treatment, and *The Child at the Window* with its little pixie-like figure at the bottom of the print, also leaves a lasting impression, but is rather heavy in tone" (Mortimer 1911c: 476).

Benington's selection of three images for the London Secession seems almost perverse in its avoidance of the obvious. *The Thames Embankment* (Fig. 6.1) takes enormous risks with the technical challenges of translating his vision into an effective photographic image. It is understated and requires the viewer to explore the subject in a reflective manner. Fig. 6.1 is reproduced from the print in *Thirty-two views of St Paul's* (Benington 1931a). The 1911 view of the Embankment is partnered here by a very similar image taken in 1925, Fig. 6.2, as a reminder of Benington's life-long preoccupation with St Paul's Cathedral.

*The Child at the Window* and *Tony* marked a radical departure from his previous exhibition practice as if he felt he had an opportunity to explore and to experiment. Snowden Ward offered a lengthy commentary on the former:

It is not merely 'a' child, but childhood, in a strange and not-too-friendly world, in the unguarded, unhelped, misunderstood time that is a part of all child-life, and it is the whole of the lives of some children. This may not be what the picture tells to others – even to Benington, who made it (Ward 1911f: 55-56).

Unfortunately, the original of *The Child at the Window* has not been located and the reproduction in *Photograms of the Year 1911* is so low key that further copying renders it almost indecipherable. The portrait of *Tony*, Benington's son, was reproduced in the 1909 Prospectus for the Photographic Association.

Mortimer effectively snubbed the contributions of Stieglitz and Annie Brigman no doubt as a consequence of the extraordinary altercation between Mortimer and Stieglitz. The hostility between the two had arisen over the unauthorised reproduction in *Amateur Photographer* of photographs by Annie Brigman from *Camera Work*. Of itself, the publication might have been considered a serious breach of professional etiquette but it escalated after Mortimer's condescending "apology" provoked Stieglitz to issue the correspondence in a pamphlet called *Photo-Secessionism and its Opponents* (Stieglitz 1910a). This consisted of correspondence with American critics and editors and was circulated to Mortimer's rival editors in London. Mortimer responded with "The Self-Seeker" (Mortimer 1910a: 276). Stieglitz then published a second pamphlet in which he called Mortimer "a poltroon" (Stieglitz 1910b).

Harker (1979) devoted a brief paragraph to the London Secession noting the determination of the Perfectionists to remain exclusive by holding exhibitions only when there was enough good material to justify a show. She concluded that in spite of its reported success "for reasons unknown it [the London Secession exhibition of 1911] was not repeated" (Harker 1979: 123). In an account of the rise and fall of the Linked Ring, C H L Emanuel, a Link from 1896, noted that Mortimer had mentioned, *en passant*, the London Secession when applauding the success of his own London Salon. Mortimer had claimed that "a strong, open exhibition was needed in London

... more sympathetic ... to new men and original work than the RPS offered” (Mortimer 1912: 5-6). However, somewhat condescendingly, he had added that the London Salon would have been stronger had it included work by members of the London Secession. Emmanuel’s 1950 article continued “This is the last reference we can trace to the London Secession; after their one exhibition they faded out, leaving the London Salon of Photography ... as the sole successor of the Linked Ring” (Emmanuel 1950: 276).

In fact, in his Centenary Lecture on Pictorial Photography, Dudley Johnston (1939a: 179-203) had recalled the London Secession exhibition as one of the three most significant events in the recent history of photography. The first was Holland Day’s *The New School of American Photography* in 1900 while he debated with himself as to whether Stieglitz’s Albright Exhibition of 1910 or the London Secession should be awarded the final accolade. On balance he believed that an exhibition of handpicked works by seventeen of the world’s greatest photographers – the London Secession – should be regarded as the finest exhibition ever staged. As noted above, Benington was one of the exhibitors at the London Secession as, indeed, was Johnston himself (Johnston 1939a: 179-203).

A number of possible reasons as to why the London Secession exhibition of 1911 was not repeated emerge from Benington’s correspondence with Stieglitz. In response to the invitation to contribute to the Buffalo exhibition, Benington had acknowledged that the support Stieglitz was receiving from a major American art institution was unlikely to be replicated in Britain through lack of interest in photography by the major art establishments. Most tellingly he had added “I fear there are hardly enough of us over here” (Beinecke Letter 102/1 Benington to Stieglitz, 14 June 1910). He seemed to be making two separate but related points. The first was that, whatever the photographic establishment might like to believe, the ‘art bodies’ in Britain at this time did not acknowledge photography’s kinship with any of the recognized visual arts. This position was consistently maintained for a number of years thereafter and may help to

explain the long delay in the acceptance, in Britain, of the ‘art status’ of photography by the cultural elite. The second point which Benington made related to “us” – the very few British photographers who were actively concerned about maintaining the highest of standards. In a further letter he answered Stieglitz’s complaint that the Photographic Salon had failed to do its duty towards Pictorial photography – a constant Stieglitz diatribe directed also to Davison and to Arbuthnot. Benington explained that the “elect”, as he called the Perfectionists, were few in number and there was no one who could sustain “the certainty of absolute financial loss” of organizing and promoting exhibitions – they lacked someone with the drive of a Stieglitz. He stated bluntly that even the most enthusiastic workers have to compromise standards by undertaking more popular and financially rewarding work – to their undoubted detriment:.

I must earn bread & a roof & clothing for me & mine, and it would require a more than ordinary wrench to plunge into the highest phases of Pictorial Photography as sole occupation – all I can do is to struggle on at my best whenever I can see my way (Beinecke Letter 102/2 Benington to Stieglitz, 6 July 1910. Original emphasis).

It becomes clear that without committed leadership and assured financial backing, the long-term future of the London Secession would be in doubt. Even including Coburn and Baron de Meyer, who were each assiduous in furthering their own careers, there were fewer than a dozen British members of the Group. While Davison, Annan and Calland had helped establish the Linked Ring as a powerful force, and were keen for its values to be maintained, their capacity to intervene decisively in matters of organization and finance appear to have diminished. The potential of others in the group to be leaders and organizers was compromised by their commitment to other activities. Benington had made it clear that he was not in a position to give the necessary leadership. Arbuthnot had been elected to the Linked Ring in October 1907 and had made an immediate impact on the Photographic Salon in 1908. As Secretary of the new Group, he had been responsible for the organization of the exhibition. He was now working in partnership with Benington at the Photographic Association studios as advertised in the London Secession exhibition Catalogue. Between them they might have



been able to provide the impetus for continuing with the London Secession if they had been guaranteed continued support from Stieglitz as Arbuthnot suggested before the exhibition. The possibility of an International Society had been mooted in 1905 but had come to nothing:

Surely, if you consider our work worthy, it would be better to come to some understanding for mutual support, and for the recognition of the claims of Photography as an artistic medium in this Country as well as in America” (Beinecke Letter 52/3, Arbuthnot to Stieglitz, 6 July 1910)

While the London Secession enjoyed its status as a self-contained and rather elitist exhibition, the populist movement spearheaded by Mortimer at *Amateur Photographer* was increasingly setting the agenda and claiming to speak for British photography. For Mortimer the 1909 Photographic Salon had been a significant step forward and the 1910 London Salon consolidated his position. He had already been involved in the selection of the British representation for the Anglo-Japan Exhibition at the White City in May 1910. Benington and Arbuthnot were both included. The following year Mortimer was again responsible for selecting the British contribution, this time for the International Photographic Exhibition in Sydney, Australia in April 1911. Benington and Arbuthnot were not included (*Amateur Photographer* 1911a: 147). Mortimer’s influence was much increased in December 1911 when, on the death of H Snowden Ward, he became editor of the annual *Photograms of the Year*. The British environment for the Purist ideals of the London Secession was becoming increasingly hostile.

It was also becoming apparent that further support from Stieglitz would be unlikely. Buffalo 1910 had been an undoubted success but it also marked a watershed. As already noted, in 1909 Stieglitz claimed that his long term mission was nearing completion (Beinecke Letter, 285/3 Stieglitz to Davison, 10 April 1909). He had repeated much the same key thought to Ernst Jühl “So at last the dream I had in Berlin in 1885 has become a reality” (Stieglitz 1911). The belief that Buffalo 1910 represented the end

of a particular chapter was also noted in *American Photography*, a journal frequently at odds with Stieglitz:

Is the Photo-Secession, having at last stormed the citadel which it has been assaulting so long, having won the Recognition which has been the watchword of its fight, now singing, in this exhibition, its *Nunc dimittis*? (Lidbury 1910: 681).

Doty notes that after Buffalo 1910, many members of the Photo-Secession became professional photographers and the “group effort, which had kept them working [and] nourished their art, had perished. The sense of purpose [of the Photo-Secession] was lost” (Doty 1978: 57)

The collapse of the Linked Ring following the acrimonious events in 1908 and 1909 had been a watershed in both the narrative of British photography and in Benington’s own career. The Populist majority began to command the exhibition schedules and the reporting of events and therefore increasingly dominated the narrative as it turned into history. The London Salon, with its claim to have inherited the mantle of the Linked Ring had marginalized the minority Purists. Their attempt to salvage something in the form of the London Secession was generally judged to have been successful but failed to be sustained. Meanwhile in America, Doty claimed that Stieglitz “No longer approved of the painterly techniques ... and could no longer support those who continued to practice them” (Doty 1978: 57) Groups which insisted on maintaining the now discredited ways such as the Pictorial Photographers of America were denigrated because “the original impetus was lost; ‘pictorial photography’ became synonymous with a vapid, stilted and worn out style” (Doty 1978: 57) Such a description might well have been applied to the main body of British photography as it became increasingly trapped in a similar position. Benington was moving rapidly and decisively in the opposite direction.

### **Walter Benington and The Photographic Association**

In 1909 Benington had become Photographer, Manager & Proprietor of The Photographic Association, 14 & 15 Conduit Street, New Bond Street,

London. W.” He published a slim illustrated prospectus which gave notice of the services which The Photographic Association offered. In addition to the portrait work which he hoped would provide the backbone of the activities, The Photographic Association also offered developing and printing for amateur photographers’ own film and the sale of materials and equipment. Personal tuition in all aspects of photographic work on payment of annual subscription of 2 guineas was available. In 1911, an advertisement in the Catalogue of the London Secession declared under the heading “Lessons in Pictorial Photography” that “Messrs. Malcolm Arbuthnot and Walter Benington have a few vacancies in their Summer Class.” In a later publicity notice, The Photographic Association was described as:

a proprietary club for the assistance of the dilettante amateur, among the members of which were the late Duke of Newcastle, the Earl of Rock-Savage, Colonel A Weston Jarvis, the Countess of Dartrey, Miss Gertrude Bell and many others” (Benington 1935)

In spite of the list of Society patrons and its prestigious location off Bond Street, *The Photographic Association* was essentially a commercial enterprise in an extremely competitive environment.

Benington’s decision to acquire *The Photographic Association* in 1909 marked a distinct turning point in his career both professionally and creatively. The opportunity to concentrate on portrait work may well have been driven by financial concerns, but another factor, rather more difficult to quantify, may have been involved. With the collapse of the Linked Ring and the subsequent failure of the London Secession, the whole nature of the photographic environment had changed and the close network of similar minded colleagues no longer operated. Even more difficult to confirm is the perception that he had exhausted his interest in the Pictorialist representation of landscape either pastoral or urban. Although he exhibited with the RPS and later with the London Salon until shortly before his death, this was no longer his central interest. The costs in terms of time and material required to produce prints of exhibition quality were considerable and had to be weighed against the possible benefits gained from public

display. He did however organize a number of One-Man shows to ensure that his work remained before the public. One such exhibition was the One-Man show at the Arts and Actors Club in June 1914 which included several of his St Paul's images causing one commentator to wonder whether "Mr Benington ought not to be compelled by Act of Parliament to go on depicting London all his days in the interest of posterity no less than in that of his contemporaries" (*Amateur Photographer* 1914a: 565-566).

Benington fortunately ignored the injunction and continued to explore widely a range of photographic options. In the following survey of Benington's post-Pictorialist work, we will look at the wide variety of different genres of photography which he explored.

In 1912, F J Mortimer noted that J Dudley Johnston, Eustace Calland, and Walter Benington – all members of the London Secession – had done little exhibition work in 1912. According to Mortimer, Benington had devoted considerable attention to professional portraiture. Mortimer also mentioned the production of "an excellent series of London pictures ... stamped with a notable pictorial and personal outlook, and more should be heard of them anon" (Mortimer 1912: 7). Mortimer's reference to a series of London pictures suggests a published volume or portfolio which has not yet come to light. Much of Benington's photographic output from this period was concerned with his portraiture but he never lost his interest in London, the River Thames and St Paul's Cathedral which remained constant themes throughout the remainder of his career.

An important feature about Benington and his work as he moved from being an amateur Pictorialist to being a professional photographer was the commitment he made to a wide range of subject matter and photographic treatments. The conventional hierarchy of genres in painting had prompted a similar hierarchy in photography with the pictorial treatment of landscapes as worthy of the highest approval. A common complaint of those anxious to extend the range of photographic subject matter and experimental approaches to recording it was the perception that only "art" photography

merited serious attention. In 1975 Ian Jeffrey made this point strongly in his analysis of how and why so much important photography has been lost or neglected. He claimed that too often attention was paid to the work of a handful of well-known names while “a huge retinue of anonymous or half forgotten supporters – amateur, anthropological, topographical and industrial photographers – occupying a vague terrain around and beyond the heights” (Jeffrey 1975: 5). Such a warning is an invaluable reminder not to consider Benington’s new work as of a lower standing than his earlier Pictorialist work.

Elizabeth Edwards has recently restated the case for a wider and more inclusive view of valuable photography in her article “Photography's default history is told as art – it shouldn't be” (Edwards 2015). Much of the discussion about the future of photography continued to be in terms of “art” photography and exhibitions of the London Salon and the RPS were largely devoted to this genre of photography and favoured an increasingly weak and imitative pastoralism. In his contribution to a later discussion about Modernism, John Havinden had remarked on his sense of isolation and how he felt like an alien in Britain: “I think photographers in general must throw off their narrow vision and come to the point where they see the world with a new pair of eyes” (Havinden 1933: 142-143). Benington had been doing precisely this for a number of years while most of his erstwhile colleagues were content to remain within their comfort zone.

Even before he had established himself at *The Photographic Association*, he had begun to explore other non-Pictorialist opportunities. One such project was to contribute a number of photographic illustrations for the *Memorial Edition* of the works of George Meredith (Meredith 1909). F H Evans contributed a significant number of illustrations to this project and may well have been instrumental in securing Benington’s involvement. The friendship between Evans and Benington was very important to each even though there was some twenty years difference in their ages and Evans’s photographic experience was so much greater. Alvin Langdon Coburn was

also involved in the Meredith enterprise having previously supplied photographic Frontispieces for the New York *Henry James Collected Edition* (James 1907).



Fig. 6.3 Walter Benington, *Old Lady* (c. 1908)  
from *Amateur Photographer* 9 June 1908: 585

In advertising *The Photographic Association*, Benington produced a Prospectus illustrated with examples of his own work including *Tony* later exhibited at the London Secession show in 1911 and a delightful portrait of a lace-capped old lady (Fig. 6.3) much praised when it had been included in his One-Man Show at the RPS in June 1908 “A happy inspiration in portraiture ... in which the quietness, peace, and happy atmosphere of approaching old age are delightfully set forth” (Blake 1908a: 582-583). The Prospectus was aimed at a clientele which valued individual service and first class presentation. While Benington became a leading portrait photographer within a relatively short period, his initial tasks within *The Photographic Association* were a good deal more mundane. Although he offered studio sittings, Benington emphasised the benefits for the sitter of making the portraits in the home environment without the distraction of the usual apparatus of the photographic studio. He elaborated on these benefits

in articles such as “Indoor Photography at Other People’s Houses” (Benington 1912: 615). His delightful portrait, *Mrs Leith and her Baby Son* was noted as “most captivating on account of its happy pose” (Tilney 1913a: 18) while *Tony and Barbara (Brother and Sister)* (Fig. 6.4) remained one of his favourite studies of his own children.



Fig. 6.4 Walter Benington, *Tony and Barbara* (1911) (aka *Brother and Sister*) from *Amateur Photographer* 3 December 1924: 338

In addition to family and domestic portraits he began to build a substantial practice in the world of the theatre and the arts. Sitters during the pre-war period included the actress Pauline Chase who had played Peter Pan since 1906, Wilfred Whitten, the editor of the popular periodical, *John O’London’s Weekly* and the eminent physician *Sir Jonathon Hutchinson*. His portraits of *Mr Israel Zangwill* (Fig. 6.5) and *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (Fig. 6.6) gained much approval as did those of the Crimean veteran and Constable of the Tower of London, *Field Marshall Sir Evelyn Wood* and the painter *Frank Dicksee* amongst many others.

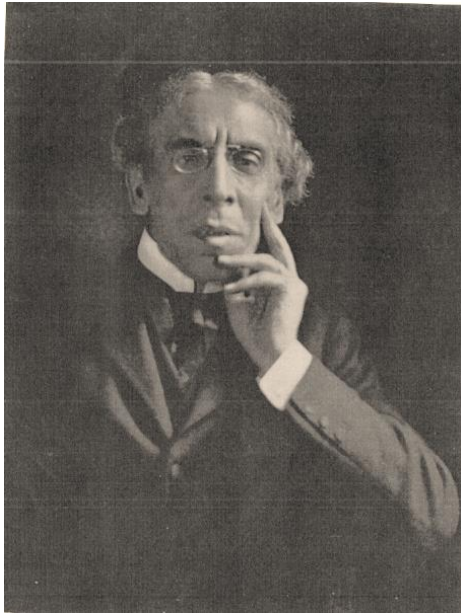


Fig. 6.5 Walter Benington, *Israel Zangwill* (1914) Bromide 280 x 220 mm (photo: © Benington Collections) Reproduced in *The Sphere*, 6 June 1914: 305

Fig. 6.6 Walter Benington, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (1914) Bromide 280 x 220 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

We shall examine a number of other Benington portraits later in this chapter. There are however important links between this side of his work and other projects in which he was involved. A double portrait of the actors *Irene Rooke and Milton Rosmer* was praised for its “effective use of *simplification and emphasis* ... [and] its peculiar *arrangement of light* and the *daringly angular lines* of the composition” (Guest 1914c: 251-252, 254, emphasis added). The phrases highlighted in Guest’s analysis of Benington’s technique – *simplification and emphasis*, *arrangement of light* and *daringly angular lines* are crucial elements in the modernist compositional vocabulary which he increasingly employed. They can also be applied to other images in very different circumstances such as two major projects which he undertook with his older brother, the poet Wilson Benington – “Shakespeare’s London as it is” and “Tilbury Docks”.

### **New views of London**

“Shakespeare’s London as it is” was prepared for the radical weekly *The Pall Mall Magazine* whose contributors included Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and H G Wells. The illustrated article was designed



as a riposte to the elaborate exhibition *Shakespeare's England* staged at Earl's Court in 1912. The exhibition, created by Mrs George Cornwallis-West, formerly Lady Randolph Churchill, was intended to raise funds for the tercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare's death due in 1916. It included a full scale model of the Globe Theatre designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens as well as replicas of Elizabethan buildings and jousting in the lists. The glamorous nature of the exhibition with its promotion of a vision of some magical past was clearly at odds with the emerging scholarship about Shakespeare and his times. More significantly, the "myth" of Shakespeare's London was contradicted by the "real" London of the Bankside which remained virtually unknown territory for many. Text and image of "Shakespeare's London as it is" combine to present a dramatic picture of a desolate and impoverished area (Benington, Wilson, 1912a:152-163).



Fig. 6.7 Walter Benington, *Puddle Dock* (1912)  
Bromide 245 x 178 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)



Fig. 6.8 Walter Benington, *The Site of the Rose Theatre* (1912)  
Bromide 240 x 178 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

The second major collaboration between the two brothers was the unpublished manuscript and photographic portfolio, “A Tour round Tilbury Docks.” In support of their excitement in visiting the Docks, Wilson wrote “The harshest utility, the austere fact, is not unfit to stimulate imagination, and may be resolved into enduring beauty by an artist-hand.” (Benington, Wilson, 1912b) The phrase is remarkably similar to Benington’s earlier declaration about the *Beauty of Ugliness*: “so lamp-posts, telegraph poles, or even electric light poles ... may serve to assist in conveying an artistic or poetical idea” (Benington 1904c: 282)

The images selected from the two portfolios demonstrate something of the imaginative power of Benington’s interpretation of the industrial scene. A

number of images from the Tilbury portfolio were later used to illustrate a morale-boosting *Country Life* article “London’s Trade and the War” about war-time trade with the Empire (Reid 1917: 541-544). *Country Life* had earlier published another article designed to reassure the public that life continued normally in spite of the war. “The Green Nooks of the City” by Wilfred Whitten included eight of Benington’s images designed to capture the solidity and permanence of British life in London (Whitten 1916: 637-640). Glossy illustrated journals such as *Country Life*, *The Sphere* and *The Globe* aimed at the burgeoning middle and upper-middle classes had an enormous appetite for quality photographic images.



Fig. 6.9 Walter Benington, *Tilbury Docks – Unloading Timber* (1912) Bromide 255 x 190 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections) Reproduced in *Country Life* 8 December 1917: 541-544



Fig. 6.10 Walter Benington, *Tilbury Docks – The Rudder* (1912)  
Bromide 268 x 188 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

Benington's other projects included illustrations for a series of walking guides to London and the surrounding countryside for The London General Omnibus Co. Ltd. and the Underground Railways Co. Ltd. One of his most important commissions was for the *Architectural Review* to compile a photographic portfolio of the major features of the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley (Benington 1924a: 205-217) The images have proved an invaluable resource for later historians and commentators.

### **Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska**

From his earliest days as a professional photographer, Benington had built up a very wide range of contacts within the arts and the theatre. One of the first of these contacts led to his photographing Jacob Epstein in his studio

while the latter was working on the massive figure *Maternity* in 1910. Subsequently he made important photographic records of Epstein's works including different versions of *Doves* and a number of studies of *The Tomb of Oscar Wilde* as it was nearing completion (Fig. 6.11). One of his most significant images is his photographic record of Epstein's original drawings of *The Rock Drill*. Many of these images have been reproduced in standard histories of British sculpture and biographical studies of Epstein and his work but are rarely credited to Benington.



Fig. 6.11 Walter Benington, *The Tomb of Oscar Wilde by Jacob Epstein* (1912) Bromide 197 x 160 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections) Reproduced in *The New Age*, 6 June 1912: supplement.



Fig. 6.12 Walter Benington, *Gaudier at work on the Head of Ezra Pound* Silver print, 209 x 158 mm. Archive of Modern Conflict, London (photo: Archive of Modern Conflict)

Perhaps of even greater significance is Benington's photographic record of the young French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915) and his work. The iconic image of Gaudier in his studio (Fig 6.12) has frequently been reproduced as have his other portraits of the sculptor save one which has only recently been rediscovered. A full account of tracking down the "missing" portrait and the possible reasons for its suppression was published in "Picturing Gaudier: Walter Benington's Photographic Record" (Crow 2013: 108-118). In 1912 Benington had been introduced to Gaudier by Haldane Macfall (1866-1928) the literary critic and art historian. Macfall was a fellow member of the Camera Club and had contributed several contentious articles about photography to the ongoing debate about art and

photography. He had recently sat to Gaudier for a portrait bust (Fig. 6.13). In a pleasing symmetry, Macfall had also recently sat to Benington for a photographic portrait – sadly no longer extant.



Fig. 6.13 Walter Benington, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's "Head of Haldane Macfall,"* (c.1912); in the manuscript of 'A Life of Gaudier-Brzeska' by H.S. Ede, 1929 (MS: 138) Vintage print, 155 x 195 mm. (photo: permission of Leeds Museums and Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive))

Dr Evelyn Silber's definitive study of Gaudier (1996) includes several examples of Benington's images although the majority of her photographic illustrations are by David Finn who commented on the need to photograph the work from many different angles to realise "the visual feasts for the searching photographer's eye" represented by Gaudier's work (Finn 1996: 144). Finn does not always resist the temptation of creating "entirely new works of art – completely independent of their actual, material referents" (Johnson 2013: 14). Benington's strictly non-interventionist approach allows the sculptures space to breathe and gives the viewer the opportunity to reflect individually on the pieces. Fig. 6.14 is a copy of the only record

of a piece by Gaudier now missing. The original print is in a portfolio in the Tate Gallery archive and the glass negative is in the Courtauld Institute, C87/108. Both are unique. The significance of Benington's Gaudier portfolios is that they allow us to respond directly to the sculptor and his work without any critical intervention.

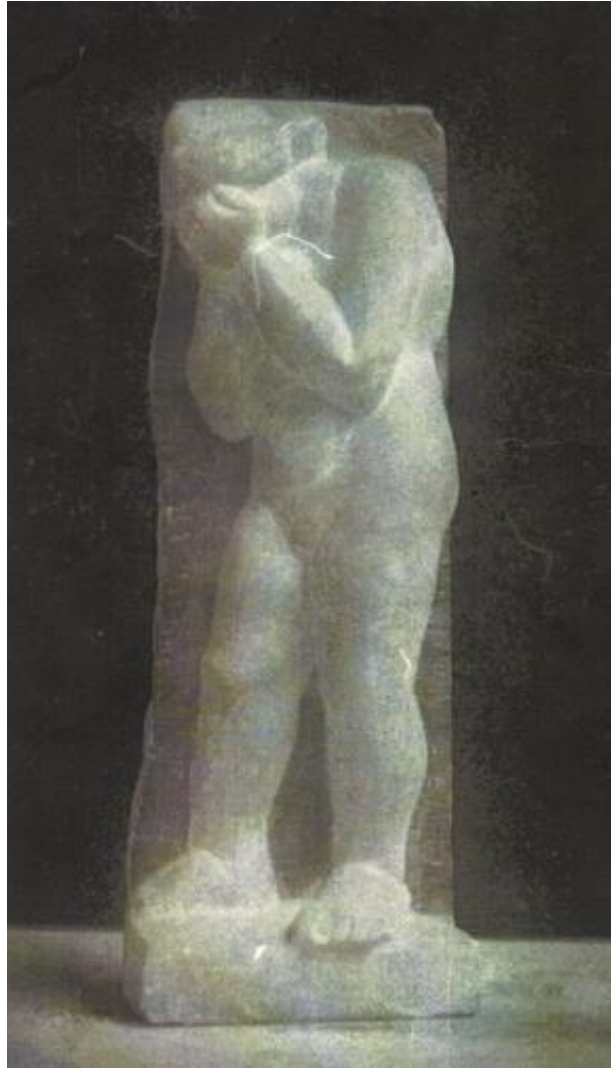


Fig. 6.14 Walter Benington, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's "Weeping Woman"* (c.1912) Silver print, 277 x 136 mm. Tate Gallery Archive (TGA 8525.24) (photo: © Tate, London, 1914)

The scenario represented in Fig. 6.12 has been extensively analysed in terms of the relationship between Gaudier and Pound (Rives 2011: 137-159; Wood 2004: 191-217; Tickner 1993: 55-61). Perhaps of even greater interest about Fig. 6.12 is what it tells us about the relationship between Gaudier and Benington because "in photographs of direct carving it is invariably *the ideal moment* that is recreated ... a curious, shared moment



co-ordinated and captured by the photographer” (Wood 2001: 13 original emphasis).

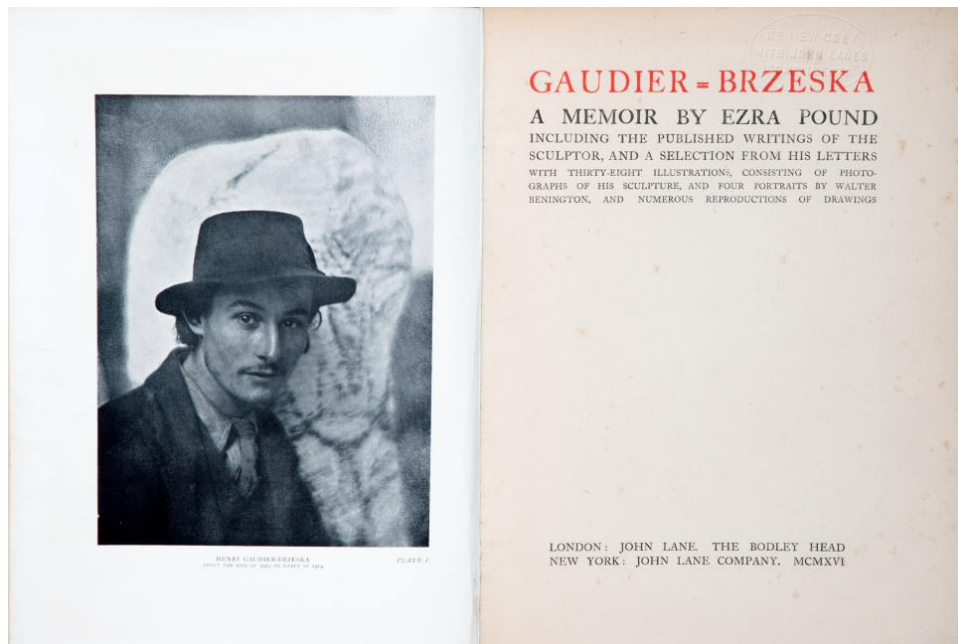


Fig. 6.15 Walter Benington, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska* (1914) Frontispiece with Title Page, Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir*, 1916 (photo: G. Light)

In his 1916 *Memoir* (Fig. 6.15) Pound had written enthusiastically that Gaudier’s writings and the reproductions of his sculpture and drawings can help to give the man himself but “Mr Benington’s camera has the better of me, for it gives the subject as if ready to move and to speak” (Pound 1916: 35)

The outbreak of the Great War had had a profound impact on all aspects of photography. The increasing scarcity and prohibitive costs of chemicals, especially of the platinum salts required for the highest quality printing meant some reduction in Benington’s output. Limitations on the availability of newsprint and a redirection of editorial policy towards patriotic and propaganda materials also encouraged a change in Benington’s activities. He took part in the “Snapshots from Home” campaign during which photographers, both amateur and professional, were encouraged to photograph families and send the images to troops serving at the Front. The initiative was developed by the YMCA and Benington’s article “Snapshots from Home – some experiences” (Benington 1916: 68) included five

illustrations. The article was reproduced in *YM*, the house journal of the YMCA with the editorial comment:

Mr Benington is one of the leaders in pictorial photography ... [one] of the high-priests of the photographic art with a big 'A.' The interest taken by such men in 'Snapshots from Home' is a great encouragement" (*YM* 1916: 101).

Alvin Langdon Coburn was another noted contributor. He had argued for a positive but humble approach while retaining the integrity of the real artist, but "none of your fuzzy stuff" (Coburn 1915b: 376.)

In spite of restrictions on photography and a steep increase in the cost of materials, the annual exhibitions had remained remarkably international in character throughout the war. "Every corner of the earth seems to have offered something, excepting God-forsaken Germany ... [works from] the land of the Huns are not in the slightest degree missed" (Tilney 1915b: 620-623). Antony Guest had declared "we are for once spared the presence of productions from Germany and Austria ... for their gloom and heaviness, and pervading negation" (Guest 1915b: 252). The benefits of international competition in the exhibitions were rather mixed. Tilney noted the strength of the American representation at the 1918 London Salon and wanted to know the reason for the "failure of British photographers to do work which can win places of honour in a British show organized by British experts" (Tilney 1918b: 435-436). As noted previously, British commentators often adopted what now seems to be patronising attitudes towards foreign work. Tilney considered American work to be "virile, trenchant and unsophisticated" while British photography "is conscientious, but with a sort of sheep-like conformity to safe custom" (Tilney 1918b: 435-436).

### **Portraits, Portfolios and the NPG**

Benington's portrait, *Miss Ellen Terry* (Fig.6.16) was exhibited at his One-Man show in June 1914 and at the RPS Annual show in September where it was warmly appreciated:

Many visitors will recognise old acquaintances among Mr Walter Benington's works, and will welcome the opportunity of seeing Miss Ellen Terry, who is sympathetically depicted with delightful vivacity, something of her former charm being recognised in addition to the influence of years. (Guest 1914b: 230)



Fig. 6.16 Walter Benington, *Miss Ellen Terry* (1914)  
Bromide 200 x 232 mm. RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS) See also Plate XVI

A later commentator remarked that the strength of a real portrait comes from recognizing that it is a human record not just “a view of a body in a certain environment. It must attempt to capture the character of the sitter through precise detail and the accurate representation of the physical being

in relation to its environment to reveal the inner being” (*Photography* 1917a: 126-127, emphasis added) This delightfully informal portrait of the actress conforms in many ways to the description as to what makes a “real” portrait. It is a very human document with the pose constructed to allow her to be relaxed and yet in command. The hands rest gently on the frame within the frame and the natural light avoids heavy shadow under the rim of the hat. Benington has also been helped in creating the relaxed but poised nature of the image by the fact that Ellen Terry was a consummate actress.

Benington’s reputation as a portrait photographer had been well established before the outbreak of World War I and he continued to work with a wide range of sitters throughout the war and beyond. The list of “known” sitters currently stands at almost 300 and ongoing research is adding new names at regular intervals. They fall into a number of categories – scientists, academics and literary figures, those involved in the arts, music and the theatre, politicians and those in public life together with others less well-known. We know that Benington exhibited selected portraits with the RPS and the London Salon and that he also arranged several One-Man Shows to celebrate and publicize his work. The following is a small selection from the richly varied portraits which Benington produced.

The dancer Margaret Morris (1891-1980) was featured in a number of Benington portraits. In 1914 Morris had started 'The Margaret Morris Club' in Flood Street in Chelsea for productions of original work and ‘free’ discussion. Members of the Club included leading figures of the avant-garde such as Augustus John, Epstein, Wadsworth, Katherine Mansfield, Middleton Murry, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Bernard Shaw, the Sitwells and Gordon Craig. It is not certain how involved Benington became with the group but he made photographic portraits of several of them including Mansfield, Shaw and Epstein. In 1915 Benington had exhibited Fig. 6.17 *Miss Margaret Morris – The Wicked Stepmother* which was greeted with a mixture of prurience and envy:

fancy costume and stage subjects are no doubt a welcome relief in the studio to ordinary clothes. People so clad are no longer under the obligations of well behaved existence, but may throw propriety to the winds. It is not surprising that under such stimulus many excellent things result. Walter Benington has a fantastic exercise of this sort, which is perhaps rather acrobatic than mimetic (*British Journal of Photography* 1915b: 620-621)



Fig.6.17 Walter Benington, *Miss Margaret Morris – The Wicked Stepmother* (1915) from *Photograms of the Year 1915*: Plate LXIX

Another critic complained “She is of the modern ballet, and that fact obviates all obligations ... nobody has outdone W Benington for sheer inconsequence and arbitrary fancy [or] made the most of the opportunities for the curious” (Tilney 1915c: Plate LVIX.). The phrase is laden with the prejudices against attempts to introduce modern ideas and values into

British cultural life. The hostility of the general public to Epstein's sculptures on the BMA building on the Strand in 1908 or Roger Fry's *Manet and the Post Impressionists* exhibition of 1910 is encapsulated in the sneering reference to "the modern ballet."

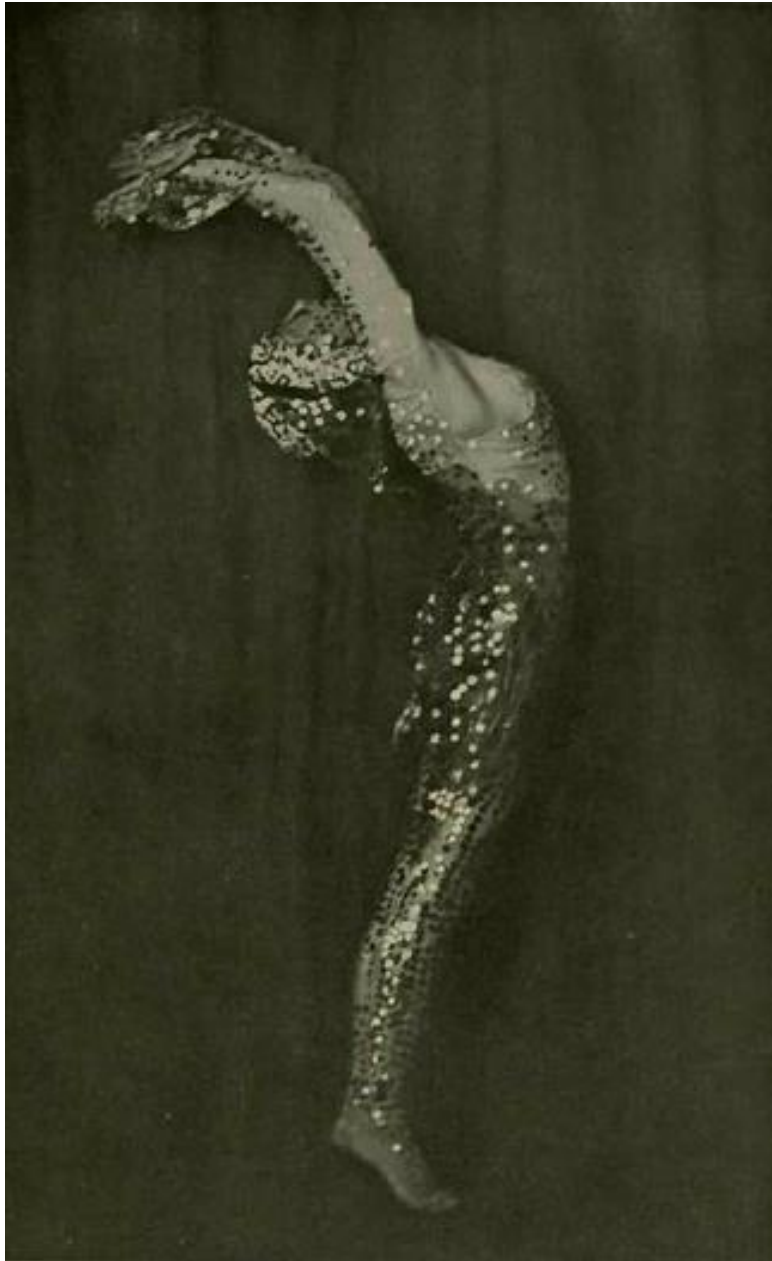


Fig. 6.18 Walter Benington, *Poisson d'Or (Miss Margaret Morris)* (1917) from *Photograms of the Year 1917*: Plate LI

Benington maximizes the drama of *Miss Margaret Morris – The Wicked Stepmother* with the extraordinary pose defined by the swirl of material and the strong front lighting casting a shadow on the back wall. Morris continued to develop the talents of young dancers as well as enjoying a

substantial reputation as a solo dancer. Benington's *Le Poisson d'Or* (1917) represents her in a dance to music by Debussy (Morris 1969: 38).

Benington was congratulated as "the Puck of Photography ... Two years ago he gave us *The Wicked Stepmother* and *Miss Margaret Morris as Le Poisson d'Or* is its brilliant peer. The finding and losing of the torso are features of this masterly work" (*Photograms of the Year 1917* Plate LI). In the absence of an original print with some fine detail we can only hazard a guess that the reference to the "finding and losing of the torso" is a reference to the suppleness of Morris's body shape. The comments on the two images highlight something of the divide within society towards modern art whether in design, music, painting or dance. Morris's exotic dances and colourful presentations – often provided by her husband the Scottish painter J D Fergusson – provided some substitute for the fact that visits from the *Ballet Russe* to London were now no longer possible because of the war.

*The Striped Dress*, the third of Benington's studies of Margaret Morris, was exhibited at the London Salon in 1918 and provoked similar responses to those which greeted the earlier Morris images. There was a mixture of praise for Benington's technical skills, doubt about the suitability of the subject matter for a photographic exhibition devoted to Art Photography, and dismissal of anything to do with design or poster work. *Photograms 1918* claimed that the image was "in his exuberant vein but rather unsettling. It should however be considered a design. His name is a synonym of quality and this sums up everything." (*Photograms of the Year 1918*: 18) Benington had clearly become noted for his off-beat humour as "the Puck of Photography" (*Photograms of the Year 1917*: Plate LI) and "nobody has outdone W Benington for sheer inconsequence and arbitrary fancy (Tilney 1915c: Plate LVIX.). Nevertheless:

his work can be admired for its sheer technical competence ... it is a striking little print with fine quality ... rather unsettling because of its peculiar arrangement of light and the daringly angular lines of the composition [it is] the kind of thing people in the poster line are persuading themselves to prefer ... it should however be considered a design (Tilney 1918b:424)



Fig. 6.19 Walter Benington, *The Striped Dress (Miss Margaret Morris)* (1918) vintage chlorobromide print, 1918, 197 x 127 mm. NPG x128743. Given by Terence Pepper, 2006 (photo: National Portrait Gallery) Reproduced in *Photograms of the Year 1918*: 18

Tilney's reference to Benington's "peculiar arrangement of light and the daringly angular lines" is a helpful reminder of Antony Guest's earlier critique of Benington's *Irene Rooke and Milton Rosmer* which was praised for its "effective use of *simplification and emphasis* ... [and] its peculiar *arrangement of light and the daringly angular lines* of the composition" (Guest 1914c: 251-252, 254, emphasis added). These criticisms of his special character portrait work are strong reminders that photographic conventions had clear boundaries which Benington had cheerfully breached. The comments also crystallize the difficulty which some within the



establishment had in coming to terms with modernist tendencies in photography. Others, like the well-known portrait photographer and commentator Herbert Lambert, praised *The Striped Dress* warmly as “very striking ... a character portrait of a subject in a striped dress, a brilliant contrast being treated with great vigour” (Lambert 1920: 374). It should be noted that Benington considered *The Striped Dress* as one of his most important images as it was included in the 1924 mini retrospective (Benington 1924a: 537-538)



Fig. 6.20 Walter Benington, *Portrait* (1922) Chlorobromide print 280 x 220 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

Equally striking is the very individual *Portrait* (Fig. 6.20) which was exhibited in 1922 and drew an angry response:

It is modern in as much as it is a revival of the ascetic primness and 'no nonsense' phase of our feminine forebears ... but why make capital out of the unearthed gaucheries of days past? Painters have done it I know: Orpen for one, but is there any merit in simply following suit? (Tilney 1922a: 18)

The reference to William Orpen (1878-1931) was particularly revealing because Orpen's post-war work was considered by some to be superficial, slick and mechanical (Arnold 1981: 400-401). The image is far more intense and questioning than Tilney allows and it merits close study.

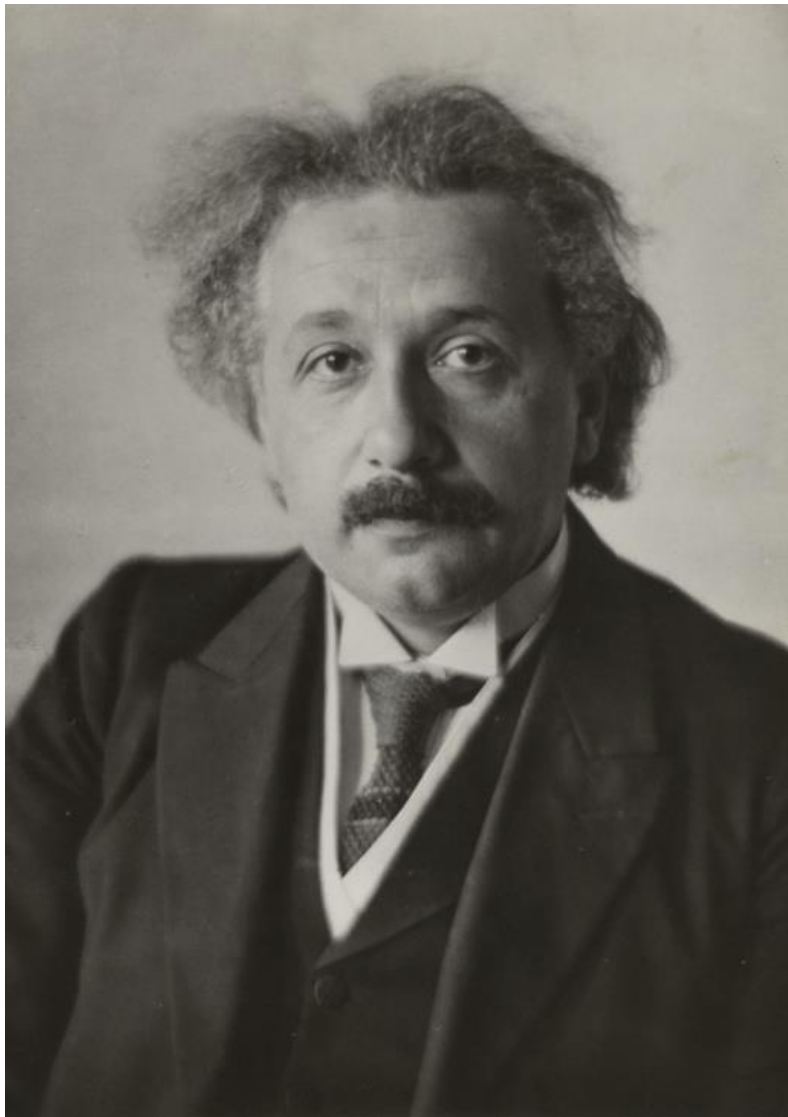


Fig. 6.21 Walter Benington, *Albert Einstein* (1921) Vintage 147 x 106 mm NPG x82213. (photo: National Portrait Gallery)

In June 1921, Viscount Haldane had invited Einstein to give a lecture in London on his theories of Relativity. The event attracted enormous

attention. *The Sphere*, 18 June 1921 published the double portrait of Einstein and Haldane on its front cover together with a small inset image of Einstein (Fig. 6.21). The glass negatives of both are amongst about two hundred negatives found in a large metal trunk in a cupboard at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. For some sitters there are multiple negatives – in the case of Einstein we have three of the scientist by himself (BOD C64/7-9) two in conversation with Lord Haldane (BOD C64/10-11) and there are a further two negatives of Haldane by himself (BOD C64/14-15) The sequence is fascinating in capturing the informal spirit of the meeting and also for studying the way in which Benington made marginal adjustments to create the most effective portraits.

By the end of the war, economic pressures had caused Benington to give up *The Photographic Association* and he became a free-lance worker with Elliott & Fry for whom he produced many fine portraits. Over the next few years, he produced several limited edition portfolios such as *Cambridge Men of Note* and *Oxford Men of Note* which have survived. Other portfolios of contemporary artists, musicians and literary figures and leading politicians have yet to be located although individual portraits have been discovered. The purchase of an important collection of portraits by the NPG was the impetus for the exhibition of his Photographic Portraits at the Gallery from December 2006 (Freestone 2006). It was fascinating to be involved with bringing this aspect of Benington's work to a wider public.

Benington did not exhibit every year with the London Salon but his work was featured regularly within the photographic press. He also continued with his series of images of St Paul's Cathedral which had started with *Fleet Street* nearly thirty years previously in 1897. *An Adelphi Window* (1924) (Fig. 6.22) was recognized as something rather adventurous: "an unusual view ... in which the darkness of the interior of the foreground is balanced against the light on the distant dome" (*The Times* 9 September 1924: 9). In 1924, *Amateur Photographer* published a mini-retrospective of Benington's

work “Little One Man Shows No. 13 – Walter Benington” (Benington 1924a: 539-540) (Fig. 6.23).



Fig. 6.22 Walter Benington, *An Adelphi Window* (1924)  
Gravure 240 x 178 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

Information from the introduction is especially valuable for his remarks on the significance of Fred Holland Day's *The New American School* and his commitment to 'straight' photography. Included in the selection from across his career was his recent *Eastwards from London Bridge* (Fig. 6.24) which had attracted attention for its individuality and its technical merit: "the picture has verisimilitude which will delight all Londoners" (*Photography* 1917b: 161-162). This image serves as a reminder of his continuing love of the River in a similar fashion to the way in which *An Adelphi Window* (Fig. 6.22) highlights his fascination with St Paul's Cathedral.

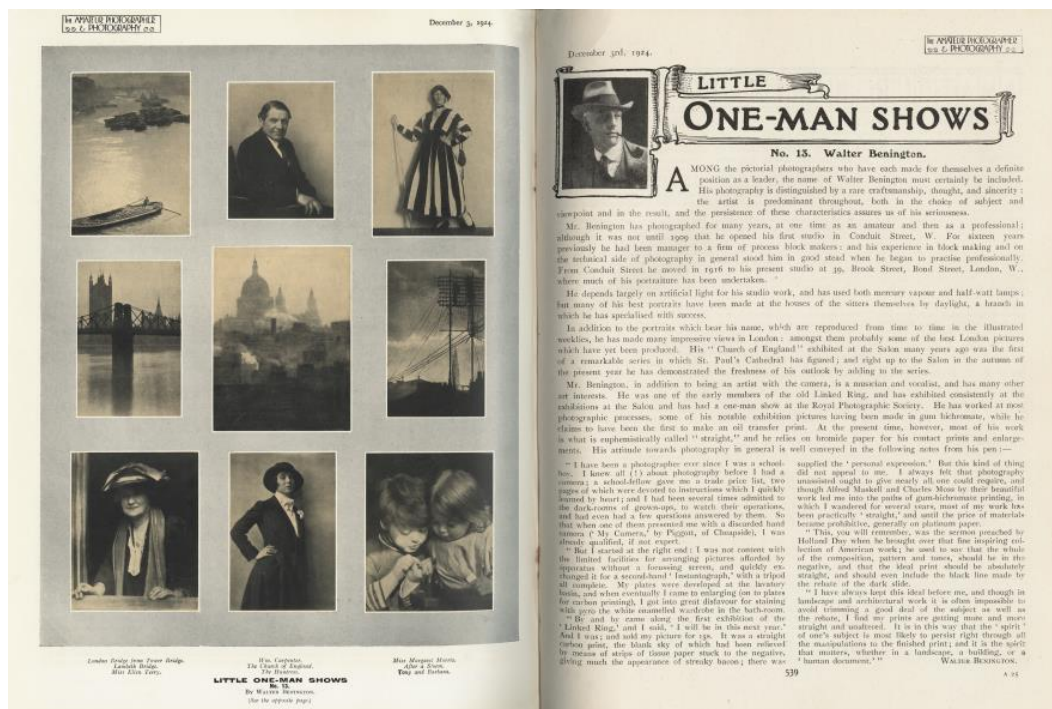


Fig. 6.23 Walter Benington, *Little One Man Shows No. 13* from *Amateur Photographer* 3 December 1924: 338-339



Fig. 6.24 Walter Benington, *Eastwards from London Bridge* (c1907) from *Amateur Photographer*, 3 December 1924: 338

Benington's selection of images for the feature provides some insight into the relative importance he attached to the different genres of photographic work he had undertaken and, perhaps more significantly, his potential readership. Two of his key Pictorialist images, *The Church of England* (1903) and *After a Storm* (1906) are represented and balance two other London scenes offering strongly differing images of the River. He has included two of his most notable portraits of *Ellen Terry* (1914) and *The Striped Dress* (1918). The less celebrated *Wm. Carpenter* (c.1923) has a benign quality which contrasts well with the assertiveness of the unidentified *The Huntress* (c.1924). The intimate study of his two children *Tony and Barbara* (1912) gives yet another insight into his work. Given the limitations of choosing only nine images from thirty years of considerable photographic activity the selection does Benington reasonable justice. There are inevitably important omissions from Benington's oeuvre with nothing from the London Bankside or Tilbury portfolios, from his work with Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska or from his many other projects. Most other "Little One Man Shows" in the series demonstrated little of Benington's range – Bertram Park, for instance, concentrated on six "fashionable West End notabilities" (Park 1924: 182-183).

In April 1929 Benington featured in another series, "The Man and the Print" with his "Portrait of W. H. Perkin, MA, FRS, Wayneflete Professor of Chemistry, University of Oxford" (Benington 1929: 299). The editorial introduction to Benington's brief article recalled his membership of the "old Linked Ring" – a reminder that Benington had been a leading figure in British photography from the early 1890s. The introduction also reminded readers of his triumphs with *The Church of England* and the award of the Grand Prix at St Louis which the writer is keen to stress "was the only award that Mr Benington has ever taken, as 'pot-hunting' has never appealed to him; picture making for its own sake has been his principal aim" (*Amateur Photographer* 1929: 299). In describing his approach to photographing the redoubtable Professor Perkin, Benington stressed the need for absolute simplicity adding that:

The negative is a quarter-plate, and the print from which the accompanying block is made is the one which hung in last year's Salon, and measures 18x14. It is an absolutely unsophisticated 'straight' enlargement (Benington 1929: 299).

His command of the technical details of reproducing the image for the paper is a timely reminder of his early days in the glass block-making trade. The emphasis on the word 'straight' found in both the 1924 and 1929 articles is an important feature of Benington's work and one which distinguishes him from a number of his British colleagues who continued in the now out-worn Pictorialist traditions well after he had moved on.

Ill-health caused Benington to cut back on his very busy schedule and he moved to Oxford in February 1931 to take on the management of the George Leslie photographic studios. Following a number of amalgamations amongst the Oxford studios, he was forced to resume a free-lance status and published his *Oxford Prospectus* (Benington 1935) as a way of soliciting custom. In the *Prospectus*, he modestly outlines some of his achievements and in retrospect, it reads as something of an obituary as he died on 5 February 1936. His long-standing friend F H Evans wrote to Dudley Johnston of the RPS lamenting Benington's death and expressing concern that he had seen no obituary "Sorry indeed to hear of Walter Benington ... I am getting to feel lonely, so many old friends gone! I saw no notice anywhere re. Benington. Wasn't in the *BJ* or in the *RPS J* why did I miss it I wonder!" (Evans 1937) Evans was indeed correct. There were no obituaries in the photographic press and only a brief note in the Quaker weekly paper *The Friend* on 14 February 1936: 154. Evans's portrait of Benington is one of a set of four delightfully informal images and serves well as a record of Benington by his friend and mentor.

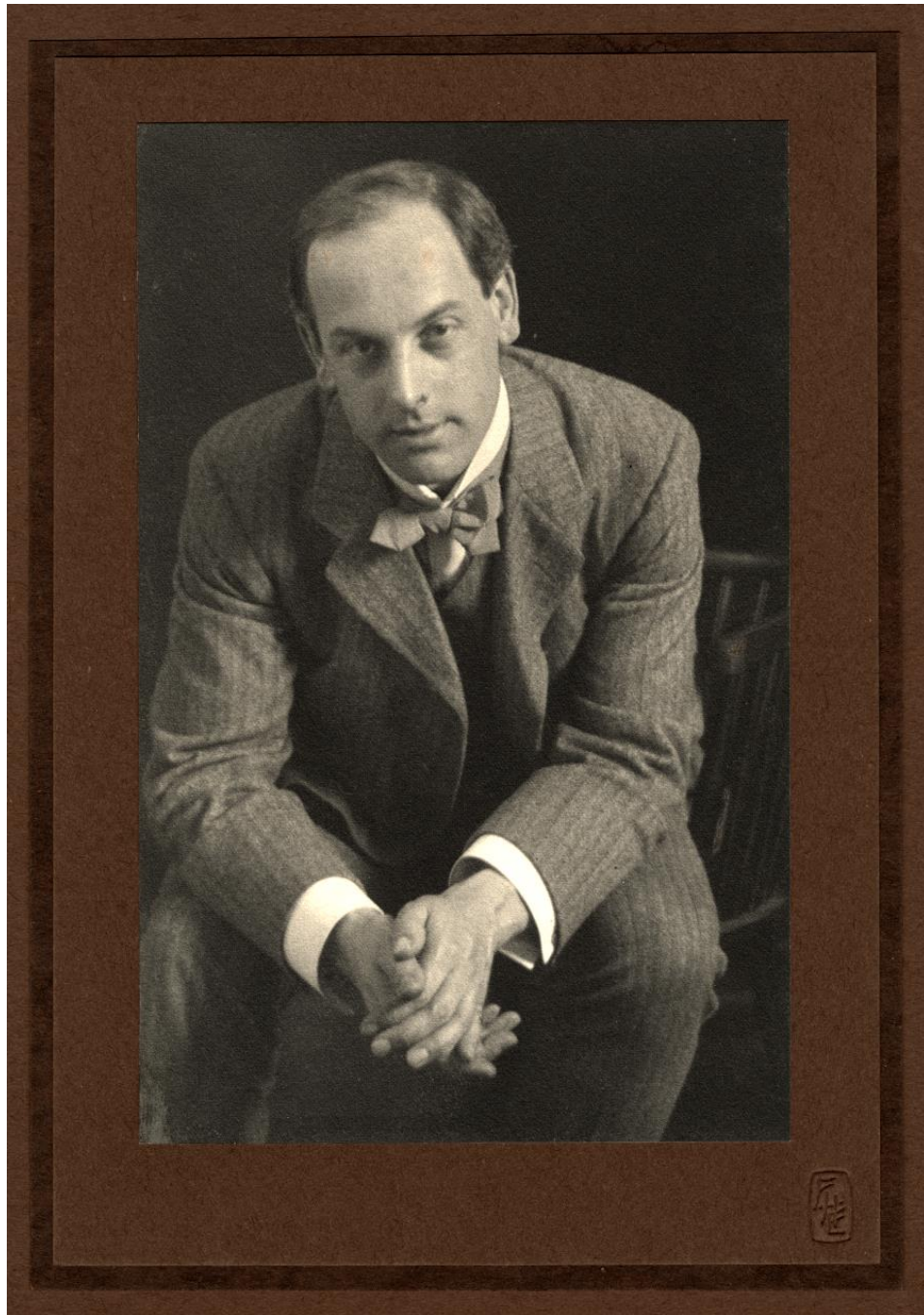


Fig. 6.25 F H Evans, *Walter Benington* (c. 1908)  
Platinum print 185 x 119 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)



## **Chapter VII**

### **British Photography from 1890: critical views from 1920 onwards**

Victorian photographers ...left behind a marvellous trail ... it led into a cul-de-sac (Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz 1942: 13-14)

In pursuing the possible factors which may have contributed to Benington's current near invisibility, we have explored both Newhall's negative views of British photography post-1870 and the positive richness of the photographic activity of the period which actually took place. To demonstrate the problems of Newhall's approach and his claims that British work was "anti-photographic" we have examined in some detail the excitement of British photography from 1890 onwards and, in particular, the significance of Benington's contribution to it. The purpose has been to recognize the complexity of the issues involved and the dangers of an over-simplified reaction. While Benington embarked on his independent path as a portrait photographer in 1909 and also began exploring a range of other photographic projects, the majority of British photographers followed a more conservative path which gained the approval of many of their colleagues and of the photographic press. The London "Victory" Salon of 1919 was called:

The finest display of pictorial photography yet seen in London ... the international character is more pronounced ... a great levelling up of merit ... almost entire absence of 'freak' pictures. [British photography] stands upon a higher plane of pictorial work and the bulk may be justly regarded as at or about the high water mark of picture-making with the camera (*Amateur Photographer* 1919c: 267-268).

In support of his case, the commentator continued enthusiastically that what was euphemistically referred to as 'straight' photography was unlikely ever to be satisfactory because "some measure of control over certain tones or planes of the negative or the print is regarded by many workers as imperative" (*Amateur Photographer* 1919c: 267-268). The commentator also highlighted the successful work of many of the Americans connected

with the continuing Pictorialist traditions in the USA. As Tilney had noted in the previous year, “pictorial photography is now firmly established as a cult all the world over” (Tilney 1918b: 435-436). In the same article he had concluded that the American was “really a very simple person ... a guileless child” and that what really annoys the British about American photography can be “attributed in the first place to American advertising proclivities” (Tilney 1918b: 435-436). The combination of patronising generality and simplistic condemnation tells a great deal of the ever-increasing gap between British and American photographs. The complacency with which each year’s Salon was greeted as the best ever, was matched by the lack of depth in critical engagement. In 1922 it was reported that over 4,000 entries were received for the London Salon but only 10% were chosen thus ensuring that “the present exhibition [is] a complete display of work to please every taste [it] tells the story of pictorial photography more adequately than any of its predecessors, excellent as they were” (*Amateur Photographer* 1922a: 223-224). There appears to have been little recognition of the impact of Paul Strand’s calls for a commitment to ‘straight’ photography. In 1917 Paul Strand had argued that

... honesty no less than intensity of vision is the prerequisite of a living expression ... accomplished without tricks of process or manipulation, through the use of straight photographic methods (Strand 1917: 326).

Strand wished to demonstrate that, by respecting the innate objectivity of the photographic process, it was possible to be more truthful in representing the chosen subject without the need to resort to the manipulations favoured by Pictorialists. He developed the theme in two further essays, “Photography and the New God” (Strand 1922) and “The Art Motive in Photography” (Strand 1923). In the latter, published in *The British Journal of Photography*, he had condemned the continuation of Pictorialist images such as those reproduced in *Photograms of the Year* as “unoriginal and unexperimental.” The perpetuation of this old photographic practice, he argued, was entirely at odds with the needs and aspirations of the modern world. To achieve the necessary direct communication required a specific range of photographic techniques and materials. The strongest expression

of such direct communication was to be found in the work of Group *f/64*, founded in 1932 and including Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. Their work was typified by “higher contrast, sharper focus, aversion to cropping, and emphasis on the underlying abstract geometric structure of subjects” (Johnston, 2005: 606). The call for sharp and unequivocal definition is found in *Making a Photograph* by Ansel Adams (Adams 1935). The book was published in London by *The Studio* as a practical guide to technique but the instruction was very much based on Adams’s own practice. He explained, in a clear foretaste of Newhall’s thinking, that: “creation within the strict limits of the medium is the basic law of pure photography as in all other arts” (Adams 1935: 61). In the Foreword, Edward Weston had argued the case for ‘straight’ and unmanipulated photography. He warned against “too personal interpretation ... [and in favour of an] impersonal revelation of the objective world” (Weston 1935:1-3).

The RPS viewed itself as the official voice of photography in Britain and its responses to modernist photography in the 1930s, as reported in the photographic press and elsewhere, were often uncomprehending and frequently hostile and insular. In January 1930, Bertram Cox of the RPS Pictorial Group had arranged a discussion on “The New Objectiveness” with extensive quotations from *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* [*The German Annual of Photography*] (Kühn, H (ed.) 1930) and other photographic works from Germany. There was a full report of the meeting with comments such as the view that in Germany, photographs of design were popular: “engineering subjects, bits of architecture or chance patterns in Nature which lent themselves to repetitive compositions” to which another commentator added “design pictures ... were like five finger exercises, while portraits and landscapes represented the beautiful finished production” (Cox 1930: 328-335). The level of incomprehension of the aesthetic principles behind the new photography was considerable and produced a variety of reactions ranging from mystification to resentment and rejection.

By the 1933 RPS House Exhibition and Symposium on Modern Photography, these responses had hardened considerably. The report gives many valuable insights into British attitudes towards contemporary photography (*Photographic Journal*, April 1933: 138-150). It was chaired by the President of the RPS, Mr Olaf Bloch who was noted for his pioneering work on infra-red photography. Bloch argued that there was a difference between “photography applied for the purpose of calling attention to something and photography as an artistic medium [but he saw] no reason why publicity and advertising photography should not attempt to conform to conceptions of beauty” (Bloch, 1933: 138). Another objected to the name “Modern Photography” with its implication that what had gone before was now outmoded and old-fashioned. He did, however, note that there was a tendency amongst older pictorialists to judge by “the standards of the pencil or the brush and choosing the same subjects or forms” (Ahern 1933: 138-139). Bertram Cox, a well-established Pictorialist, complained that photography was being dictated to by the demands of newspapers and magazines, using small stops and smooth papers to “improve” printing quality. Cox offered a very patronizing view of commercial photography where the standard of judgement must be based mainly upon publicity or advertisement value and any artistic value was merely incidental. He concluded that eventually photography would “return to the path of rectitude by utilising a greater variety of those principles which underlie the making of any work of art” (Cox 1933: 140-142). The language is remarkably similar to the 1909 comments quoted earlier about the dangers of too much experimental work by “the photographic suffragettes of today ... [who] may be prevailed upon to revert to the less eccentric and more attractive paths” (Lambert 1909: 607-609)

John Havinden who was associated with the commercial side of photography through his brother’s advertising agency was a rather isolated voice. He praised work from Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Belgium and by men such as Man Ray, Edward Weston and Alexey Brodovitch, the Art Director of *Harper’s Bazaar* and later one of Newhall’s Honorary

Advisors. Havinden claimed that they were doing things in photography that, unfortunately, were seldom done in England. "I think photographers in general must throw off their narrow vision and come to the point where they see the world with a new pair of eyes" (Havinden 1933: 142-143).

Havinden was one of the few contemporary British photographers to have his work selected by Newhall for *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937). As if to confirm Havinden's sense of being in a tiny minority, another speaker berated the new commercial imperatives in photography which, he believed, led to plagiarism and the increase of the second rate. He rejected "photographic stunts of the unusual angle for looking at the commonplace" (Wormald 1933: 146-149)

The Symposium was dominated by J Dudley Johnston who had established an important reputation as a Pictorialist in the latter years of the Linked Ring and had been one of the exhibitors at the London Secession in 1911. He had served two terms as President of the Society and had been Honorary Curator of the RPS collection since 1924. He argued that he was misunderstood when people claimed that he was opposed to Modern Photography. He stated that he was in favour of 'straight' photography and improved techniques and equipment but warned that "if these advertising stunts are put forward as Modern Photography's fine flowering as pictorial art, I am all against it" (Johnston 1933: 144-145). His negative comments concerning "Modern Photography" are particularly significant because he served as a major contact for Beaumont Newhall on his visits to Great Britain. To appreciate the full significance of his opposition it is necessary to quote him at some length. He stated that he valued the authority of tradition and argued that:

To present adequately this Beauty it is necessary to employ artistic methods which are the result of centuries of trial and experiment and form our pictorial tradition. The result is a picture. The material, that is, the subject matter, to make the picture, may be as modern as you please – but the putting together of that material must conform to the broad principles of pictorial art if it is to be satisfactory. It is precisely because these considerations are not observed, either intentionally or from ignorance by modernistic photographers that I

find their efforts unsatisfactory as pictures  
(Johnston 1933: 144-145).

The lack of enthusiasm for modern photography in Britain so clearly expressed in the 1933 RPS Symposium seems to have been shared by many home photographers, the mainstay of the photo-clubs and exhibition societies throughout the country. There was, however, a small contrary movement which identified itself with 'straight' photography whose work was later explored in David Mellor's Arts Council exhibition *Modern British Photography 1919-39* (Mellor 1980) which will be examined later. These photographers were noted as "distinct precursors of the Realism which marked the work of Humphrey Jennings, Humphrey Spender and Bert Hardy" (Mellor 1980: 38). The predominant feeling was well captured in Newhall's note to Alfred H Barr Director of the Museum of Modern Art that "modern photography in England is a sad affair" (Newhall to Barr, 15 October 1936 cited by Bertrand 1997: 146, note 72).

### **Centenary celebrations**

Attitudes to the celebrations for the centenary of photography in 1939 provide some interesting insights into how contemporary photography was valued. In Britain, the centenary was an opportunity to celebrate past achievements with little reference to how it might link to possible future developments. In the USA, it appeared as if the centenary had been pre-empted by two years with Newhall's 1937 exhibition with its clear declaration that the purpose of the past was to prepare for the future. In Britain, the RPS organized a series of lectures entitled 'Photography in Science, Art and Industry.' The title was claimed to "epitomize Photography's amazing developments during its brief career" (*Photographic Journal* 1939a: 176--233). The lectures furnish a useful summary of contemporary British thinking about photography and maintained the prevailing attitudes from the 1933 Symposium. The Centenary Lectures opened with J Dudley Johnston's review called "Pictorial Photography" (Johnston 1939a: 179-202) which covered concisely the key points in the developments during the nineteenth century with non-judgemental

comments on the major figures including Hill, Fenton, Rejlander, Robinson and Cameron. He stressed the importance of the Linked Ring and its international character in raising standards. However, he reserved his greatest enthusiasm for Stieglitz, now 74 and, as Johnston reported to his audience, clearly ailing. Under the sub-heading “An Inspired Prophet” Johnston warmly praised Stieglitz for his efforts to raise standards. This included the stimulation in US photography which led to the *New American School* exhibition in 1900. Johnston identified this exhibition as the first of three key transitional moments. He claimed that the exhibition had generated great enthusiasm which seemed to peak in about 1905 and then slowly began to dissipate. One notes the coincidence of that date with Szarkowski’s later declaration about British photography.

In a slight confusion over chronology, Johnston then noted his second highlight, the [London] Secession Exhibition of 1910 (sic) which was

probably the finest exhibition of photography ever held in any country, small as it was, or possibly just because it was small ... seventeen workers each of whom (modestly barring myself) would be acclaimed as one of the world’s greatest masters (Johnston 1939a: 179-203)

His third highlight was Stieglitz’s Albright Gallery exhibition in 1910. This, Johnston noted, had been a sensation and had resulted in many art galleries now admitting photography on the same footing as painting. He acknowledged that as he had not seen the Buffalo exhibition he could not fairly decide whether it was better than the London Secession but “to my mind fifty picked prints by seventeen leading workers is more likely to maintain a higher level than 500 prints selected internationally” (Johnston 1939a:179-203). Unlike some of Johnston’s critical observations on photography, his praise of the three very different exhibitions reveals a real enthusiasm for the subject. Interestingly, it should be remembered that Benington was greatly influenced Holland Day’s *New School* exhibition in 1900 and had participated in both the London Secession and the Albright exhibition.

Although he had less enthusiasm for post-WWI photographic developments as precursors of modernist developments, Johnston did recognize that ‘straight’ photography had been a response to the fact that certain gifted photographers in the latter part of the first decade of the century had created images where it was “doubtful how much was photography and how much was handwork” (Johnston 1939a:179-203).

Johnston’s analysis of the New Realism as “a modern revival of the teachings of Stieglitz but without the spirituality” is linked to his belief that the soullessness of some European photography in the 1920s and 1930s had little appeal in Britain nor, he believed, in America “where sentiment still plays a part in our artistic make-up” (Johnston 1939a:179-203). He was dismissive of much “stunt” photography as mildly amusing but of no real value. As in his earlier articles, Johnston deplored the profligate consumption of film by users of miniature cameras and the lack of artistic quality in so much current work. The lecture is interesting not only for Dudley Johnston’s personal memories but also for the special significance that he attaches to the London Secession exhibition of 1911.

Other centenary celebrations included a joint meeting of the RPS with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) on 17 May 1939. The RSA had been the venue for the first public exhibition of photography in December 1852 and it was also where the RPS had been founded in 1853. There was also an exhibition at the Science Museum with photographic equipment and images from its own collections and from the RPS collection (*Photographic Journal* 1939b: 554-565). The centenary celebrations in Britain were very clearly intended to be retrospective and were definitely not an opportunity to celebrate modern practice. The V&A’s *Exhibition of Early Photographs to Commemorate the Centenary of Photography, 1839-1939* (Gibbs-Smith 1939) opened on the exact anniversary of the public announcement by Michael Faraday of Fox Talbot’s invention. It attracted some favourable attention in the arts press and served as a reminder of the original arguments



of Lady Elizabeth Eastlake that photography might be a powerful force against nationalism. The ubiquity of photography:

makes for the diminution of distance, for the unification of peoples of the earth as step by step the hoard of our knowledge becomes the common property of everybody. Romantics see this as a tragedy; realists find in it hope for ultimate world fraternity (Gibbs-Smith 1938 quoted in Haworth-Booth 1997: 121)

### **Some new critical voices**

The reality of the political developments culminating in the outbreak of WWII made the “hope for ultimate world fraternity” through photography an unlikely prospect. Nevertheless, two weeks after the declaration of war in September 1939, Lucia Moholy published *A Hundred Years of Photography, 1839-1939* (Moholy 1939). Moholy had come to London in 1934 as one of a major influx of distinguished of artists and other cultural figures who fled Germany in anticipation of the many difficulties facing modern artists and Jews. She was a respected writer on photography with first-hand experience in Europe of modern developments in a range of the arts including working at the Bauhaus. *A Hundred Years of Photography, 1839-1939* was published as a Pelican Special by Penguin Books and sold 40,000 copies in two years but, because of paper shortages, was not reprinted. It has been called “the first history of photography in English” (Trompeteler 2012) but even if that claim might be questioned, there is no doubt that it is an important contribution to the literature of photographic history. Its purpose was to introduce a lay but intelligent readership to a complex subject. It remains impersonal and impartial passing no judgement on the worth of any photographic development. Her Preface adopts a modest tone in acknowledging the many previous history books and claiming that it is not intended to replace them. It had been written because:

it was felt that at the age of a hundred, which, by now, photography has reached, it may be worthwhile to give a thought not only to the achievements of photography as such, but to the part it has played by mutual give and take throughout these hundred years in the life of man and society (Moholy 1939: 5)

Essentially Moholy was celebrating a century of achievement in photography because of its relevance to the contemporary world. She also forecast exciting new developments because, for her, photography and life were inextricably linked and “photographs surround us and infiltrate every corner of life. They are in our lives, as our lives are in them” (Moholy 1939: 178) Her illustrations came from a variety of international sources and offer a wide range from portraits of some of the earliest workers through landscapes, later portraits and technical studies including high-speed photography. The international and shared nature of photography both in its past and in its likely future is paramount to Moholy’s vision. She has made no particular distinction about British achievements at the expense of others beyond noting the British development of dry-plate technology. Her commentary on combination printing was even-handed and she avoided any moral judgement on the contentious issues which vexed Newhall such as the use of soft-focus lenses, retouching or the use of gum bichromate printing.

She praised Craig Annan, Steichen and Stieglitz for cultivating the “beautiful picture” but observed that these “had a close resemblance to painting, yet [they] were at the same time excellent photographs” (Moholy 1939: 160) Her unease as to whether it was appropriate to approve of these manipulated works was expressed in terms not dissimilar to those later used by one of Stieglitz’s greatest admirers, Robert Doty who wrote “Despite the painterly techniques favored by the Secessionists, their work at its best is beautiful” (Doty 1978: 57). Moholy’s comment may be no more than a passing observation but it highlights the difficulty she and many others have had in accepting Pictorialist photography purely on its visual merits. There are a number of important contrasts between Moholy’s brief *A Hundred Years of Photography, 1839-1939* (Moholy 1939) and Newhall’s *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937). In terms of physical appearance, Moholy’s study was a slim paper-back of fewer than 200 pages and with thirty-five matte-finish photographic illustrations and a few drawings on poor-quality paper. Newhall’s work was presented with ninety-five Plates

on good-quality paper together with other illustrations and substantial details of the exhibits. Essentially each was designed to meet the needs of their specific audiences in very different circumstances. It would be unwise to read too much into this contrast but it is perhaps indicative of other important differences between the two works. One example may serve to illustrate the ways in which the two authors presented a particular episode. Moholy was obviously familiar with Newhall's work as she quoted from him concerning the British interest in the French photographer Adam-Salomon (Newhall 1937: 54 quoted in Moholy 1939: 114). Newhall referenced Adam-Salomon to demonstrate British enthusiasm for his "painterly" work and therefore, presumably, as a mark of weakness. Moholy included as a matter of some significance the information that P H Emerson had enthusiastically dedicated his *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (Emerson 1889) to the memory of Adam-Salomon, establishing a direct connection between the two. Newhall failed to include this same information in his account of Emerson. One might conjecture that Newhall did not wish to make this strong connection between Adam-Salomon and Emerson on the grounds that it might have compromised the prominent place he had given to Emerson in his 'pedigree' of modern photography. Newhall needed to promote the significance of Emerson and his insight in being the first to recognize Stieglitz's genius.

As suggested in the discussion in Chapter III, Newhall relied on building a direct connection between the works of Hill and other primitive workers and 'straight' photography. Anything which appeared to interfere in the way of its realization must be rejected – 'straight' photography was the objective. Moholy's approach to 'straight photography' was rather more measured making no claim that it was the only path to follow although she did claim that "the principles – science, technique, domination of the object, sense of form and value of light – have since governed modern pictorial photography" (Moholy 1939: 164-165). Her personal preference for contemporary photography may be detected in her writing but there is no sense of triumph or of vindication that one finds in Newhall. She also noted

that the most fruitful location for this 'straight' style of photography was in modern advertising and picture papers. She looks at the way in which developments in several areas such as the higher standards of technique and major improvements in the quality and reliability of materials had contributed to the impact. In addition she noted an increasing concentration on the object becoming the centre of attention rather than solely the form and presentation of the image.

Her response to the "modern" photography of the 1920s and 1930s showed some impatience with the still-life and "pattern" photographs "with a minimum of object and a maximum of lights and shades, rhythm and balance in them ... an egg or a tea-cup ... a piece of silk or a heap of sand ... well arranged and the pattern well balanced" (Moholy 1939: 163-164). Her coverage of photographs in Russia and Germany and the development of the "Neue Sachlichkeit" were presented with clarity and balance. She noted that there may have been interesting developments in Central and Eastern Europe approaches to portraiture, but there was little uptake of such extreme style in Western Europe. "England, in particular, has conserved a strong taste for the soft-focused, gentle and placid portrait photograph of the Reynolds and Gainsborough style" (Moholy 1939: 166) She noted the more realistic portrait work of Howard Coster and Lucia Moholy and she applauded the "soft-focused, smooth and lovely portraiture" of Cecil Beaton, Dorothy Wilding and others (Moholy 1939: 166)

It might be interesting to speculate as to why Moholy should have been commissioned to undertake such a project when a commentator of long-standing such as J Dudley Johnston might well have been available to work on the scheme. His views would have been well-known following the RPS Symposium in 1933 (Johnston 1933: 144-145) his regular articles on Pictorialism and his Centennial lecture in April 1939. He had helped Newhall in selecting some of the British material for his 1937 exhibition and was recognized for his expertise. The Pelican Special series was renowned for its balanced presentation of even the most controversial

subjects. The publisher may have considered that a modern photographic writer might provide a more rounded and nuanced assessment of photographic history than other possibilities. Moholy's work has been described as "a complex, up-to-date and lyrical view of the medium" (Haworth-Booth 1997: 129).

Two other important studies of British photography were published during the war. Although not directly comparable in scope or intention to either Newhall (1937) or Moholy (1939), they both offer some interesting insights into British photography from very different perspectives. The first was *Victorian Photography* edited by Alex Strasser with additional notes Andor Kraszna-Krausz who was also responsible for its publication by his Focal Press (Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz 1942). In spite of its title, *Victorian Photography*, the book did extend the chronological survey to about 1910 to include the work of Dudley Johnston, F H Evans and Alvin Langdon Coburn. The selection also included images by Fox Talbot, D O Hill, Roger Fenton, Julia Margaret Cameron and Frank Sutcliffe. Its sympathetic but clear-sighted analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of nineteenth-century photography included the memorable

the amateurs took the lead after the dry plate was invented and techniques became simplified. The genuine blessings of this turn are facts of history ... Whatever the technical limitations that oppressed Victorian photographers, however extravagant the means they used to overcome them, whatever paths they chose to follow – they left behind a marvellous trail. It may seem to us that it led into a cul-de-sac (Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz, 1942: 13-14)

Unlike Newhall, who found any handwork entirely objectionable, Strasser and Kraszna-Krausz, recognized the initial spirit of innovation that had motivated the early years of the Linked Ring. Their objections were levelled against those who still (in 1942) held to the old traditions. These current photographers had driven themselves into a cul-de-sac much as had been predicted by Benington and others at the collapse of the Linked Ring. The review of *Victorian Photography* by the modernist painter John Piper was called, provocatively, "Second-hand painting" (Piper 1943: 172). Piper was particularly damning of later Victorian photographers who had become

Impressionists fifteen years too late and he complained that “even today the Victorian rule holds ... photographers still set out to make pictures ... instead of using the camera as the highly efficient and narrow-minded recorder that it is” (Piper 1943: 172). In a similar vein, Cecil Beaton in *British Photographers* (Beaton 1944) was prepared to acknowledge that there may once have been some valuable work created by later Victorian photographers but those who persisted in these now outmoded forms, over three decades later, were to be condemned.

Beaton had first started to work as a fashion photographer with the British edition of *Vogue* in 1931 and was assiduous in developing his contacts and being accepted within Society. During the war Beaton had originally been posted to the Ministry of Information to take pictures on the Home Front. In this capacity he photographed a three-year old Blitz victim sitting up in her hospital bed clutching her teddy bear. The image had a powerful impact in Britain and perhaps, more significantly, in the USA then still neutral. Beaton later took many powerful images of British troops in the North Africa campaigns. Both the little girl and the military photographic records appear in *British Photographers*. Beaton’s account runs through the ‘conventional’ pre-history of photography and then in a non-partisan way through the early events using the achievements of a number of named British photographers as a way of reporting developments without the need to explain technical matters in other than very general terms. He included Silvy amongst the leading British photographers calling him “the Gainsborough of commercial photographers” (Beaton 1944: 14). As noted above, Moholy had already recognized how English photographers had modelled their work on Reynolds and Gainsborough (Moholy 1939: 166). Interestingly, Strasser and Kraszna-Krausz, had also noted that many British photographers had continued to love the “the postures of Classicism long after Reynolds, Gainsborough and Raeburn were gone” (Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz 1942: 13-14).

Beaton applauded Talbot, Octavius Hill, Roger Fenton and Julia Margaret Cameron and admired the technical skills of Rejlander and Robinson in composite printing. George Davison's *The Onion Field* of 1890 was celebrated as the first piece of modern photography with its "horizontal ruthlessness" (Beaton 1944: 30) being considered quite revolutionary. Beaton was a good deal less enthusiastic about Edwardian photographers whom he claimed were too much influenced by French Impressionist painters. He complained that Alex Keighley's *Spring Idyll* of 1904 was almost indistinguishable from a reproduction of a late Corot landscape (Beaton 1944: 28-29) He disapproved of the use of gum processes on oil papers which were designed to make the image as "artistic" as possible, reasoning that there was a real danger that the processes controlled the workers. Beaton's use of the word "workers" is interesting in this context. At first sight it might mean that the photographer using manipulation was nothing more than an artisan or some unthinking labourer. However, as noted previously, the word "worker" was often used in writing about photographers without any condescension as in the description of Benington "This worker has at all times demonstrated a keen appreciation of all pictorial matters" (*Amateur Photographer* 1929: 299). Perhaps more telling is Beaton's use of the word Edwardian to dismiss the work of photographers active well after 1910. He seems to suggest that those who persisted in the style of a previous generation of workers were no longer relevant

Beaton's survey of other contemporary British photographers included modest recognition of J Dudley Johnston for his "impressionistic and romantic illustrations" and for F J Mortimer's *The Gate of Goodbye* (1917) which had some historical interest because of its wartime theme. E O Hoppé and Baron Demeyer met with Beaton's approval and were given substantial coverage. Demeyer "the Debussy of photographers has not been placed high enough in the hierarchy of photographers" (Beaton 1944: 36-37) while Hoppé was celebrated for photographing many of the contemporary cultural and artistic community. Malcolm Arbuthnot was praised *en passant* for his innovative pictorial work and for his fashionable

business which had suffered a disastrous fire. Beaton makes no reference to Benington's work.

Beaton's comments on current [1944] British photography were not flattering. Reflecting, somewhat mockingly, on the earlier generation of Edwardian "Great Masters of photography" he claimed that almost any photographic exhibition in England held then [1944] was a mere replica of the work done by these Edwardian artists. These original photographers were entitled to experiment even if the results now seemed unconvincing. For Beaton, the real danger lay in those who were still, four decades on, producing the same images to the applause of their colleagues. He claimed that the current crop of exhibiting photographers were of no credit to themselves or to contemporary British photography. Like their equivalents at the Royal Academy, these picture-makers adorned their exhibits with elaborate titles; and most pictures told a story (Beaton 1944: 28).

The three wartime reviews of photography discussed offered three different approaches to historical reporting. Lucia Moholy's Pelican Special of 1939 scrupulously avoided an outright condemnation of current British attitudes to contemporary photography but had hinted her impatience with the British affection for the feeble imitation of the great portrait painters of the eighteenth century (Moholy 1939: 166). In making her book broadly educational and designed to be an accurate and objective centennial record, she had been quite circumspect in her comments about different styles of photography – especially those with which she may not have had much sympathy or liking. Strasser and Kraszna-Krausz, recognized the weaknesses and excesses of some of the work they had examined but rarely became censorious. They were keen to celebrate earlier photography in its own right but warned that such work had proved something of a dead-end. Beaton had been rather more forthright in his rejection of the complacency of much current British exhibition photography (Beaton 1944: 28). The book was part of *Britain in Pictures – The British People in Pictures Series* designed to promote national pride and fortitude – in effect propaganda for



home consumption. It is also lively and entertainingly written and offers its own insights into photography in Britain. Beaton's rather flamboyant *persona* as a successful fashion and Society photographer was celebrated in Newhall's exhibition, the only British photographer to be acknowledged in the commentary on the Contemporary section (Newhall 1937: 72). Unlike Newhall, all three historical reviews accepted in principle that British work produced from 1890 was a legitimate expression of the photographic artist's vision. Once, however, the originality and enthusiasm of the early experimenters had given way to repetition and conventionality, that legitimacy had been sacrificed and much British photography was now in a cul-de-sac. Victorian photography, with its implied extension into the first decade of the twentieth-century, was :

admirable as a show-place, it should have a traffic sign at the entrance: no thoroughfare for motor-cars, miniature cameras and other vehicles of twentieth-century speed" (Strasser & Krasznak-Krausz, 1942: 14)

The British celebrations of the Centenary of photography had been relatively low key and the general lack of enthusiasm for modern photography had become very clear from the earlier RPS Symposium in 1933 onwards. The outbreak of WWII had put major constraints on photographic activity but the annual exhibitions continued unabated with the 1940 RPS exhibition being praised for

clearly and unmistakably (sic) [demonstrating] the real position of photography as a living art that no alarums of war can quench ... the resiliency and spirit of the British workers [is shown] in the fine show of work they have contributed" (Mortimer 1940: np)

*The British Journal of Photography* urged, very politely, that those who rejected modern practices in photography should "let a breath of modernity waft itself over things" and recalled that the 'Good Old Days' were really "a matter of remembering only the pleasanter things" (*British Journal of Photography* 1942a: 371-372).

### **Post-war prospects and a National Collection of Photography?**

From Beaton's perspective, the contemporary (1944) scene was not entirely bleak. He identified much excellent work being created in appalling wartime conditions. He welcomed the beneficial influence of some contemporary American work, challenging British photography to avoid its slipshod tendencies (Beaton 1944: 41) He concluded his survey with an appeal that:

in the new scheme of things and under a new and improved educational system, young people of talent, intelligence and taste will be encouraged to feel that, by expressing themselves in terms of photography ... Photography is a medium with enormous possibilities; we must endeavour to bring it into always closer and closer relationship with problems of contemporary life (Beaton 1944: 48)

In contrast, Dudley Johnston summarized his concerns about the immediate post-war period:

We emerge from six years of artistic stagnation with a feeling of disillusionment and unrest ... [there are] signs of an attempt to revert to the ideas of the "New Photography" era of twenty years ago ... It is not clear what they want to pull down and still less clear what they want to build up ... The future of our art [lies in] accepting the pictures of established exhibition workers as worthy representatives of the British Empire's place in photographic art (Johnston 1946: 308,309 & 311)

The belief that the RPS had become moribund and unrepresentative led to the secession of a number of progressive photographers led by Hugo van Wadenoyen to form the Combined Societies in 1945. The memories of an earlier Secession were revived in a retrospective article by one of the early Links, C H L Emanuel who claimed that the London Salon was the true successor of the Brotherhood (Emmanuel 1950: 777-779). A further fragmentation of the photographic world developed with the creation by Dr S D Jouhar and others of the Photographic Fine Art Association in 1961 (Jouhar 1961)

In addition to the confused state of British photography attempting to come to terms with its heritage and mapping out its future direction, there were issues as to the place of photography on the wider “art” map and especially within the major cultural institutions. It appeared that the collection and exhibition of photography became a proxy for wrangles between some of the major cultural institutions for the right to hold the National Collection of Photography. The indifference or even hostility to photography in the major art institutions has been examined in detail by Alexandra Moschovi (Moschovi 2004). She has described her intention as being to examine “the ‘small history’ of photography’s accommodation in previously photo-phobic art institutions” (Moschovi 2011). Her case studies explored activities and attitudes within the Tate Gallery, the V&A, the National Media Museum and the Arts Council of Great Britain. The wider context for her analysis as declared in the title is “the post-modern era” during which significant changes concerning the nature of photographic history were being explored. Also under close scrutiny were issues such as the purposes of galleries and museums in relation to the photographic image. The concept of the “photographic canon” with its implications of unique value and “ownership” had a major bearing on the arguments.

Moschovi has identified the idea of a “British Paradigm” (Moschovi 2004: 74) to express a particular coming together of circumstances that appeared to be almost serendipitous. Unlike the idea of a grand design or an overarching plan, the operations within the Paradigm appear haphazard and unrelated with a common pattern being seen to emerge only with the benefit of hindsight. After the Victory celebrations in 1945, the harsh realities of continuing austerity in the post-war period were widely recognized. As a “tonic for the people” the 1951 Festival of Britain was designed to create a national display celebrating British contributions to civilization. It also, significantly, commemorated the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The policy was intended to be as inclusive as possible by seeking contributions from leading designers and architects as well as exhibits from the arts, the sciences and newly developing technologies. London’s South

Bank was the centre of much attention with its futuristic buildings including the Dome of Discovery. As part of its contribution to the celebrations, the V&A organized an exhibition *Masterpieces of Victorian Photography* (Gernsheim 1951) based on the collection created by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim. The exhibition was regarded as a homage to Victorian endeavour. C H Gibbs-Smith, in charge of the Photography Collection at the V&A, wrote appreciatively

For the first time a selection of Victorian photographs has been assembled by an eye and mind balanced between artistic achievement and historic development ... for the first time under one cover, a scholarly conspectus of both the history and aesthetic of Victorian photography and its technical development (Gibbs-Smith, C 1951: 5-6)

In his introductory remarks to the accompanying illustrated book, Gernsheim declared that there was much more to photography than “the detailed metallic daguerreotype at the beginning or the smudging and fuzzy photographs of the over-publicized ‘artist’-photographers at the end of the period” (Gernsheim 1951: 7). Just as one would not judge the quality of contemporary art by the paintings at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition so one should not judge modern photography by the current RPS annual show. In essence he claimed that one must discriminate carefully in assessing nineteenth century photography. His clear antipathy to the photography of the late Victorian period and beyond is evident and much of the Introduction is concerned with the relationship between photography and painting because this was the constant concern during the nineteenth-century. He concluded that for both the photographer and painter:

the picture must exist in his own mind and the success or failure will be due to the vision and imagination (or lack of it) of the man behind the camera, and not to his apparatus ... the camera itself has no vision (Gernsheim 1951: 17-18).

Gernsheim later expanded his views in a number of important texts. The substance of his condemnation of pictorial photography is found in his 1955 *The History of Photography from the camera obscura to the beginning of the modern era* (1955 revised 1969) and in his *Creative Photography*:

*Aesthetic Trends 1839-1960* (1962 revised 1991). His critical stand-point was that intervention in the photographic process was, as a matter of principle, an abuse of the essential nature of photography. He seemed to accept that in very limited circumstances, and under strict control, intervention might be allowed. When confronted by Camille Silvy's *River Scene* (1858) Gernsheim had reluctantly acknowledged that Silvy's "interference with the camera's image was perhaps *justified for aesthetic reasons*" (Gernsheim, 1962: 47, emphasis added.). Gernsheim was in no doubt that Sir William Newton's well-intentioned advice had been a recipe for disaster. Newton's idea was that the photographer should aim to produce "a broad and general effect" rather than securing "every minute detail." The consequence of the subject being "a little *out of focus* [is to increase] the breadth of effect and consequently, [to be] more *suggestive* of the true character of nature" (Newton 1853: 6-7, original emphasis). Newton had also recommended that "when a tolerably faithful and picturesque effect can be obtained by a chemical or other process, applied to the negative, the operator is at full liberty to use his own discretion" (Newton 1853: 6-7).

Gernsheim had complained that the main blame for the "perversion of photography" rested with critics (Gernsheim 1962:75). This severe judgement of encouraging the "perversion of photography" has resonances of Beaumont Newhall who, in his position as guardian of photographic morality, had decided what was fit and what was unfit to be presented to the public. Gernsheim had no doubt that:

Impressionistic photography and imitation paintings became epidemics ... Whenever one art borrows the characteristics of another and forsakes its own distinctive qualities, it is decadent; and that the art photography of the *art nouveau* period certainly was ... the *fin-de-siecle* photographers had been influential but "their self-conscious picture-making ... contributed little to the progress of photography (Gernsheim 1969:465, 469)

The success of the 1951 exhibition encouraged hopes for the establishment of a British National Collection, a proposal for which was promoted through a letter to *The Times* signed by a number of distinguished figures from

different areas of the wider cultural and artistic world (Pevsner et al, 1952). More detailed plans for the proposed collection were put forward but eventually came to nothing, thwarted by some of the more negative elements within the British Paradigm described by Moschovi. This has echoes of Benington's earlier observations to Stieglitz about a British institutional antipathy to photography as a major cultural asset "I wish the art bodies in England would support the pretensions of Photography in the same way, but I fear there are hardly enough of us over here" (Beinecke Letter 102/1, Benington to Stieglitz, 14 June 1910). There was also some "territorial" rivalry over the relative standing of different institutions as repositories of photographic collections. Allied to this, there was a lack of clarity about the purposes of collecting photographic images whether of a historical nature or by contemporary workers. One outcome of the complex mixture of institutional practice and prejudice was the failure to capitalize on the availability of the collection made by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim.

There had been renewed efforts from 1958 onwards to resolve the difficulties about incorporating the Gernsheims and their collection into the British institutional framework until, having apparently exhausted all options, the Gernsheims sold their collection to the University of Texas in Austin in 1964. Subsequent well-illustrated books on the collection such as *The Formative Decades: Photography in Great Britain, 1839-1920* (Flukinger 1985) and more recently *The Gernsheim Collection* (Flukinger Nordstrom and Haworth-Booth 2011) give insights into the extent of the collection and therefore the magnitude of the loss. Whatever the balance of blame may be, the consequences of the sale were important. Not only was an archive of national importance physically removed from Britain but a statement was also being made, albeit indirectly, that photography and its history were not really worth preserving as a part of the national heritage.

### **A chance discovery and signs for the future**

There were continuing disputes between the major Art institutions as to which should be considered as the repository of the National Collection

of Photography. One particular incident illustrates how complicated the issues could become. In 1973 the Royal Academy planned to sell a portfolio of important photographic works by Hill and Adamson given to the Academy by Hill himself. In a swift move, Roy Strong, then director of the National Portrait Gallery, promoted an appeal to save the Albums for the nation and for them to be lodged in the NPG. The V&A claimed that while the NPG had a specific remit to collect portraits including photographic portraits which had now been admitted to the scope of its collecting, the NPG should not be attempting to build itself up as the home of the possible National Collection of Photography. In a classic example of “unintended consequences” this particular controversy did have at least one positive outcome.

When the NPG mounted its campaign in *The Sunday Times*, it asked members of the public who had photographs and other materials relating to any aspect of art before 1930 to make contact. The artist, Archie Utin, sent the NPG a typed copy of Benington’s detailed listing of his photographic record of the work of the French sculptor, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. The list showed that in addition to the photographic record of many of Gaudier’s sculptures, Benington had taken six portraits of the sculptor. This vital record about one of Benington’s major post-pictorialist projects has been examined in Chapter VI. The survival of this record is fortuitous and its chance survival beautifully illustrates Moschovi’s idea of the British Paradigm and the extraordinary results which can arise from the most casual or seemingly trivial of incidents. In this case, the outcomes have included the evidence of a missing Gaudier sculpture and, more recently, the publication of a previously unseen photographic portrait of the sculptor (Crow 2013: 108-118). Being able to follow leads such as the NPG/Utin listing of Benington’s work with Gaudier has been most exciting not least because it demonstrates the continuing need to investigate all aspects of British photography.

Haworth-Booth in his survey “Where we’ve come from: Aspects of post-war British Photography” (1989a) gives a good general guide to the subject and noted what he called the “quantum leap in interest and activity” during the 1960s concerning the art of photography within the V&A and beyond (Haworth-Booth 1997: 136). In part this was brought about by the proper organization of the existing collection, the acquisition of archive and/or historic material, the purchase or gifting of contemporary works and the creation of innovative exhibition programmes in London and elsewhere. The RPS’s attempts to become more active in promoting photography beyond its membership has been analysed in detail by Jane Fletcher (2010: 130-151). Bryn Campbell writing in *The Times* in November 1976 (Campbell 1976: 13) recorded his impressions of many positive efforts to improve the status of photography in Britain. He quoted Peter Turner the co-editor of *Creative Camera* who had claimed “Photography in Britain is at more than a cross-roads, more of a Spaghetti Junction” (Turner 1976 quoted Campbell 1976: 13). In trying to make sense of the different routes available, Campbell noted that until 1971, major Photographic exhibitions had been rare in London and were virtually unknown in the provinces. He distinguished between professionally curated exhibitions and the annual exhibitions of the RPS and the London Salon or of local camera clubs which were generally devoted to the display of contemporary amateur work. The significance of this move to professionally presented exhibitions meant that for almost the first time, the non-specialist public could view original photography from different historical periods. A selection of these will be considered in some detail in the following chapter.

The 1973 appointment of Barry Lane as the Arts Councils Photography Officer was critical to these developments. Another key figure in later developments was Mike Weaver who chaired the Arts Council Photography Committee from 1978-1983. The inclusion of photography in the Arts Council’s commitment “to develop accessibility to and greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts” (Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997: np) was one of the most significant moves to ensure



that photography would at last enjoy a proper status within the fine arts and elsewhere. How far these expectations were met will be examined in the next chapter. A number of important developments were to have an impact on the reception and understanding of British photography particularly of the period after 1890. In the analysis which follows, attention will be paid to how often Benington's work was exhibited or noted and the context in which it was presented. As changing curatorial practices began to introduce new ways of presenting the history of photographic images, so opportunities became available to recognize much exciting work which had previously been neglected or marginalized. An examination of how far Benington's work was able to benefit from these new circumstances will highlight a number of other issues related to his reputational survival and current visibility.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **British Photography from 1890: the exhibition record to the present**

The previous chapter has examined some of the main features of the critical assessment and reporting of British photography within the wider cultural setting from the 1920s onwards. Particular attention has been paid to the widening gap between the predominating views within the British photographic establishment and the views of a small minority determined to remain connected to photographic developments in Europe and the USA. Influential commentaries during Second World War highlighted how much contemporary British photography now tended to be a pale reflection of the exciting work of previous generations and, crucially, how there was need to recover the experimental spirit. It was not until sometime after the war that major institutions, such as the V&A and the Tate Gallery together with the RPS began to recognize the significance of photography as a major cultural component of contemporary importance. There were also some difficulties in defining the specific roles of the different institutions and organizations within this changing environment. Bryn Campbell (1976) and Mark Haworth-Booth (1989a) have identified other important developments which also contributed to the increased awareness of photography within Britain in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Although great image-based periodicals like *Picture Post* had closed, new young editors such as Bill Jay and enterprising organizers such as Sue Davies were making a critical impact on the photographic world. The growth of rigorous courses in Institutes of Higher Education helped to raise the profile of and respect for the history of photography and ensured that there was some sense of coherence across the board. One of the best ways of tracking this changing status of photography within the public domain is to examine the records of the various exhibitions of photography. Table 8.1 lists a selection of these exhibitions together with some other material such as photographic anthologies and critical texts relevant to the topic.

**Table 8.1 Selected exhibitions and studies of British photography from 1970**

Year	Title	Curator Location
[1951	<i>Masterpieces of Victorian Photography</i> (from Gernsheim. Collection)	Gernsheim, V&A]
1970	<i>Hill and Adamson Centenary exhibition</i>	Michaelson, Scottish Arts Council Edinburgh, Touring
1971	<i>Masterpiece: Treasures from the Collection of The Royal Photographic Society</i>	Scharf, London, Touring
1972	<i>"From Today Painting is Dead": The Beginnings of Photography</i>	Thomas, V&A
1973	<i>Looking at Photographs</i> MOMA	Szarkowski,
1975	<i>The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950</i>	Jeffrey, London, Touring
1976	<i>Photography: the first eighty years</i>	Lloyd, London Colnaghi
1978	<i>Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920</i>	Taylor, London, Touring
1979	<i>The Linked Ring</i>	Harker
1980	<i>Treasures of the Royal Photographic Society 1839-1919</i>	Hopkinson
1980	<i>Modern British Photography 1919-39</i>	Mellor, Touring
1981	<i>Old and Modern Masters of Photography</i> V&A Collection	Haworth-Booth, V&A. Touring
1984	<i>The Golden Age of British Photography 1839-1900</i>	Haworth-Booth, V&A, then US tour
1985	<i>The Formative Years: Photography in Great Britain 1839-1920</i> (Gernsheim Collection)	Flukinger, University of Texas, HRHRC
1986	<i>The Photographic Art: Pictorial Traditions in Britain and America</i>	Weaver, Touring. Scotland
1989	<i>The Art of Photography, 1839-1989</i>	Weaver & Wolf, Houston, Canberra, London
1989	<i>British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition</i>	Weaver
1989	<i>Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain 1945-1989</i>	Badger & Benton-Harris, London
1996	<i>Early British Photography: a prophecy for the twentieth century. "Rare work from the RPS Collection, 1839-1917"</i>	Roberts, P, Paris, Nice and Bath
1997	<i>Photography: An Independent Art: Photographs from the Victoria &amp; Albert Museum 1839-1996</i>	Haworth-Booth
2000	<i>Photogenic</i> from the Collection of the RPS	Roberts, P
2003	<i>Unknown Pleasures: Unwrapping the Royal Photographic Society</i>	Roberts, R, NMPFT,
2003	<i>A Matter of Focus: The Art of Photography 1892-1917</i>	Liddy, NMPFT
2006	<i>The Folio Society Book of the 100 Greatest Photographs</i>	Haworth-Booth
2006	<i>Impressionist Camera, Pictorial Photography in Europe, 1888-1918</i>	Liddy (Daum) Rennes, St Louis (USA)
2006	<i>Tale of Two Cities: London and New York</i>	Fletcher, NMM
2006	<i>Walter Benington, Photographic Portraits</i>	Freestone. NPG
2012	<i>Photographing the British Landscape: 1840s to the Present</i> from NMM Collections	Liddy, NMM, Touring. Postponed
2014	<i>Drawn by Light</i> from the R P S Collection	Harding, London, NMM

Behind the examination of selected exhibitions and studies is an attempt to discover whether there are recognizable patterns in the presentation and interpretation of British photography particularly of the period post-1890. Within the analysis there will be special reference to how, when and where Benington's work has been presented.

The British 1939 centenary exhibitions and Gernsheim's 1951 exhibition at the V&A had been intended to be retrospective and celebratory of past glories. The sequence of exhibitions which really began to establish British photography as worthy of attention started with the David Octavius Hill Centenary exhibition in Edinburgh curated for the Scottish Arts Council by Katherine Michaelson in 1970. As noted previously, Hill's importance to the national heritage was brought to public attention shortly afterwards in the furore over plans by the Royal Academy in London to sell a portfolio given to the Academy by Hill himself. The intervention of Roy Strong on behalf of the NPG no doubt served to raise the profile of the gallery as well as prompting some interest in Britain's photographic past. It also, eventually, had the benefit of bringing evidence of Benington's work with Gaudier-Brzeska into a wider forum.

Two major exhibitions followed the David Octavius Hill Centenary exhibition and helped to establish a solid foundation for the exploration of British photography from its earliest days. The exhibitions were *Masterpiece: Treasures from the Collection of The Royal Photographic Society* (Scharf 1971) and *"From Today Painting is Dead": The Beginnings of Photography* (Thomas 1972). The exhibitions were genuinely groundbreaking in their challenge to the public to take photography seriously as a major component in social and cultural history. *Masterpiece* (Scharf 1971) had an international rather than specifically British scope in attempting to offer a historical overview of photography. The significance of this exhibition and its catalogue was that it stressed the role of the RPS in promoting the international scope of the history of photography, a tradition continued to the recent RPS show *Drawn by Light* (Harding 2014). It was

curated by Aaron Scharf, the author of *Art and Photography* (Scharf 1968) and featured many now familiar images including examples of the work of Hill & Adamson, Roger Fenton, Rejlander, Julia Margaret Cameron, H P Robinson, P H Emerson, Frank Sutcliffe, F H Evans, Alfred Stieglitz, Clarence White and Edward J. Steichen. The composition of the canon of great works and the pantheon of notable photographers was by now well established. Scharf did not expound a history of photography in any great depth being very much concerned with telling the story of the RPS and its collection. It toured several galleries in UK.

This RPS exhibition was followed by “*From Today Painting is Dead*”: *The Beginnings of Photography* (Thomas 1972) an exhibition organized by the Arts Council and held at the V&A in 1972. It was curated by Dr D B Thomas of the Science Museum and drew on the V&A and Science Museum collections as well as other sources and, with over 900 exhibits of images and artefacts, gave extended coverage of photography up to about 1880. Without being exclusively concerned with British photography, its coverage clearly reflected the sources of the artefacts on display. There were three brief introductory essays in the catalogue concerned with the origins, the invention and the expansion of photography (Thomas 1972: 5-7), the technical challenges of early photographic portraiture (Powell 1972: 9-11) and the social and cultural implications of photography (Briggs 1972: 13-15). Exhibits were listed in relation to the technical processes used and the art potential of photography was not discussed in any depth. Briggs noted that the arrival of Dry Plate technologies in the 1870s effectively introduced a new age. Unfortunately the exhibition did not extend its scope beyond this significant threshold to look at developments from 1890 onwards. The close chronological proximity of the two shows – the RPS show opened in November 1971 while the V&A/Science Museum opened in March 1972 – may have been accidental.

Although out of strict chronological sequence, the next exhibition illustrates that one of the side-effects of the greater interest in its history was the

development of a commercial interest in “historic” photography. American institutions and collectors as well as others were attracted to sales such as *Photography: the first eighty years* (Colnaghi 1976). The show was held at the art auction house P & D Colnaghi & Co in London in the autumn of 1976 as a prelude to the planned sale of over four hundred images from British, European and American photographers. The catalogue was copiously illustrated with a clear commentary contributed by Valerie Lloyd who had previously worked with the NPG and with the RPS (Lloyd 1972: np). The lots included a fine cross-section of mainly well-known names. A very limited number of British works from the post-Emerson period were located within the Photo-Secession section and were largely drawn from *Camera Work*. One interesting parallel between the Colnaghi sale exhibition and the 1971 RPS exhibition was the similarity of the photographers and the images featured in each. This raises issues of the symbiotic relationship between the exhibition/gallery and the sale-room in the promotion of photography.

The Colnaghi exhibition performed a rather different function from “*From Today Painting is Dead*” because it was only incidentally designed to demonstrate a vision of photography and its history. Its main purpose was to promote the sale of historic photographs. The actual lots in the sale were presumably determined by the material available for auction. Nevertheless, the Colnaghi sale catalogue has given a useful insight into the thinking about the key issues of photographic history especially of the period from 1870 to 1920. These included the perception that the driving force for the real developments in photography was through Emerson’s links to Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession. Works by the majority of British Linked Ring photographers were not offered for sale, perhaps because they were judged to lack commercial appeal or, perhaps the influence of Newhall and Gernsheim with their negative valuation of post-1890 British photography had permeated the selection process. As a marker for the then current status of post-1890 British photography, the Colnaghi exhibition was a clear indicator of the increasing commodification of photography and of the fact

that such work was perceived to have little value in the market place or on the gallery walls.

The commercial potential of “old” photography had been recognised in comments by Gibbs-Smith in charge of the Photography Collection at the V&A who had suggested that the centenary celebrations might be an opportune time to invest in photographs as *objets d’art* (Haworth-Booth 1997: 121). Such possibilities had been identified a good deal earlier by the photographic commentator A C R Carter who had predicted in 1904 that

in the future no-one will choose to remember that photography was once without a vote in the constituency of art ... At the Christie’s of that day collectors will vie with each other ... headlines [such as] ‘Auction Triumphs of the Early Edwardians’ (Carter 1904: 95 ff)

Carter’s forecast has only partially been realized.

### ***The Real Thing and beyond – three key exhibitions and others***

Following the success of *Masterpiece* (Scharf 1971) and “*From Today ...*” (Thomas 1972) the public awareness of the history of photography was greatly enhanced by the sequence of three Arts Council sponsored exhibitions – *The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950* (Jeffrey 1975), *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920* (Taylor 1978) and *Modern British Photography 1919-39* (Mellor 1980). The sequence can now be seen as a watershed in the presentation of the history of photography because, above all else, the exhibitions challenged people to think. The exhibitions also served as a crucial counterbalance to the negative view of post-1890 British photography presented by many of the standard histories of photography as epitomized in Szarkowski’s iconic comment “For purposes of approximate truth, it might be said that photographic tradition died in England sometime around 1905” (Szarkowski, 1973: 120). Before exploring the three exhibitions in detail, it is sensible to examine the circumstances of Szarkowski’s comments.

The specific context of Szarkowski’s comments was in the short introduction to Bill Brandt’s *Young Housewife in Bethnal Green* (1937) an

iconic modernist image from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Although he had hedged his claim with the phrases “approximate truth” and “sometime around,” his criticism struck home and it has remained memorable. The core of his criticism is that from about 1905 British photography had effectively lost its sense of purpose and had stifled innovation especially during the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, he claimed, Bill Brandt had to overcome almost insuperable odds to produce his modernist work. Szarkowski made a deliberate contrast between the modernist Brandt and the reactionary forces in Britain with the implication that photography in Britain ceased to be of real interest when it failed to embrace modernism and persisted in purveying a watered down pictorialism. Szarkowski’s position as a leading critic and curator from one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world certainly gave significant weight to his argument. His claims were later challenged by Gerry Badger in his Introduction to the 1989 Barbican exhibition *Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain 1945-1989*. Badger noted with pleasure that Szarkowski had “duly ruffled the feathers of the British photographic community” but added that even the non-establishment photographers “who had been bemoaning the abject state of British photography for years bristled at this unwarranted slight from afar” (Badger 1989: 22). Badger acknowledged that Szarkowski had voiced one of those infuriating half truths which had to be recognised rather than be rejected out of hand.

The three exhibitions demonstrated the power of the Arts Council’s purpose of promoting accessibility and understanding of the different fine arts. The inclusion of photography within the remit of the Arts Council had not been an easy formality with some of the earlier hostility to photography within elite cultural spaces being maintained. As noted previously, the appointment of Barry Lane as the Arts Council Photography Officer was of key importance in bringing forward many exciting developments (Campbell 1976: 13). The three exhibitions will be examined in some detail to discover how different approaches to the selection and the presentation of



the material can bring about very different outcomes especially when supported by critically alert commentaries. Throughout the examination, particular attention will be paid to how far Benington's importance was recognized.

*The Real Thing* (Jeffrey 1975) was not arranged as a conventional chronological survey but was presented on a thematic basis within broad time bands. Themes included (2) "Art Photographers and Portraitists" featuring works by Julia Margaret Camero, Rejlander and Robinson and (8) "Art Pictures" which included Emerson and members of the Linked Ring. Unfortunately the catalogue does not give details of exactly which images were exhibited but work by the major figures from the Brotherhood including Craig Annan, Arbuthnot, Benington, Coburn, Davison, F H Evans and Dudley Johnston are listed. In his introductory essay, Jeffrey immediately challenged the reader to think again about what the history of photography is about:

Certain photographs have been steadily admired and collected and eventually written into the history of art. Others have been consistently disregarded and neglected. The remarkable feature in this pattern of admiration and neglect is its relative stability; the cast has remained more or less the same with the Hill and Adamson partnership, Mrs Cameron and Dr Emerson firmly amongst the elect (Jeffrey 1975: 5)

Jeffrey was concerned that using the conventional system of "favourites" might not be telling the real truth about the world of photography. On the one hand we have the usual "cast ... amongst the elect [which are included in] the pantheon [of] photographers." On the other, the vastly greater number of those who were not part of the "cast" nor are one of the elect to be admitted to the pantheon. He promised that exploring the work of this group would definitely not be a depressing experience. He argued that there was much exciting work to be discovered from those not normally given a place in the standard histories – the neglected ones. He urged us to take note of the images of these "unknowns" because they might well demonstrate "haunting prefigurations of a later modernism [and that] it is this conjunction of prefiguration and a neglect which borders on suppression

which is most suggestive for a history of photography” (Jeffrey 1975: 5) In effect he was questioning the standard histories of photography which tell of the “wonderful progress of science, of difficulties identified and overcome en route to ... the modern age” (Jeffrey 1975: 5) Applying such a determinist vision to photography was, he argued, very misleading because instead of the steady progress imagined to be the norm, in real life there was often a sequence of erratic and contradictory events. Such a view was in marked contrast to the thinking of Beaumont Newhall who had argued that there was a clear line of progress in art-photography from the Primitives to the modern and that any deviations from this clear pathway had to be ruthlessly erased. Instead of treating the development of a photographic movement as a linear progression Jeffrey visualized the growth of art-photography from 1885 as a “pattern of effort and exhaustion, aspiration and lapse [with periods of intense efforts by] a talented and energetic group of artist-photographers [which then deteriorated into a] kind of nerveless self-parody” (Jeffrey 1975: 5).

The history of the Linked Ring outlined in earlier chapters tells exactly of the surges in developments and periods of comparative torpor. Jeffrey also challenged traditional thinking in his treatment of two iconic figures who are presented with no false heroics but who had erratic histories. Julia Margaret Cameron’s career ended in disappointment and Dr P H Emerson “whose huge energies and talents were again put at the service of art through photography [actually] ended in bitterness and renunciation” (Jeffrey 1975: 6) The recognition of such realities was vital if a proper understanding of the dynamics of photographic practice was to be achieved. He also suggested the idea that some of the most critical changes in direction in photography were not the outcome of aesthetic or cultural rethinking but a response to commercial or economic imperatives. In particular he noted the moment when the centre of photographic activity in Britain shifted from the interests of ambitious amateurs to the more commercially valuable and burgeoning mass market of the novice “snapshotter” (Jeffrey 1975: 23) Jeffrey has given no precise date for this change

– as with many momentous changes, the clues become evident only in retrospect.

The critical commentary in *The Real Thing* (Jeffrey 1975) was split between Jeffrey's own essay "British Photography from Fox Talbot to E O Hoppé," and David Mellor's "Patterns of Naturalism: Hoppé to Hardy" (Mellor 1975: 25-35). The use of Hoppé as a bridge between two phases of British photography is an interesting device. Mellor noted him as being "the most prominent and the most active photographer then [1933] working in Britain" (Mellor 1975: 25). Cecil Beaton had also praised Hoppé's achievements in portrait work (Beaton 1944: 36). More recently, Hoppé has been noted as "The missing link in British photography between Frederick Evans and those contrasting moderns, Bill Brandt and Cecil Beaton" (Haworth-Booth 2006 np) Haworth-Booth has also observed that Hoppé's career disproves the commonly held belief that nothing of importance happened in British photography between about 1910 and 1930 (Haworth-Booth 2014 np). One is tempted to offer Benington as another photographer who might be considered as the "missing link" between Haworth-Booth's two dates. We shall return to this theme in considering Mellor's later exhibition *Modern British Photography* (Mellor 1980).

Mellor's essay explored the impact of the development of the miniature camera such as the Leica on British photography and the benefits to British photographers of personal experience in Germany for more fully appreciating the new photography. As noted previously, the RPS 1933 Symposium on Modern Photography (*Photographic Journal* 1933: 138-150) had responded very negatively to the new developments which were seen as an assault on the traditional virtues of British photography. Mellor adopted a position in keeping with Jeffrey's remarks about understanding the context of particular photographic activities. He declared that in Germany "photography was the ideal means of presenting the truth ... visions of a democratic future ... photography as the great democratic art ... degenerate High Art of the past would be driven out" (Mellor 1975: 26) Mellor noted

that such a vision had not established itself in Britain until the late 1930s. Mellor's account of the key relationship between Germany and modern photography in Britain was given more expanded treatment in his study *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-33* (Mellor 1978)

Some of the 1930s modernist British photographers who flourished included Humphrey Spender who moved out of the studio "to adopt "the 'open' naturalistic mode aligned with schemas of social reportage, distinguished by a reformist and progressive spirit" (Mellor 1975: 26) Mellor drew particular attention to Spender's view of St Paul's Cathedral for the front cover of *The Listener* (28 April 1937) in which he combined two elements – the distant view of St Paul's and what Mellor called the "modernist geometry of a crane in the foreground ... [reminiscent] ... of the later school of pictorialists such as Benington and Arbuthnot" (Mellor 1975: 26). By noting the strong visual link between Benington and Spender, Mellor has identified an important example of Benington's work as a precursor of modernism. Benington's unpublished 1912 *Tilbury Docks* portfolio (see Figs. 6.9, 6.10 and 8.4) is strongly representative of Mellor's "modernist geometry." Such a reference fits well with Jeffrey's call for his readers to explore beyond the well-known and note the importance of such prefigurations. The rejection of the Newhallian vision of progress towards an ideal and the call for a more sustained examination of the "missing" photographers and their work remains valid forty years on.

Perhaps the most valuable theme developed within *The Real Thing* was the challenge to rethink the traditional ways of seeing and classifying photographic images. Rather than relying on the canon of "favourites" it was important to explore the "unknowns" and those "haunting prefigurations of a later modernism" because through them we may understand the history of photography so much more fully (Jeffrey 1975: 5)

There was an important degree of continuity between *The Real Thing* (Jeffrey 1975) and the next significant exhibition designed to promote a

better understanding of British photography, *Pictorial Photography in Britain, 1900-1920* (Taylor 1978). Just as Jeffrey and Mellor had challenged the public with their selection of images and their commentaries, Taylor also rejected the traditional Newhallian approach. In his capacity as the Arts Council's Photography Officer, Lane wrote the Foreword to *Pictorial Photography* in which he succinctly challenged the conventional modes of photo-history. He claimed that British photography in the nineteenth century had generally been well reported but this was not the case for British photography produced in the early years of the twentieth which had been "largely unpublished and neglected" (Lane 1978: 7). The phrase is remarkably similar to Jeffrey's theme of the clash between the well known (and therefore celebrated) and the unknown (and therefore neglected) examples of British photography. Lane argued that the modernist approach to photo-history had been highly selective in its evidence and dismissive in its interpretation of "pictorial" work. Lane then noted the need to confront the way in which "recent photographic history" had presented the battle in the period 1900 to 1920 as one between modernist reformers and dogged conservatives with the implication that the former had the best interests of photography at heart.

In his catalogue essay, Taylor pursued this point and examined the specific circumstances that led to a defining confrontation between British and American photography. He dealt briefly with the secession of a group of like-minded photographic enthusiasts from the Photographic Society of Great Britain. The details of this break-away movement, the Linked Ring, have been well documented in Harker (1979) and have also been examined in earlier chapters of this study. He then moved swiftly to an exploration of the issues which brought about the acrimonious ending of the Linked Ring. Taylor explored these issues in more detail in his later article "The Salon des Refusés of 1908" (Taylor 1984). Taylor argued that Stieglitz and fellow-members of the Photo -Secession did not exhibit together in Britain until after 1902 and when they did, they presented a disruptive challenge to the accepted norms of British photography. The inevitable consequences of

such moves, he claimed, were the “American Salon” of 1908 and the creation of the Salon des Refusés by F J Mortimer. Taylor argued that the major problem lay in the fact that there was not a united British front in dealings with the Americans. The minority group including Craig Annan, George Davison, Benington and Arbuthnot were strongly identified with the 1908 “American Salon” and with the vote to end the Linked Ring. They had become, in Taylor’s reading of the events, the “defeated Links.” They then mounted their own secession with the 1911 London Secession exhibition. One might reasonably argue that the group had not actually been defeated because they had proposed an “honourable burial” for the Brotherhood and had narrowly won the postal ballot by 11 votes to 10. The controversial and damaging battle between the Perfectionists and the Latitudinarians (Harker 1979: 123) has been considered in earlier chapters as part of the study of Benington’s important role within the Linked Ring.

The strength of Taylor’s argument lies in the fact that he had offered a serious engagement with the subject of Pictorialism by challenging the conventional view that in Britain the style was incapable of any development. While many photographers in Britain may have later degenerated into a “kind of nerveless self-parody” (Jeffrey 1975: 5), others, Taylor has suggested, were at least prepared to take up a more challenging position. The fact that some of the opportunities to explore were rejected or ignored or possibly led to dead-ends did not mean that they should not be considered to be part of the history of photography. This is an important illustration of the theme which McCauley has also explored, that the linear determinist view of historical progress takes no account of the range of possible options at any one time but settles on one single version of events. Not only do these writers fail to identify what they have excluded but they do not positively justify what they have included because too often they are recycling previous accounts rather than exploring the original sources available (McCauley 1997b: 87).

Taylor has examined his theme in ways which challenged many preconceptions and the received version of the narrative ultimately derived

from Newhall. He has also recognized that the overwhelmingly negative responses to British photography of the period have provided “a compendium of the beliefs that ensured the eclipse of British pictorialists after the First World War” (Taylor 1978: 29). These beliefs have been well-rehearsed from Newhall and Gernsheim onwards and it is refreshing to see them challenged by Taylor in his commentary. Three of Benington’s major Pictorialist works – *Among the Housetops* (1900), *The Church of England* (1903) and *After the Storm* (1906) – were included in the exhibition. There is no indication as to the actual layout of the hanging of the images but there appears to be a clear pattern in the arrangement of the plates in the accompanying book with strong contrasts between the paired images. If that is, indeed, the case, the selection of Benington’s *Among the Housetops* (1900) as Plate 1 provides a defining image of British pictorialism. It is paired with Coburn’s *Wapping* (1908) as a classic Pictorialist image and perhaps as a reminder of the similarity of subject and composition in the London images by Benington and Coburn. Other pairings of the Plates give an interesting series of juxtapositions. Edward Steichen’s *The Pool* (1898) is set against Horsley Hinton’s *Fleeting and Far* (1903). The first is a powerful demonstration of Steichen’s control of tonal values which give a sense of foreboding as against Hinton’s more generalized picturesque account. Other pairings are equally stimulating with one of the most provocative being the juxtaposition of Benington’s *After the Storm* (incorrectly dated to 1903, first exhibited in 1906) with Paul Strand’s *Telegraph Poles* (1916) and illustrated as Fig. 5.8. The similarity of the two images has been discussed earlier as an indicator of Benington preparedness to venture well beyond the conventional. It is also a good example of the pre-figuration of modernism of which Jeffrey had written earlier. *The Church of England* (1903) which was also included in this exhibition was not illustrated in the catalogue but was discussed in the notes.

Taylor’s exhibition had opened at the Hayward Gallery in London in May 1978 and completed its extended tour of UK in Edinburgh in June 1979. Margaret Harker’s definitive study of the Linked Ring was published in

September 1979. It is not clear of the connection between Taylor's exhibition and Harker's book beyond the acknowledgement by Taylor of Harker's (unspecified) support. The timing may have been a coincidence but it is also very helpful because Taylor's exhibition and Harker's book serve complementary purposes. Harker's wealth of material provides a necessary context for a number of Taylor's assertions and cross-referencing between the two can help to clarify a number of issues. Both demonstrate a commitment to the Pictorialist tradition as a legitimate form of photographic expression. It should be noted that Taylor's exhibition was mounted in 1978 and Harker's study was published in 1979 and that it is now over thirty-five years since their initial appearance.

The next important exhibition in the Arts Council's series devoted to enhancing the standing of British photography was *Modern British Photography 1919-39* curated by David Mellor (Mellor 1980). The catalogue stressed the connection with the earlier *Pictorial Photography* (Taylor 1978) and argued that there was a continuity and coherence with it for all the apparent discontinuities and incoherencies. Mellor characterised Pictorialism as "soft focus, manipulation and retouching the photograph, along with decorous subject matter" and observed that Pictorialism had already started to collapse before 1914. Taylor's decision to extend his study of Pictorial photography in Britain through the years of the Great War to 1920 had allowed him to demonstrate the longer term consequences of the disruption of the period between 1908 and 1911. After 1911 the populist forms of Pictorialism and the romanticism of English pastoralism and patriotism gained the upper hand. Both Taylor and Mellor appear to have agreed that 1919 was the point at which the rift in British photography between traditionalists and more forward thinking workers had become irreversible. One might add that the failure of the London Secession to continue beyond 1911 had demonstrated how firmly entrenched traditionalist photographic thinking had become in Britain. The work which Benington produced in the period after 1911 shows how far he had become detached from the mainstream of British photography and how far his work



prefigured the later modernism which Mellor has reported as developing after 1919. Just as Taylor had demanded that British photography deserved proper recognition because of its neglect in standard histories of photography, so Mellor has made out a strong case for the diversity of British photography from 1920 onwards to be properly recognized. He especially pointed to the emerging documentary, fashion and commercial work as being of the very highest standards.

Mellor has identified 1919 as a significant turning point not only on the wider post-war political and cultural fronts but also because Ward Muir's exhibition, *The Fact of Beauty*, was held at the Camera Club (Muir 1919). Muir had argued that the public supported 'straight' photography because they bought illustrated papers and also because, in their own photographic practice, they massively preferred "the straight and unfaked hand camera photograph ... throughout the world an interest in straight and true and real honest to goodness photographs is tingling through the very limb and tissue of our modern interested age" (*Amateur Photographer* 1920a: iii) The forum for these claims was an advertisement for the Imperial Dryplate Co, makers of one of the most successful and popular dry-plates and keen to promote its products to the widest possible market. Even those who broadly welcomed the rejection of too much manipulation complained that Muir could have achieved so much more from his negatives and produced something more attractive. Turning away from the conventional genres of pastoral or character portraits Muir had argued for "an industrial iconography of 'gasometers and factory chimneys'" as being more true to the real world (Muir 1920b: 66). The "real world" included scenes of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. Mellor illustrated this theme with Muir's *June Evening* (c.1916) see Fig. 8.1, a scene of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. Mellor also noted the unconventional, roof-top view-point (Mellor 1980: 5). Such a view-point had, of course, been exploited by Benington. Mellor contrasted this view of modern London with Dudley Johnston's *Liverpool: an impression* (1907) an icon of the pictorialist movement both for its style and for its technique.



Fig. 8.1 Ward Muir, *June Evening* (1916) Bromide print.  
RPS collection Ref Number: 2003-5001/2/21751 (photo: RPS)



Fig. 8.2 Walter Benington, *The Orange Barrow* (1897)  
Gravure 240 x 175 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

It is good to meet Muir's work and to register his declarations of artistic intent that photography must reflect the realities of the daily world and should also capture the "industrial iconography" of the mundane world. Much that Mellor has claimed on Muir's behalf has strong resonances with

Benington's work of a few years earlier. Benington's 1897 street scene *The Orange Cart* (Fig. 8.2) captures something of the busy London life while the later *Water Lane* (Fig. 8.3) from the *Shakespeare's London as it is* portfolio (1912) beautifully captures the vivid reality of London life



Fig. 8.3 Walter Benington, *Water Lane* (1912)  
Bromide 240 x 166 mm (photo: © Benington Collections)

Muir's call for "an industrial iconography of 'gasometers and factory chimneys'" (Muir 1920b: 66) is strongly reminiscent of Benington's earlier call for the mundane features of our surroundings to be the proper subject of photography (Benington 1904c: 282). Benington's *Bankside* and *Tilbury* images (both 1912) – see Figs. 6.7 to 6.10 – pre-date Muir's "rehearsal of Documentary photography in the mid- and late thirties" (Mellor 1980: 6) by a number of years. Fig. 8.4 is clear evidence of the "industrial iconography" which Mellor considers to be an essential component of the Realism which

was later to mark the work of Humphrey Jennings, Humphrey Spender and Bert Hardy (Mellor 1980: 38).



Fig. 8.4 Walter Benington, *Tilbury Docks – Cranes, unloading goods “Made in Germany”* (1912) Bromide 254 x 182 mm. (photo: © Benington Collections)

Mellor had previously noted the visual parallels between Benington’s proto-modernist iconography and the work of Humphrey Spender (Mellor 1975: 25-35). I would argue that Benington can be seen as providing a previously unrecognized link within the period from the 1890s towards the 1930s as covered in these three key exhibitions.

## New approaches and wider contexts

Immediately following *Modern British Photography 1919-39*, the Arts Council sponsored the exhibition *Old and Modern Masters of Photography* (Haworth-Booth 1981) in conjunction with the V&A. Following his time at the National Portrait Gallery from 1967 to 1973, Roy Strong moved to the V&A as Director. He immediately began to implement significant changes in the organization of the photographic collection to improve accessibility and to promote a forceful policy of acquisitions. The emphasis was not on providing a coherent history of photography but on promoting the international and modern range of the V&A collection. British photography of the post-1890 period did not feature strongly. In the Foreword to the exhibition, Strong could write confidently that

The National Collection of *photographs as art* is housed at one of the manifold museums that make up the Victoria and Albert Museum ... [Among the priorities are] the rapid expansion and consolidation of the national photographic collection with international representation ... Our sole criterion is *aesthetic quality* (Strong 1981: 3. Emphasis added).

The RPS had also established itself in exhibition and promotional work with the 1971 touring exhibition, *Masterpiece: (Scharf 1971)*. *Treasures of the Royal Photographic Society 1839-1919* (Hopkinson 1980) raised the vexed issue of selecting from the approximately 15,000 images in the Permanent Collection. Hopkinson willingly admitted to a bias in favour of work which did not introduce darkroom manipulation but in his thematic commentary he acknowledged the importance of British Pictorialism. This was well represented by the work of Frank Sutcliffe (6), Horsley Hinton (2), Alexander Keighley (3) F J Mortimer (3) and J C S Mummery (1). There were also contributions from Demachy (6) and other European workers to help balance “The American Invasion” which formed the next theme. There appear to be no references to Benington. Fletcher (2010: 130-151) has argued that the attempt by the RPS to be more engaged with a wider public was part of the larger campaign to recover its status within the cultural establishment.

A selection drawn from a number of major British collections plus a contribution from the Philadelphia Museum of Art formed the basis of an exhibition which opened at the V&A in June 1984 and then toured in the USA until May 1986. The well-illustrated volume, *The Golden Age of British Photography 1839-1900* (Haworth-Booth 1984) was organized to cover the main historical narrative with a general introduction for each phase, supplemented by a number of individual studies. Haworth-Booth identified four important technical factors which facilitated the significant changes from the late 1870s onwards. He noted the introduction of dry-plates, the improvements in lenses, the photogravure process and the availability of platinum papers as allowing far greater freedom for seeking personal expression. The rise in popularity of easily manipulated small cameras encouraged an explosion in the market and a consequent division between “real” photographers and those for whom photography was merely a popular craze (Haworth-Booth 1984: 152-153)

Three photographers were highlighted as representative of the best of British photography in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Emerson was noted for his strength and volatility (Jeffrey 1984: 154-162). Craig Annan’s role in maintaining the international scope of art-photography through the Linked Ring, the Glasgow International exhibition of 1901 and the proposed International Society of Pictorial Photographers in 1905 was recognized (Buchanan 1984: 170-173). The third major figure was F H Evans whose work with the Linked Ring was noted as well as the excellence of his architectural studies and his commitment to unmanipulated images. The Linked Ring was noted in the comments on both Annan and Evans but there was no exploration of its importance in the history of British photography from 1890 onwards. Perhaps the cut-off date of 1900 precluded its inclusion.

In his Introduction to the 1989 Barbican exhibition *Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain 1945-1989* Gerry Badger had acknowledged the annoying half-truth of Szarkowski’s observations

concerning 1905 and the demise of British photography. Peter Turner argued that Szarkowski's "problem" was caused by looking in the wrong direction. Turner explained

we have two traditions, and two notions of photography's value as art, just as we did in 1857. One asserts itself through an alliance with art – photographers wanting works to look like Art. The other, often and misleadingly called documentary, presents a world unadorned by artifice and demanding that this be art enough (Turner 1989: 66-70)

Essentially Turner was identifying the same key issue as Ian Jeffrey in 1975 that the history of photography is not only the history of art photography but also the history of the art of photography and each aspect deserved to be valued. Turner's implicit demand is that both traditions be taken seriously and that one is not necessarily "better" than the other. His distinction is also helpful in identifying some of the strengths of British photography rather than drawing attention to some of its weaknesses. His comments build on David Mellor's 1980 exhibition *Modern British Photography 1919-39* (Mellor 1980) which had made a good case that there were some photographers in Britain determined to maintain a critical partnership with contemporary European and American practice. In their exhibition, Badger and Turner brought the story of British photography forward to 1989 with evidence of exciting and impressive work appropriately dedicated to Bill Brandt many of whose works were included.

An even more ambitious exhibition with considerable international aims was *The Art of Photography 1839-1989* (Weaver and Wolf 1989a). The show was designed as part of the sesquicentennial celebration of photography and travelled to Houston and Canberra and then to the Royal Academy in London. Pictorialism was presented as a "well-organized and highly self-conscious movement ... with the objective of establishing ... an essential place within the contemporary media of personal expression" (Bunnell 1989: 156-158). The relatively objective tone continued in the description of the methods and techniques used while highlighting that the purpose was to produce an image where "the physical and tonal beauty of

the printed object was all important” (Bunnell 1989: 156-158). The curatorial team concentrated on the work of a few individuals arguing that “by showing each artist in appropriate depth, the innovative power and force of his or her work is more clearly demonstrated” (Wolf 1989: 1).

This is precisely contrary to the argument that Jeffrey had been making in 1975 – that such a selection distorts the true nature of photography and leads to rejection or neglect of photographers deserving of as much coverage as the “chosen few”. The “chosen few” selected to illustrate “Pictorial Effect” were H P Robinson, P H Emerson, Clarence White, F H Evans, Coburn, Steichen and Heinrich Kühn (Bunnell 1989: 156-158). Mike Weaver provided a commentary “An American Place” (Weaver 1989: 190-191) devoted to Stieglitz, Edward Weston and Paul Strand. The exhibition moved on to the Modern Movement and developments beyond including an important section called “British Contemporaries” (Haworth-Booth 1989: 364-368). An interesting feature of the catalogue was the inclusion of selections from essays and other commentaries from writers or photographers contemporaneous with the images illustrated. Such an arrangement reflected Weaver’s interest in providing a rich context for the images.

The exhibition was generally well-received although the commentator from *Marxism Today* questioned the whole enterprise as a betrayal of photography:

The size of the exhibition diverts attention from the amazing predictability ... the art game has already solidified into a Hall of Photographic Fame ... in capturing photography for the art world, the figure of the Artist is paramount: most of the photographs that participate in our lives are anonymous, but in Art they are organised by names (Slater 1989: 9-10)

Weaver had also been working on several other projects including *The Photographic Art: Pictorial Traditions in Britain and America* (Weaver 1986) This was a touring exhibition on behalf of the Scottish Arts Council



which adopted the plan of “compare and contrast” across a whole range of genres of photography. Weaver had designed the exhibition around twenty broad themes and illustrated each with a selection of from four to six images from both Britain and the USA. Of particular interest was his selection of Benington’s *The Church of England* as part of his treatment of “Atmospheric Influence” (Weaver 1986: 46-51). Weaver’s interesting thoughts on the importance of the different atmospheres in England and in the USA have been examined earlier. As a way of penetrating to the heart of the photographic experience and of explaining key differences in the photographs of different times and places, Weaver’s close attention to detail is perhaps more helpful than the grand sweep attempted by *The Art of Photography 1839-1989* (Weaver and Wolf 1989a).

The primacy of Art Photography had been increasingly questioned with commentators and critics considering that it was unacceptable that it should be regarded as the only mode of photography of social or cultural value. Calls for new kinds of histories of photography were increasingly made. Ya'ara Gil-Glazer (2010) has provided a useful supplement to Nickel’s earlier survey of histories of photography (Nickel 2001) in summarizing the situation. Gil-Glazer claimed that the late 1970s saw photography being brought into the academic world and also into the sale-room as noted with the Conaghi sale in 1976. She also noted the demand for a ‘new kind of history’ initially articulated by Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson in the special “Photography” issue of *October* in 1978 (Krauss & Michelson 1978: 3) and more extensively explored in journals and other publications such as *The Originality of the Avant-garde and other Modernist Myths* (Krauss 1981). Some of the more extreme post-modernist approaches calling for photography to be relocated in different contexts created some anxiety as to whether the best interests of photography were being served by such moves.

These concerns can also be noted in Mike Weaver’s important collection of essays *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition* (Weaver 1989b). Weaver’s purpose was to take “an academically

based historical and critical look at certain British photographers born in the nineteenth century ... whose work transcended literal fact to arrive at a degree of expressive meaning” (Weaver 1989b: xv). Although there is no separate essay on Benington, his work is discussed in connection with that of his colleague Malcolm Arbuthnot (Parsons 1989: 281-296). The need to re-establish that such photography was legitimate was, according to Weaver, becoming ever more pressing in the face of the structuralist movement in criticism and the tendency of post-modernist writers to re-introduce the “hybridization of media.” His other concern was that the lack of real research had led to the reiteration of “old fallacies” (Weaver 1989b: xv)

This last point serves as reminder of one of the central criticisms of much post-Newhall history which took his statements of “fact” as the basis for their own commentaries. Later critics, although adopting very different approaches, did not return to the original sources but relied on Newhall as the *urtext* or the original source of the facts (Nickel 2001: 550). In effect, Weaver appears to be arguing that those photographers who had been rejected or neglected in the modernist phase of the creation of histories of photography have remained ‘unavailable’ in later post-modern commentaries. Such ‘unavailability’ was one of the consequences of relying on unreliable and incomplete research. Weaver’s favoured option was the detailed examination of original sources which should help to counter the claims of the modernist approach to photo-history. Barry Lane had also claimed that the mistaken approach of modernist historians had ensured that much good work remained “largely unpublished and neglected” (Lane 1978: 7)

This theme runs through Jeffrey (1975) Taylor (1978) and Mellor (1980) and Weaver’s Scottish Arts Council exhibition in 1986. Each curator, by returning to original source material, has rediscovered a number of important photographers who had previously been marginalised or rejected. Each has found that Benington’s work has contributed significantly to the developments being explored. A common feature of all four exhibitions has

been the sense of revealing the hidden and of sharing the pleasure of meeting previously little-known or completely unknown work. Each exhibition offered a real and exciting challenge as it demonstrated the importance of the support from the key objective of the Arts Council.

*Early British Photography: a prophecy for the twentieth century* (Roberts, P 1996a) was billed as:

Rare work from the Royal Photographic Society Collection – the originals [images] chosen represent a French perception of ‘Britishness’ and embrace Victorian life from the conception of photography in 1839 until 1917 (RPS Publicity 1996)

The exhibition had been planned in conjunction with Pierre Bonhomme, Director of the *Mission du Patrimoine Photographique* in Paris and opened there in the spring of 1996 and toured to Nice. It was then decided that the exhibition should be presented at Bath – the first time that there had been a major exhibition of Early British Photography from the Society’s own collection since the RPS had moved to Bath in 1980. Roberts explained in a supporting press article that the First World War had effectively brought photography’s first golden age to an end but crucially she stressed that “the first 75 years of British photography were characterised by a restless, excited, pioneering creativity - at odds with the clichéd image of stilted Victorians but actually quite characteristic of the age” (Roberts, P 1996a). Her description captures the same spirit that Strasser and Kraszna-Krausz, (1942) had identified – of vigorous discovery producing photographic work that was really exciting. The exhibition included over 100 images with some variation in the selections for each venue. An illustrated catalogue in French was published but there was no English catalogue. The well-known workers such as Fenton, Frith, Cameron, Robinson, Emerson and Coburn were included. Benington was represented by two gum-bichromate prints – *Among the Housetops* (1900) and *Cab Rank* (1909) with the caption:

Walter Benington – a friend of Evans and Coburn, Benington was heavily influenced by Japanese Art which he collected and shows strong graphic and decorative qualities in his photography. He was particularly interested in the City, photographed from unusual angles as these two photographs undoubtedly show. There is a powerful

sombreness and brooding strength in his work during this period but his later work is largely portrait based (Roberts, P 1996a: np)

The RPS Collection has provided a rich source for illustrating the history of photography through its own exhibitions and through a number of well-produced volumes of images which have been noted in this review. Schemes to produce fine quality limited edition portfolios of well known images did much to promote the idea that half-tone reproductions failed to demonstrate the technical complexity of the originals. A fully-documented and beautifully illustrated presentation of the RPS Collection was published as *Photogenic* (Roberts, P 2000). The text by Pam Roberts provided many insights into the creation of the collection and in particular the indefatigable efforts of J Dudley Johnston who in 1923 began a systematic policy of collecting. Roberts has suggested that Dudley Johnston had his own definition of Art photography and of the history of photography as a whole. Reflecting this understanding, Roberts claimed that the collection represented “a flowering of an inventive British Pictorial domestic tradition, an interlinking and an integration of art and photography that is unique to the RPS Collection” (Roberts, P 2000: 184). Roberts made it clear that only a fraction of the Collection could be represented in *Photogenic* nevertheless, although the photographers were from “different cultures and backgrounds – stretching across the art/science divide – they all speak the universal language of photography” (Roberts, P 2000: 13). She had chosen to present the images thematically rather than in chronological order, thus giving a real cross-section of images across the different periods. Within each theme, the treatment was broadly chronological and the range of images is impressive. Reference was made to the development of the Linked Ring and other Secessionist groups, noting that owing to petty infighting the groups eventually fragmented (Roberts, P 2000: 183).

As noted earlier Dudley Johnston had great difficulty in coming to terms with “Modern Photography” and this was demonstrated by his reluctance to add such work to the RPS Collection. However, he was proactive in securing new material, especially examples of pictorial photography, as a

counter-balance to technical bias of the existing collection (Pritchard 2014: 7-15). He encouraged gifts from contemporaries such as F H Evans, Coburn, Demachy, Holcroft, Steichen and Stieglitz to make substantial donations. It is important to note that the majority of Benington's images in the Collection were donated by Evans and Coburn. Benington's widow also donated a small collection of Fred Holland Day's work in 1937, as well as an important collection of Linked Ring papers.

The RPS Collection was relocated to Bradford in 2003 and in celebration, there was an exhibition curated by Russell Roberts, *Unknown Pleasures: Unwrapping the Royal Photographic Society* (Roberts, R 2003). This exhibition ran from January to March 2003 to be followed later in the year by a more detailed look at the work of members of the Linked Ring and the Photo-Secession, *A Matter of Focus: The Art of Photography 1892-1917* (Liddy 2003). The exhibition included three important images by Benington – *Among the Housetops* (1900), *The Church of England* (1903) and *The Cab Rank* (1909). More recently an NMM exhibition photographically comparing London and New York, *Tale of Two Cities* (Fletcher 2006) included *The Church of England* (1903). A 2012 touring exhibition drawn from the NMM/RPS Photography Collection, *Photographing the British Landscape, 1840s to the present* which was to have included *Among the Housetops* (1900) appears to have been postponed.

Liddy had also contributed to the important international exhibition *Impressionist Camera, Pictorial Photography in Europe, 1888-1918* (Daum 2006). The show was a joint enterprise between the Musée des Beaux Arts in Rennes and the St Louis Art Museum in the States. As the title indicated the coverage was pan-European but with a real awareness of the American dimension both of the historical period and the contemporary, i.e. 2005-2006, audience. British Pictorialism was not especially privileged but was presented with confidence. In his essay, "The Origins and Development of Pictorial Photography in Britain" (Liddy 2006: 65-71) Liddy provides a clear summary of events leading up to the disputes involving H P Robinson

and P H Emerson and then subsequently with George Davison. The establishment of the Linked Ring was a natural consequence of the disputes and Liddy gives full credit to Alfred Maskell for driving things forward. The Linked Ring's annual Salon which became "internationally recognized as the finest showcase for international Pictorial photography" (Liddy 2006: 68-69) was, in its early years, truly *avant-garde*. Liddy highlighted the influential role of Horsley Hinton as editor of *Amateur Photographer* and as a leading artistic photographer who favoured pastoral settings. Benington was noted as one who "successfully used the city as a subject" (Liddy 2006: 70). Liddy's summary of the events of 1908 and the Salon des Refusés omitted the important role of the minority of Links such as Davison and Benington but his characterisation of the real conflict as "the quiet rural British form of Pictorialism ... [which] was under threat from the more abstract American Pictorial photography" (Liddy 2006: 71) is most helpful even though it does not take into account Benington's remarkably original approach. Liddy concluded his contribution with the reminder perhaps directed to his potential American readers that it would be a mistake to undervalue British Pictorial photography not least because of its legacy of "inspiration and support" for American Pictorialists. It can be argued that an even more important legacy of British Pictorialism is the wealth of fine and exciting photographic images which can be enjoyed for themselves.

The most recent national exhibition drawn from the RPS Collection, *Drawn by Light* (Harding 2014) opened in December 2014. The catalogue has a good deal of useful information about the history of the Society and its Collection noted above (Pritchard 2014: 7-15), the relationship of the Society with the Science Museum in London (Harding 2014: 16-23) and some observations on the Collection in an international context (Sui and Herrmann, 2014: 25-27). Rather than following a conventional chronological pattern, Harding adopted the more critically engaging style of "compare and contrast" using pairs of images to generate many helpful insights. Benington's work is not represented in this recent RPS selection but the size of the collection and the particular curatorial style of the

exhibition clearly must lead to the omission of many equally interesting images.

A number of important features emerge from the survey of exhibitions and studies which may help our understanding of how and why the history of post-1890 photography has been presented. Within this wider brief, we have looked in particular at the level of recognition given to Benington's work. Some of the exhibitions and anthologies were designed to celebrate the wealth of a particular collection such as the RPS or the V&A (e.g. Hopkinson 1980; Haworth-Booth 1981). With these exhibitions, the stress has tended to be on the range and variety of images on show with a varying mix of the celebrated "crown-jewels" of the photographic world and some less familiar images. A number of important well-illustrated anthologies of photographs drawn from major collections but not related to specific exhibitions have also been included in the survey to confirm the richness of the collections. Similar anthologies which have been directed towards celebrating a canon of "great" images have also been noted because they point to a certain glamorization of the images. Some of these volumes have very high production values and well-researched commentaries (e.g. Haworth-Booth 2006) but others are far less satisfying.

Other exhibitions have explored photographic history in broadly chronological order perhaps with a view to demonstrating the way in which early developments have shaped future progress. The dominant mode of many of these histories has been "art photography" with other genres of photography treated as of lesser importance. Weaver (1989) acknowledged the dominance of "art photography" in his sesquicentennial celebrations whereas other exhibitions claiming comprehensive coverage also focussed on "art photography" and treated other genres of photography as of little importance. Other differences between exhibitions concern whether the focus is specifically national or whether the particular exhibition is more broadly international. The chosen time-span covered by exhibitions also varies with some concentrating on a twenty year period such as 1919 to

1939 (Mellor 1980) while others have aimed for a much more extensive coverage such as 1839 to 1989 (Weaver 1989). Such variations will clearly influence the depth of detail which can be offered to the visitor

### Locating Benington within the exhibitions and studies

Table 8.2 briefly summarizes the degree of “visibility” which Benington’s work has enjoyed since 1970. Letter A indicates the inclusion of one or more of Benington’s images in the specific exhibition or study. Letter B indicates where his work has been referenced in the supporting text.

**Table 8.2 Summary of Benington’s “visibility” in selected exhibitions and studies of British photography from 1970**

Year	Title	Curator	Location
1975	<i>The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Jeffrey,	London, Touring
1978	<i>Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Taylor,	London, Touring
1979	<i>The Linked Ring</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Harker	
1980	<i>Modern British Photography 1919-39</i> <b>B</b>	Mellor,	Touring
1986	<i>The Photographic Art: Pictorial Traditions in Britain and America</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Weaver,	Touring. Scotland
1989	<i>British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition</i> <b>B</b>	Weaver	
1996	<i>Early British Photography: a prophecy for the twentieth century.</i> “Rare work from the RPS Collection, 1839-1917” <b>A &amp; B</b>	Roberts, P,	Paris, Nice and Bath
2003	<i>A Matter of Focus: The Art of Photography 1892-1917</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Liddy,	NMPFT
2006	<i>Impressionist Camera, Pictorial Photography in Europe, 1888-1918</i> <b>B</b>	Liddy (Daum)	Rennes, St Louis (USA)
2006	<i>Tale of Two Cities: London and New York</i> <b>A</b>	Fletcher,	NMM
2006	<i>Walter Benington, Photographic Portraits</i> <b>A &amp; B</b>	Freestone.	NPG
2012	<i>Photographing the British Landscape: 1840s to the Present</i> from NMM Collections <b>A &amp; B</b>	Liddy,	NMM, Touring. <b>Postponed</b>

A partial pattern can be identified in the exhibitions listed in Table 8.2. Jeffrey (1975), Taylor (1978) and Mellor (1980) plus Weaver (1986a and 1989c) together with Harker (1979) all point to a period when post-1890 British photography was being given increasing status and value. The involvement of the Arts Council in supporting these exhibitions was clearly of major importance not only in promoting British photography as deserving of critical attention but also of challenging the viewer to move beyond the



traditional chronological presentation of well-known masterpieces. Jeffrey had argued the need for an adventurous approach in order that the neglected and marginalized might be rescued and enjoyed. Benington was clearly a beneficiary of Jeffrey's challenging approach and the case was continued in the detailed study of Pictorialism in Britain (Taylor 1978) and in Harker's vital study of the Linked Ring (Harker 1979). In the turmoil which surrounded the collapse of the Linked Ring, Benington was determined to pursue an independent path which led him away from the Pictorialist images which had made his reputation. Taylor (1978) had pointed to Benington's proto-modernist approach in his juxtaposition of *After the Storm* (1906) and Strand's *Telegraph Poles* (1916). Jeffrey (1975) had identified the pre-figuration of modernism as one of the justifications for exploring the unknown and marginalized photographers and their work. Mellor (1980) had also noted this pre-figuration in Benington's geometric compositional style as a possible influence on the documentary work of Spender and others. This has been reinforced by drawing attention to Benington's portfolios of London's Bankside and of Tilbury Docks.

One of the most important of subsequent exhibitions in highlighting Benington's work was *Early British Photography: a prophecy for the twentieth century – Rare work from the RPS Collection, 1839-1917* (Roberts, P 1996). As with Jeffrey (1975) and the other exhibitions noted above, the viewer was challenged to relate the images on show to a wider cultural perspective. Pictorialism in its initial and experimental stages was acknowledged as part of the continuity of photographic vision from the earliest days. It was most definitely not as an aberration which had to be excluded from the continuing narrative. Work such as Benington's *Among the Housetops* (1900) and *The Cab Rank* (1909) were offered as prefiguring future developments but, crucially, they were also valued in their own right. The move of the RPS archive from Bath to Bradford in 2003 gave a renewed opportunity to explore the collection for its rich holding of Pictorialist work in a small specialist exhibition (Liddy 2003). Evidence from this exhibition fed into the international exhibition of European

Pictorialism (Liddy 2006). In 2006, the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (NMPFT) was re-launched and renamed the National Media Museum (NMM) with the declaration that “The name change was motivated by the need to respond to a rapidly changing media landscape, and to extend our remit to reflect the web and new digital technology” (NMM 2015: np)

The recent exhibition *Drawn by Light* exhibition (Harding 2014) has demonstrated a continuing commitment within the RPS and the NMM to promote the appreciation of important photographs of the past. In this instance, none of Benington’s RPS images was included. However, the show demonstrated how vital exhibitions of this calibre are in promoting and, above all, celebrating British photographic history. It will remain crucially important that, in pursuing its redefined objectives related to digital technologies, the Museum’s vital commitment to the history of photography is not jeopardized. Access to the original images from the RPS and other collections and to the materials so vital to effective research must be protected. These and other vital archives such as the V&A photographic collections are confronted by many challenges but their crucial role in celebrating British photography through curatorially ambitious and exciting exhibition policies must be protected.

Hostility or perhaps a casual indifference to the importance of photography within the wider artistic and cultural institutions may have been an earlier impediment to the successful celebration of post-1890 British photography. This no longer seems to be a barrier. Notwithstanding some of the future challenges noted above, it must be hoped that further progress can be made and that Walter Benington’s contribution to the development of British photography can also needs to be celebrated. Ensuring that his work is brought to the attention of the wider public through exhibitions and other means may also help to rectify his current neglect within many histories of photography.

## Chapter IX

### Conclusion – Recovering Walter Benington

It had been, and still is, in my mind to devote an issue of *Camera Work* to the work of the ‘later’ British workers, you, Benington & Arbuthnot (Stieglitz to Dudley Johnston, 15 September 1923, quoted in Roberts, P 1997: 29)

Stieglitz’s suggestion of giving recognition to Benington in the iconic photographic journal, *Camera Work*, comes in his correspondence with Dudley Johnston over the proposal to award him the RPS Progress Medal. The significance of the letter is not so much in the likelihood of another edition of *Camera Work* some six years after the previous “final” issue – far too much had changed for this to be realistic. Rather, it establishes the fact that Stieglitz acknowledged the importance of Benington as a photographer worthy of the most serious recognition. The letter gives a tantalizing glimpse of what might have been. Whether it would have made a significant difference to Benington’s subsequent reputation must remain a matter of conjecture. The realities of Benington’s reputation appear to have depended on issues rather more complex than whether Stieglitz’s expression of goodwill could have been realised. Nevertheless, the fact that Stieglitz had suggested the possibility is indicative of the many complex issues which have influenced Benington’s current very limited visibility.

Examining Benington’s photographic career has offered the opportunity to celebrate the rich variety of his work. Doing so has also drawn attention to the remarkable gulf between the very high reputation he enjoyed amongst his contemporaries and his present virtual invisibility in current histories of photography. At a very early stage, it was decided to extend the scope of the study beyond Benington to include an examination of whether British photography in the period from 1890 onwards had experienced a similar marked decline in its own reputational status. It became clear that this was indeed the case. One advantage of setting the study of Benington into the wider national context has been to avoid the charge of practising “resurrectionist” history in which there is a temptation to exhume some obscure artist and claim immortality on his behalf (Ramirez 1987: 182).

Far from being an obscure or isolated figure, Benington was at the heart of several major developments in British photography, first exhibiting with the Linked Ring at their Second Photographic Salon in 1894. His career illuminates several important facets of the course of British photography of the post-1890 period. There are, of course, some disadvantages in creating too close an identity between Benington's career and the course of British photography. One disadvantage of making Benington entirely synonymous with British photography would be that one might lose sight of his remarkable individuality. This becomes very clear in the turmoil of the collapse of the Linked Ring from 1908 onwards where there are numerous cross-currents of motives and influences. Benington's determination to pursue his own path through this difficult period appears to put him at odds with the majority of his British colleagues.

Benington was a photographer of great imagination and vision as well as a consummate technical worker. Something of his power has been demonstrated in the work that has been reproduced within this study. It is important to ensure that his work becomes better known not only because it is rewarding in itself but also because it counteracts the still prevailing belief that there was little of value produced by British photographers from the 1890s onwards.

In attempting to establish the possible causes of the current neglect of Benington and of post-1890 British photography more generally, we have examined several areas of concern. The first major area to be investigated was how the changing nature and purposes of histories of photography may have contributed to the effective eclipse of an important part of British photography and with it the careers of a number of major British photographers including Benington. To provide the context for the study of Newhall's *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) we have explored issues of nationality and cultural and aesthetic values. The notion of the Britishness of British photography seemed to be broadly accepted as a concept but proved rather more difficult to identify in practice. Beyond

accepting that the photographer's birthplace and/or parentage were not fundamental determinants of Britishness and that actual location in Britain of the photographic activity was not necessarily of prime importance, there seemed to be a general agreement that the term "British photography" tended to be used as if its meaning was understood by everybody.

Concern over national identity in and through photography was a constant theme. For instance, there may be some strength in the suggestion that French claims to priority in the initial discovery of photography was a way of compensating for the defeat at Waterloo (Marien 2006: 34-35). Certainly, the fear of invasion by foreign styles of photography might well also express fears of a wider cultural or commercial invasion. Similarly an aggressive promotion of a national photographic style might be indicative of wider expansionist aims and the assertion of a considerable degree of self-confidence as with Fred Holland Day's 1900 *The New School of American Photography*. Expressions of national pride and the denigration of the enemy may have been regarded as appropriate during hostilities but the condescending attitude to one's friends such as claiming that the American was "really a very simple person ... a guileless child" (Tilney 1918b: 435-436) will have contributed little to mutual understanding and appreciation. Anglo-American political and economic differences during the period after 1890 may well have contributed to the shifting and sometimes deteriorating photographic relationships between the two countries.

The detailed examination of *Photography 1839-1937* (Newhall 1937) has revealed examples of a casual belittling of the British such as the description of Fox Talbot as "a lone Englishman ... conducting similar researches" (Newhall 1937: 32) as well as a more general antipathy to much British photography. The statistics show Newhall's strong preference for US based work with American photographers clearly favoured in virtually all areas over representatives from France who, in turn, considerably out-numbered the British. Another outstanding finding was that notwithstanding his personal enthusiasm for German film and photography, little of the work

appeared in the exhibition or was mentioned in the commentary. In collecting material for the exhibition in 1936, Newhall did not visit Germany claiming later that the political situation had deterred him. McCauley has argued that Newhall's concentration on photography in America, France and Britain has led to the distortion of the broad shape of photographic histories for generations to come (McCauley: 1997b: 91). Newhall remained unrepentant about his chauvinistic approach arguing that "more strong photographers have come from the United State than from any other part of the world" (Newhall 1977: 410).

Newhall's modernist aesthetic agenda is clearly evident throughout the catalogue essay and in his list of recommended reading. In the analysis we have tried to explore the way in which his aesthetic prejudices against Pictorialism were imported extensively from eminent German and Austrian critics whose work he had reviewed earlier. Their conclusions, that photography had "suffered" significantly after the introduction of Dry Plate technologies in the 1870s, coincided with Newhall's own conviction that "soft-focus work was an aberration that should be eliminated" (Newhall 1993: 46). The preference for sharp focus and glossy prints, as epitomized in the work of Group *f/64* and much favoured by Newhall, also suited the modernist institutional agenda of MoMA. The great influence which Newhall's work has had on subsequent histories of photography has meant that his key messages were accepted as unassailable statements of truth which few were concerned to verify. Another feature of Newhall's approach which has also attracted considerable criticism is the assertion that "in the spontaneous origin of photography lies the course of its future development (Newhall 1938: 9). This positivist view of the development of photography has many of the same characteristics as the 'Whig' approach to history in which progress is believed to be both inevitable and beneficial (Butterfield 1931). Examples of 'Whig' historicism such as a tendency to subvert evidence or to oversimplify by removing essential caveats have been noted in the analysis of Newhall's commentary particularly in relation to British photography after 1870. Newhall's combination of modernism

and nationalism clearly seems to have appealed strongly to MoMA in New York and its visitors. Newhall's approach also seems to have met the needs of many later historians and commentators who have found his version of photographic history both simple and attractive. Newhall's original history and its subsequent revisions and enlargements have helped to create an image of British photography that has remained embedded in the popular consciousness. Mike Weaver has commented that many of these subsequent histories and encyclopaedias of photography have not been based on original research but have been "perpetuating old fallacies" (Weaver 1989c: Preface xv).

To redress the balance against these "old fallacies" it has been important to return to the many original sources available to identify more exactly what had actually been happening. By doing so, the intention has been to build up a much fuller picture of events than appears to have been previously available. There is a remarkable variety of cross currents within the overall narrative demonstrating how the story of British photography of this period was significantly more complex than might appear from Newhall's account. Much of the evidence in support of the view has been derived from a close examination of Benington's career and the work of his colleagues within and beyond the Linked Ring. The evidence we have analysed broadly relates to these two main themes – the wider events of British photography from 1890 onwards and, more specifically Benington's own career. Sometimes the paths run in parallel and sometimes they diverge quite markedly making it necessary to switch the focus of the commentary as appropriate. The main purpose in adopting this approach has been to establish a solid core of factual evidence on which to provide the foundations for the two probable outcomes. One of these outcomes has been the need for post-1890 British photography to be re-evaluated and given the same serious consideration as that devoted to other periods of British photography. The related outcome is the recognition that Benington's work is an essential component of this complex narrative but that it also has an individual life beyond its immediate historical context.

His work demands to be reappraised so that it becomes far more widely known and better recognised for its range and individuality.

One of the key issues which emerged from the analysis included the importance of the international dimension of the Pictorialist movement in the early successes of the Linked Ring. The need for the constant renewal of inquiry and innovation in the work was essential if stagnation was to be avoided. As long as this spirit of renewal continued at the heart of the Linked Ring's activities, British photography was at the forefront of international developments. When this vital drive began to be compromised, British photography became increasingly insular and isolated. Evidence of this critical finding is to be found in the three "episodes" which have been chosen to illustrate this journey. Each episode had important parallels in Benington's career and can be seen in the new directions he followed in his photographic work.

The establishment of the Linked Ring in 1892 and its rapidly growing importance within national and international photographic circles opened up great opportunities for young amateur photographers like Benington. Harker's invaluable study of the Linked Ring (1979) has been supplemented by revisiting the unpublished Linked Ring papers in the RPS Archives (Linked Ring 1892ff). The extensive coverage of the annual exhibitions in the photographic press makes clear how some of the early enthusiasm for adventurous work began to weaken as the urge to protect the interests of home photographers against those of foreign workers began to assert itself. The earliest of Benington's work to have survived seems to be *Fleet Street* (1897) which was welcomed by the press. *Among the Housetops* (1900) was Benington's first major Pictorialist image to excite interest being particularly liked by Steichen for its honest expressiveness (Steichen 1900: 343-345). Other critics found it disturbing but enjoyed Benington's other rather more conventional exhibit, *Peace* (1900). The contrasting reactions to these two very different images suggest the emergence of a fault line within British photography. This breach was more fully exposed in a series



of important exhibitions during 1900 and 1901. Benington's work was being selected for inclusion in European exhibitions such as the Paris *Exposition* of 1900 and the Glasgow International of 1901. In Paris there had been little opportunity to compare current British work with that of other countries because there was nothing from the USA and several other countries. Glasgow 1901, organized by Craig Annan, gave the opportunity for a detailed comparison between British photography and the work of other countries. While much of the English press remarked favourably on home-based photographers, respected European commentators, such as Heinrich Kühn, expressed concern that British photography was stagnating. Kühn's comments were deeply resented by many who remained complacent that British photography was flourishing.

An even greater challenge to conventional thinking about photography was the exhibition, *The New School of American Photography*, organized by Fred Holland Day in 1900. The show was greeted with alarm and derision by some as were the American contributions to the 1900 Photographic Salon: "an insult to the public ... the cult of the spoilt print" (Bedding 1900b: 613-615) being typical of the strongly chauvinistic response. British photographers who were attracted to these new developments were also castigated by some for damaging the "purity" of British photography. Benington recalled the tremendous impact the exhibition had on him at the time and how he was strongly influenced by Holland Day in much of his work since then (Benington 1924b: 539-540). The aftermath of the various international exhibitions and especially the strong foreign presence at the Salons continued to reverberate as some argued that British photography was in danger of being overtaken. Benington had been elected to the Linked Ring in 1902 taking the title of *Housetopper* in recognition of his characteristic roof-top location in creating his images. On a personal level his reputation was increasingly enhanced. The St Louis Exposition in 1904 at which Benington was awarded a Grand Prix for *The Church of England* (1903) seemed to confirm the success of British photographers on the international stage. This image had been dubbed "Picture of the Year" by

*Amateur Photographer* (1903k: 76) and was to become his best-known work.

*The Church of England* (1903), *Among the Housetops* (1900) and the later *After the Storm* (1906) have been examined in detail as fine examples of British Pictorialism. Although the three images demonstrate Benington's technical mastery and his powerfully imaginative response to his subjects, they also show how far he was determined to go beyond the conventional boundaries. In a striking contribution to the debate about Beauty in Photography, he had earlier argued in "The Beauty of Ugliness" (Benington 1904c: 282) that even the meanest subject was fit to be photographed. This important statement, that photography should not confine itself to the traditionally picturesque, was confirmed in his RPS One-Man Show in June 1908 (Benington 1908: 282). The show gave Benington the opportunity to demonstrate the range of his work and his commitment to the proto-modernist thinking which was to be evident in much of his subsequent work. For the purposes of the present study it has been possible only to note very briefly some of the influences on his aesthetic understanding. These included the prevailing enthusiasm for the Arts and Crafts movement and for Japonisme. He also enjoyed the work of Whistler and a range of other artists with whom he had contact and he gladly acknowledged the impact of photographers such as Fred Holland Day and his long-standing friend and colleague, F H Evans.

There had been great concerns about American work driving out British contributions at the Salon but disputes with Stieglitz over selection policies saw a dearth of foreign contributions at several Salons. In an effort to maintain the international status of the Salon, the 1908 show had a very strong representation from Stieglitz and others from his Photo-Secessions group. Benington was very much involved in organizing what became known as the "American" Salon. The immediate riposte by Mortimer, the newly appointed editor of *Amateur Photographer*, was to present the *Salon des Refusés* and to claim that by doing so he was saving British

photography. Changes in the selection process for 1909 forced the resignations of most of the non-British Links including Stieglitz, Steichen and Coburn. Attempts were made to keep the Linked Ring alive with the 1909 Photographic Salon to which Benington contributed two fine examples of British Pictorialist work in *The Cab Rank* (1909) and *Riverside Houses* (1909). However, the clear division between the Purists including George Davison and Benington and the Populists led by Mortimer was far too severe to be bridged and the Linked Ring was given an “honourable burial” in 1910. The final meeting of the Brotherhood was held at Benington’s studio and, as the Centre Link or Chairman, Benington signed the final Minutes of the Linked Ring on 17 February 1910.

These turbulent times have been well reported by Harker (1979) and by Taylor (1978 and 1984). The London Secession exhibition in 1911 has not been well reported perhaps because it had no sequel and failed to generate a following. Benington’s previously unpublished correspondence with Stieglitz (Beinecke Letters 102/1-3 Benington to Stieglitz, June-September 1910) gives important detail of this pivotal moment in the history of British photography. The London Secession exhibition needs to be investigated more fully than has been possible within this study. Dudley Johnston retained very fond memories of the exhibition and rated it above Stieglitz’s Albright show of 1910 for the quality of its carefully selected contributions (Johnston 1939a: 179-203). With the “failure” of the London Secession, the hope of maintaining an international dimension in British photography had finally disappeared.

Benington’s decision to purchase the Photographic Association in 1909 marked a decisive turning point in his career. By becoming a professional photographer he ceased to be an amateur worker with all the social and cultural connotations that such a move brought about. He effectively changed direction not only in his own photography but also in his social standing and relationship with his former colleagues. The three images chosen for the London Secession in 1911 had a powerfully direct treatment

of much simplified subject matter and point in the direction which he was to follow for the remainder of his career. Meanwhile, he had been building his reputation as a portrait photographer with considerable success and he also embarked on several projects which took him well beyond anything he had tackled before.

This post-Pictorialist phase of his career has been examined in some detail because the range and variety of his work makes it very much more difficult to pigeon-hole him. Within his earlier Pictorialist phase, we can judge his comparative success in pushing the boundaries and gaining mastery of the many technical challenges. With his post-Pictorialist work there are no such conventions to help evaluate the images in comparison with the work of the few others in the same genre. Each image or group of related images has to be evaluated in its own terms. His work with Gaudier-Brzeska has no parallel from this period and few, if any, from other periods. His 1912 *Bankside* documentary studies have powerful dimensions which predate the later work of Humphrey Spender and other documentary photographers of the 1930s. His industrial studies in the Tilbury Docks, also from 1912, demonstrate his delight in the compositional challenges to be overcome and look forward to the work of many modernist photographers. Both portfolios offer insight into his early use of “modernist iconography.” His portraits provide ample evidence of his capacity to range from the quirky humour of the portraits of dancer Margaret Morris to the powerful symbolism of *Gaudier at work on the Head of Ezra Pound* (1914) and to the rather disturbing *Portrait of a Lady* (1922). Equally satisfying are the more traditional portraits of Ellen Terry or Albert Einstein.

In considering other possible factors involved in the long term neglect of post-1890 British photography and with it the work of Benington, we have also examined whether there were, in fact, ambivalent critical responses within Britain itself which may have contributed adversely to its reputation. In the first instance we explored how the entrenched anti-modernist stance of key figures within the photographic establishment seemed to refuse to

accommodate any mode of photography other than a decorative pastoralism. The impact of such a stance was that critics who argued for even a fairly modest expansion of the genres of photographic expression were forced to call on Continental and American colleagues as potential role models, further exacerbating tensions.

Most critics in Britain who wished to advance the cause of modern photography were a good deal less doctrinaire than Newhall in discussing Pictorialism. Lucia Moholy (1939) explained her personal preferences for un-manipulated work as more fitting the current needs of photography in its intimate relationship with the modern world. Nevertheless she argued that past achievements deserved to be recognized and, unlike Newhall, she avoided ascribing any moral defect to soft-focus or “painterly” work. She did, however, express some surprise that such “impressionistic” methods in the hands of experts could produce such excellent pictures (Moholy 1939: 160). This gives passing recognition to the fact that it is the visual imagination of the photographer and not just the physical form of the image that should determine its status. In her even-handed study she argued for the international and shared nature of photography. For her, the past must be properly appreciated so that its likely future can be developed freely. Moholy’s vision, even as Europe was being engulfed in war, was “inclusive, positive and lyrical” (Haworth-Booth 1997: 129).

Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz (1942) celebrated the British contribution to the history of photography by concentrating on Victorian photography which they declared to be exciting and rewarding. Their extension of Victorian to include the Edwardian period allowed them to include two contrasting London scenes by Coburn and Dudley Johnston. Their warning that “Victorian photography is a chapter closed” (Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz 1942: 14) was directed at those who persisted in imitating it years after the event. Essentially Strasser & Kraszna-Krausz recognized the excellent work that had been produced by some of the original Pictorialists but they also insisted that photography had now moved on to embrace new genres

and techniques. They warned that to attempt to continue in the old ways was to court disaster. A similar message came from Cecil Beaton in his generally more dismissive account of Edwardian photography. He claimed that there was some merit in the work of the original Pictorialists even though they were mistaken in their experiments. The real crime of most current (1944) pictorial photographers was, as far as Beaton was concerned, insincerity and the faking of a “response” to the subject. This, he implied, was especially dishonest at a time of national peril when photography should be essentially truthful and to be seen to be responding to current issues.

The end of WWII saw a continuation of Dudley Johnston’s laments about the dangers of modern photography (Johnston 1946:308). In 1951 the first major post-war photographic exhibition was held at the V&A. It was drawn from the Gernsheim collection and paid tribute to the early masters of British photography. Gernsheim had little good to tell of the later Victorian work with what he called its manipulation and painterly qualities. The gap between the traditionalism of Johnston and the modernist views epitomised by Gernsheim appeared even greater than before the war. In addition to this almost unbridgeable division there was the ambivalence of the major cultural institutions towards photography as an expressive and imaginative medium. This was compounded by the “territorial” disputes as to which institution should be regarded as the appropriate repository of a National Photographic Collection. The failure to secure Gernsheim’s collection for the nation appeared to be further evidence that Britain showed scant interest in its photographic past. Such a position was unlikely to provide the necessary base for mounting a defence against the prevailing Newhall-derived rejection of post-1890 British photography and with it any hope of reversing the neglect of Benington and others.

The examination of a number of important exhibitions from the 1970s onwards does show a marked change in the valuation of British photography. Some exhibitions were concerned to demonstrate the depth

and range of the collections with particular attention to the canonic works on show. In this context some anthologies of images not directly linked to specific exhibitions have been included in the discussion because they served a related function. Other exhibitions adopted a curatorial programme of challenging the viewers to abandon the traditional celebration of the canon and encouraged them to explore the previously undiscovered. Three exhibitions in particular – Jeffrey 1975, Taylor 1978 and Mellor 1980 – demonstrated this new approach. It seems to be no coincidence that each was sponsored by the Arts Council and designed to deliver on its commitment to accessibility and understanding of the fine arts which now included photography. The appointment of Barry Lane as the Council's Photography Officer in 1973 has been seen as critical to its success.

*The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs, 1840-1950* (Jeffrey 1975) laid down the challenge of moving beyond the works of the well-known photographers to examine those of lesser-known or indeed unknown workers who for too long have been marginalised or neglected. We do not know which of Benington's images were included in the exhibition but Jeffrey was clearly determined to encourage the viewer to believe that these "new" images would be exciting and innovative and that they deserved to be better known because their work often prefigured later developments. In his commentary Jeffrey noted that the new post-Pictorialist photographer would need to be versatile enough to incorporate different styles – Impressionist, Vorticist, Surrealist, Social Realist – to be a "mirror of fashion" (Jeffrey 1975: 24). Benington's work from the period after the collapse of the Linked Ring clearly demonstrated the proto-modernism which Jeffrey saw as being worthy of note. Jeffrey had most powerfully argued that a new way of presenting British photography was required if justice was to be done to so much work that has previously been marginalized or neglected. *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900 to 1920* (Taylor 1978) elaborated on Jeffrey's contention that we should pay far more attention to work that had too often been disparaged and then neglected. Such neglect was blamed on modernist photo-historians who wished to promote their own version of the

battle between British traditionalists and American innovators. He claimed that the key moments of this conflict were encapsulated in the “American” Salon and the Salon des Refusés leading to the subsequent collapse of the Linked Ring. Some of the underlying tensions can now be more fully appreciated in the light of the unpublished correspondence between Davison and Benington with Stieglitz.

Taylor’s 1978 catalogue communicates a message similar to Jeffrey’s – that the best work of the period was forward-looking and challenging and Benington is clearly identified as a major contributor to the quality of the work on show. *Modern British Photography 1919-1939* (Mellor 1980) extended the narrative to challenge the prevailing view that British photography of the inter-war period had nothing of interest to offer the public. Although Mellor had used Ward Muir as his bridge into Modern British photography, it has been argued that on the basis of his important post-Pictorialist work, Benington could well have served the same purpose had his work been better known.

An informal analysis of the exhibitions reviewed in Chapter VIII suggests something of a hierarchy. The first group of shows appears to aim for inclusive coverage in terms of chronological and international scope with the intention of providing an overview of the history of photography. Within such surveys, post-1890 British photography has often been given only cursory coverage. One outcome of this curatorial plan has been that the recognition of photographers like Benington would be most unlikely. The second variety of shows included exhibitions more restricted by time period or nationality where the likelihood of a greater recognition of post-1890 British photography increased. Even within this semi-restricted field, the importance of Benington’s work has not always been recognized. More specialist studies such as Jeffrey (1975) and Taylor (1978) or subsequent exhibitions such as Roberts, P (1996), Liddy (2003 and 2006) and Fletcher (2006) have given Benington’s work some important recognition. Weaver (1986a) used Benington’s *The Church of England* (1903) to illustrate his



arguments about key differences in the photographs of Britain and the USA. The spirit in which Weaver's discussion was carried out seems to be far more generous and inclusive than the dismissive mode adopted by Newhall and others.

A feature of those exhibitions which have used Benington's work has been their concentration on his three major Pictorialist images – *Among the Housetops* (1900) *The Church of England* (1903) and *After the Storm* (1906). As noted previously, *The Church of England* became something of an icon as a Pictorialist image – it was included together with six other Benington images in Stieglitz's Albright show in 1910. It also became something of a photographic symbol of London (Morton 1925 et al). *Among the Housetops* (1900) was recently noted as “beautiful and mundane but also amazingly atmospheric and evocative” (Dhaliwal 2014: np) while *After the Storm* has been suggestively identified as a precursor of Paul Strand's modernism (Taylor 1978) These three key Pictorialist works together with *The Cab Rank* (1909) have tended to overshadow the remainder of Benington's considerable oeuvre. Indeed few other Benington images have been included in any discussions of British photography.

One reason for including a large number of Benington's images in this study has been to demonstrate the extraordinary range of his work beyond the very limited number included in the exhibitions or discussed in critical texts. Many of the images within this study have been reproduced from half-tone illustrations in the contemporary photographic press or from other difficult to access sources because the originals are no longer extant. Others have been reproduced from previously unpublished sources or from sources with little connection with the study of post-1890 photography such as histories of modern art. Benington's work has been “discovered” in a number of seemingly unlikely places such as the London Transport Museum. This highlights one of the most important possible explanations of how and why Benington specifically has been neglected. The difficulty of accessing

Benington's photographic originals represents a major hurdle to presenting as full a picture as one might wish and underlines the difficulties in bringing him back to public attention.

In their research on the survival of artistic reputations, Lang and Lang (1988; 1990; 2001) studied a well-defined group of artists, the members of The Society of Painter-Etchers in Britain and an equivalent group of artists in the USA. The craft enjoyed enormous popularity during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century but:

when the tide went out, most of the etchers once acclaimed were forgotten along with their prints – but some were more forgotten than others ... [what was] the process whereby some producers of culture but not others come to be considered worth remembering? (Lang & Lang 2001: np)

Lang & Lang's research is particularly relevant to the current study as the group of Painter-Etchers has interesting parallels with the Linked Ring. The Society was founded in 1880 as a break-away movement from the Royal Academy over exhibition policies and flourished for a number of years before "the tide went out." The phrase "but some were more forgotten than others" (Lang & Lang 2001: np) suggests that, all other things being equal, there were clearly some factors which must account for the different rates of reputational survival of seemingly similar artists. Some of the factors identified by Lang & Lang include whether the artist had taken care to establish and promote his own reputation during his lifetime. Equally crucial was whether someone had acted as the equivalent of a Literary Executor to boost the artist's posthumous reputation. A key role for such an Executor would have been to create of an easily accessible and well structured archive to be available to interested parties. Benington scores very poorly on each of these findings.

We actually know relatively little about Benington's photographic career. He presumably maintained Day Books and other records related to the Photographic Association and his other projects but these have not been

located. It has been possible to create some record of his exhibition successes through contemporary press reports and various exhibition medals and ephemera, including those related to his Grand Prix at the St Louis World Exposition in 1904. Although he presented a number of One-Man shows and exhibited regularly, Benington appears not to have set out to promote himself in the manner pursued by his younger associate, Coburn. He was invited to contribute his views on photographic subjects and was recognized as a technical expert particularly on Platino-type printing methods. However, he tended to express himself without the flamboyance of some of his colleagues. His correspondence with Davison and Stieglitz has a studied intensity which avoids the querulous tone adopted by Arbuthnot. Following his election to the Linked Ring in 1902, he was assiduous in his attendance at meetings of the Brotherhood and served as Centre Link regularly and conscientiously. As noted previously, he signed the final Minutes of the Linked Ring *Journal*.

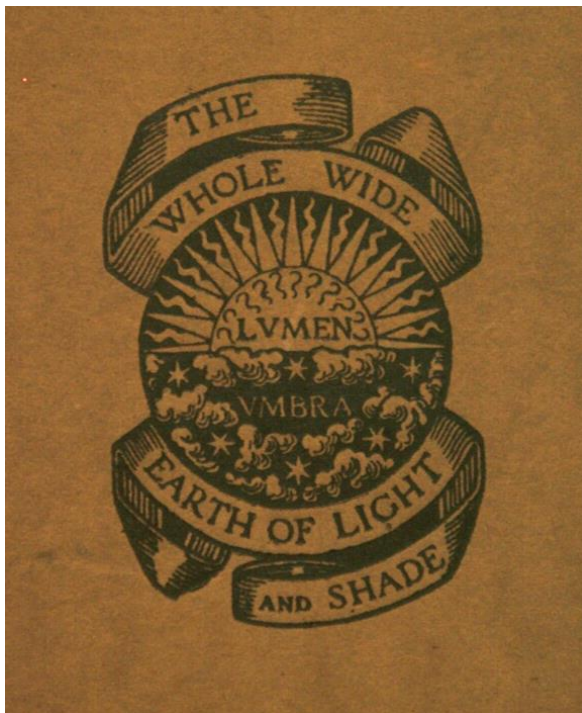


Fig. 9.1 Walter Benington, *Lumen/Umbra* logo c.1905  
(photo: © Benington Collections)

Throughout his career he adopted a visual motif which summarized his commitment to the universality of photography. His logo appeared on the brown or grey sugar-paper folders he used to store his images and he also

included it as part of his letter head. The symbolism would have been familiar to his contemporaries, but it may be helpful to examine the message in a little detail. The motto in the scroll “The Whole Wide ... Earth of Light and Shade” is from an early poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

This earth is rich in man and maid;  
With fair horizons bound:  
This whole wide earth of light and shade  
Comes out, a perfect round (Tennyson 1842)

The stylized visual contrast between *Lumen* and *Umbra* is a declaration that photography, which is essentially the relationship between light and shade, encompasses the whole world and can make it known to all. The message has a strong link to the idealism of Lady Eastlake and others concerning the universal potential of photography. By 1935, while the central message remained much the same, its delivery had become rather more functional.

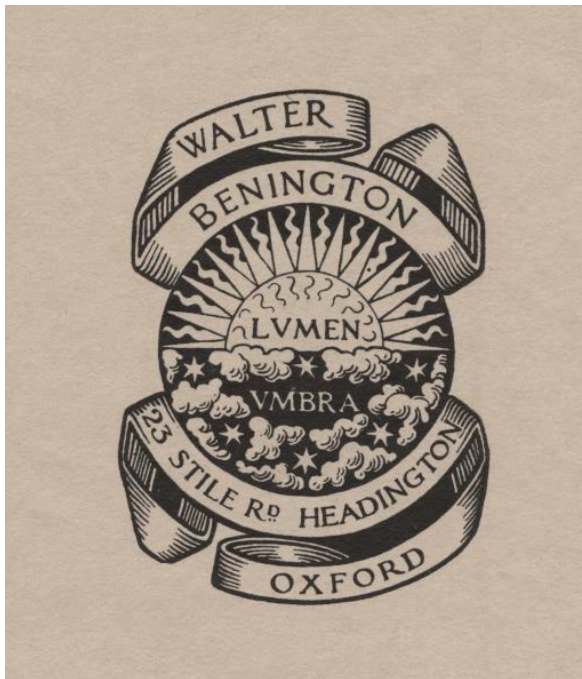


Fig. 9.2 Walter Benington, *Lumen/Umbra* logo c.1935  
(photo: © Benington Collections)

Lang & Lang have identified that the most critical criterion for establishing a lasting reputation is that the artist should have had left behind “a sizeable, accessible and identifiable oeuvre” (Lang & Lang 1990: 331). There are real problems with constructing a full picture of Benington’s work because of the scattered nature of his photographic archive. This problem is well-

illustrated with regard to his work with the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska between 1912 and 1914. An informal list of his work came to the NPG in 1973, while separate portfolios of some of the prints are now in three other archives and the glass negatives of some of the images together with negatives of his work with Epstein are in yet another archive.

The NPG collection of Benington's photographic portraits currently lists well over sixty sitters and is expanding with new acquisitions and the correction of several previously uncertain attributions. It was a privilege to be involved in the preparation of the exhibition "Walter Benington – Photographic Portraits" at the NPG in December 2006 (Freestone 2006). It was especially pleasing to offer some additional material to support the main body of the exhibition and also to learn something of the many difficult curatorial decisions that were involved. Other material in public archives includes his work with Gaudier and Epstein as noted above, the 200 glass negatives of "Oxbridge Personalities and Others" in the Bodleian Library including Zangwill, Conan Doyle and Epstein as well as individual portraits in academic and public libraries including the British Library (Bernard Shaw) and the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand (Katherine Mansfield). The total number of known Benington portraits is now approaching three hundred sitters. The RPS archive with some sixteen images has proved an invaluable resource in studying Benington's Pictorialist images. This small collection is made up largely of donations by F H Evans in 1924 and 1937 and by Coburn in 1930.

Unfortunately much of Benington's work was dispersed after his death with a number of portfolios of original prints and other images being passed on randomly to friends and relatives. Some of these have now been located in different private collections across the world. There may well be others awaiting discovery. While it is perhaps no surprise there are no works by Benington in the Gernsheim collection, it has also been noted that there is no record of any of Benington's work in the V&A collection. Such absences are indicative of one of the possible causes of Benington's lack of

visibility today – the lack of a substantial and accessible archive. Without a significant collection of readily available original images, the chances of a curator directing his attention to Benington's oeuvre is much reduced.

It becomes clear from this study that there have been several factors which have worked together to prevent a full appreciation of Benington. Some of these are so embedded within the established body of photographic history that they seem incapable of change. Under the influence of Newhall's rejection of painterly and soft-focus work, there has been a tendency for British work of this period to be disregarded as a distraction from the path of the development of "true" photographic values. As we have seen, this has resulted in post-1890 British photography failing to enjoy a high profile in many international histories of photography. Trying to persuade the authors of conventional single-volume histories in the Newhallian mode, to rewrite their versions of British photographic history is probably doomed to failure.

Cultural and Art institutions in Britain certainly appear initially to have been slow to acknowledge the vital importance of photography within the wider history of the arts. While the earliest photographic workers were celebrated for their contributions to the great Victorian age, most photographers of the period from 1890 have been given little recognition. The promotion of the concept of a canon of great masterworks and the creation of a pantheon of great master-photographers has tended to focus attention on a restricted range of images and practitioners and given little room to others. The exhibitions curated by Jeffrey (1975), Taylor (1978) and Mellor (1980) ensured that British photography from the 1890s onwards began to be more widely appreciated by demanding that a full range of examples of work from this period should be more closely examined. Such an approach allowed some previously unknown or neglected images to be recognized for their special qualities of bold experimentation, in some cases presaging future developments. Following the success of these exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s, there have been a few more recent shows that have also

celebrated this period of British photography. Jeffrey had earlier suggested that it is the recognition that a good deal of this “lost” work is truly exciting that provides a powerful incentive to look again at the way we value our photographic history. The examination of Benington’s work has been designed to celebrate that there is a richer and more nuanced history of post-1890 British photography than has usually been offered. Benington is at the very heart of this more positive approach to British photography of this period.

There have been increasingly frequent calls from Fontcuberta (2003) and McCauley (1997 & 2005) and many others for different approaches to the writing of histories of photography. Certainly we do need new types of history which aim to provide a fuller picture of the scope of photography across the world. Batchen’s entertaining but very serious demands for new approaches to the history of photography in his *Proem*, include the memorable “I want a history that begins from particular photographs and works outwards from there” (Batchen 2002: 3). This “new” history will be built on the belief that the true excitement of the “real thing” can be found beyond the well-trodden and conventional paths promoted by many well-established histories of photography.

In the spirit of working outwards from the pictures themselves as Batchen has demanded, there is considerable scope for exploring Benington’s work more fully. This study has supplemented the limited number of Benington’s images currently within the public view with a selection from private collections and other less accessible sources. The extraordinary range of the work can be recognized even from this limited selection but more needs to be done to celebrate Benington and his work. At a practical level this will involve continuing to explore existing archives and also, we may hope, discovering further examples of his work. A possible outcome would be the creation of a catalogue raisonné which would serve as a springboard for exploring more fully his aesthetic and wider cultural understanding and the way he expressed these through his photographic images. The influences on

him of a variety of different individuals and art movements would also be a rich area of exploration. His interest in the Arts and Crafts Movement and his enjoyment of the work of Whistler are evident in some of his pictorialist images as is the influence of Japanese art. His commitment to “The Beauty of Ugliness” (Benington 1904c: 282) also requires deeper investigation within the wider context of the cultural values which saw such modernist tendencies as photographing the mundane as a threat to the good order of society. This important theme has been discussed in a recent study, *Ugliness: A Cultural History* (Henderson 2015).

Benington’s career from the early 1890s onwards provides its own commentary on the many important developments in British photography during this very under-reported period. The proposed catalogue raisonné of his work would also offer a number of important pointers for new paths to be explored involving other, presently undervalued, workers. An important outcome of such a procedure would be to declare with confidence that post-1890 British photography is truly worthy of appreciation. Although there is encouraging evidence of a greater openness to the variety of non-digital photographs and a determination to be more accepting of styles which have been long out of favour, pressures on curatorial resources may mean that currently hidden or under-recognized work will remain undiscovered and unappreciated. There have been recent calls for a better understanding of “how we came to surpass notions of *the* ‘history of photography’ ... to arrive at our present sense that there are *many* histories of photographs” (Gervais 2014, emphasis added)

We must hope that within this more accommodating and rather less doctrinaire approach to photographic history there is room for Benington’s work to be recognized for its range and variety. His work certainly deserves to be more widely known so that it can be better understood and appreciated. One is reminded of his blunt response to the President of the RPS at the opening of his 1908 One-Man Exhibition



All that I have to say is upon the walls ... I see beauty, or think I do, in a great many subjects of very different kinds, and I do my best to show it. If my prints show it at all I succeed, if they do not, I suppose I fail (Benington 1908: 282)

It is important that we should all have the opportunity to judge whether Benington has, indeed, succeeded.

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**Walter Benington: plates from original prints in the RPS collection.**

- Plate I Walter Benington, *The Church of England* (1903)  
Platinum. 195 x 145 mm. RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS) See also Plate VIII
- Plate II Walter Benington, *Fleet Street* (1897)  
Platinum 223 x 141 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)
- Plate III Walter Benington, *Over the Hills and Far Away* (1901) (aka *Across the Valley*)  
Platinum 84 x 112 mm. RPS collection, gift of F H Evans 1937 (photo: RPS)
- Plate IV Walter Benington, *Rye Marshes* (c. 1907) Gum 108 x 195 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)
- Plate V Walter Benington, *The Mere* (c. 1902) (aka *The Silent Pool*)  
Platinum 110 x 202 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)
- Plate VI Walter Benington, *The Top of the Hill* (c. 1906) (aka *Landscape with Cows*)  
Gum 106 x 92 mm RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)
- Plate VII Walter Benington, *Among the Husetops* (1900) Gum 350 x 240 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS) See also Plate VII
- Plate VIII Walter Benington, *The Church of England* (1903)  
Platinum 192 x 143 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS) See also Plate I
- Plate IX Walter Benington, *After the Storm* (1906) (aka *A Tangle after the Storm*)  
Gum 280 x 190 mm RPS collection, acquired 1928 (photo: RPS)
- Plate X Walter Benington, *Westminster* (c.1906) (aka *Houses of Parliament from the Embankment*)  
Platinum 240 x 182 mm RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XI Walter Benington, *Landscape* (c. 1908) (aka *Surrey Woods*)  
Platinum 236 x 169 mm RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XII Walter Benington, *The Cab Rank* (1909)  
Gum 488 x 379 mm RPS collection, gift of J Holcroft (1930) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XIII Walter Benington, *The Cab Rank* (1909) Variant print  
Gravure. 129 x 101 mm RPS collection gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XIV Walter Benington, *Riverside Houses* (1909) (aka *Limehouse Hole*)  
Gravure 134 x 91mm RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XV Walter Benington, *Portrait* (1913)  
Platinum 204 x 157 mm RPS collection, gift of J C Warburg (1931) (photo: RPS)
- Plate XVI Walter Benington, *Ellen Terry* (1914)  
Bromide 300 x 232 mm RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)



Plate      Walter Benington, *The Church of England* (1903)  
I            Platinum. 195 x 145 mm  
              RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)





Plate II      Walter Benington, *Fleet Street* (1897)  
Platinum 223 x 141 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)



Plate III      Walter Benington, *Over the Hills and Far Away* (aka *Across the Valley*) (1901) Platinum 84 x 112 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS)



Plate IV      Walter Benington, *Rye Marshes* (1905?)  
Gum 108 x 195 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)



Plate V      Walter Benington, *The Mere* (c. 1902) (aka *The Silent Pool*)  
Platinum 110 x 202 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)



Plate VI      Walter Benington, *The Top of the Hill* (c. 1906) (aka *Landscape with Cows*) Gum 106 x 92 mm  
RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)



Plate VII      Walter Benington, *Among the Housetops* (1900)  
Gum 350 x 240 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS)



Plate VIII      Walter Benington, *The Church of England* (1903)  
Platinum 192 x 143 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1937) (photo: RPS)



Plate IX     Walter Benington, *After the Storm* (1906) (aka *A Tangle after a Storm*) Gum 490 x 280 mm  
RPS collection, acquired (1928) (photo: RPS)



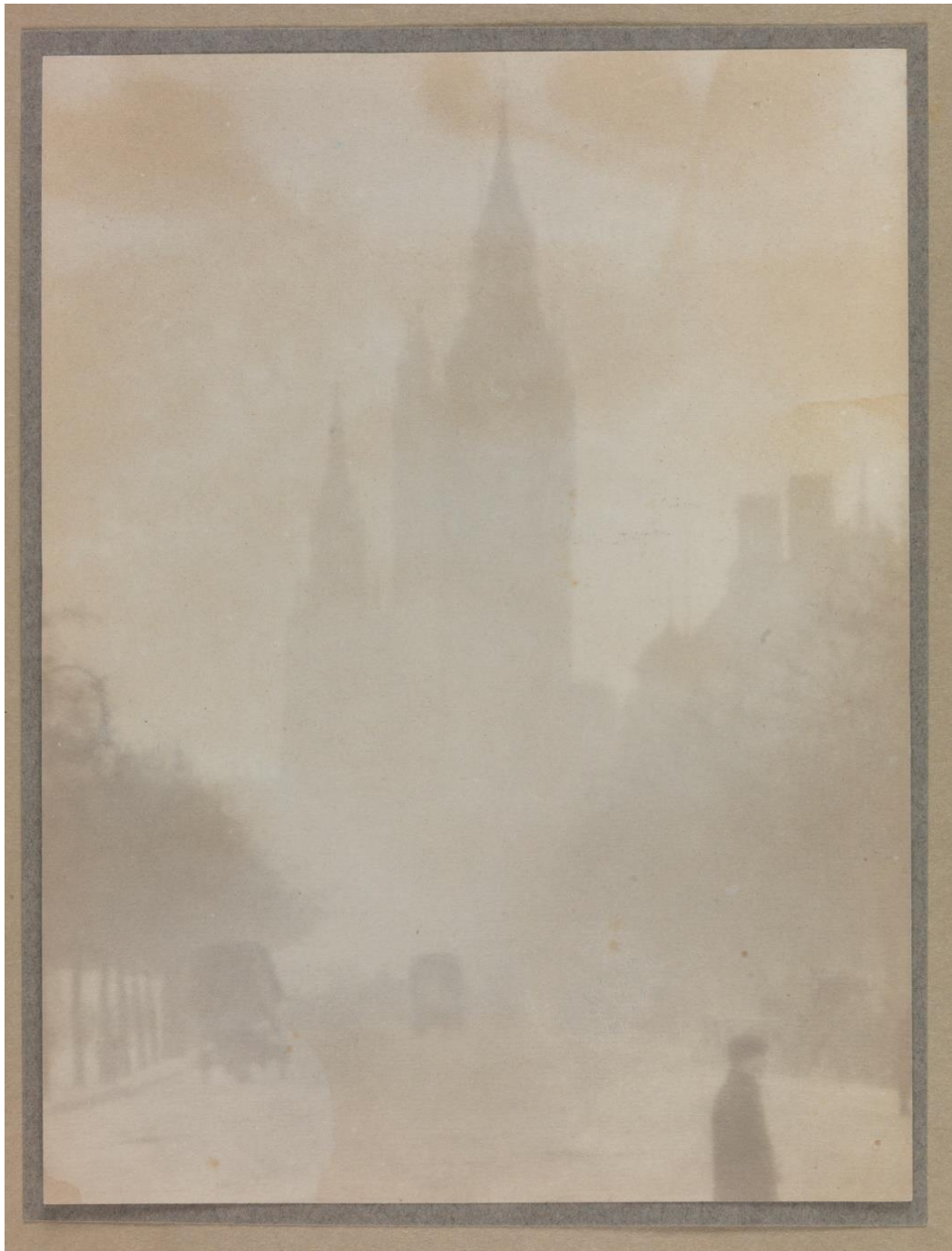


Plate X     Walter Benington, *Westminster* (c. 1906) (aka *Houses of Parliament from the Embankment*) Platinum 240 x 182 mm  
RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)



Plate XI      Walter Benington, *Landscape* (aka *Surrey Woods*) (c. 1908)  
Platinum 236 x 169 mm  
RPS collection, gift of F H Evans (1924) (photo: RPS)



Plate      Walter Benington, *The Cab Rank* (1909)  
XII        Gum 488 x 379 mm  
            RPS collection, gift of J Holcroft (1930) (photo: RPS)



Plate XIII      Walter Benington, *The Cab Rank* (1909)  
Gravure. 129 x 101 mm  
RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)

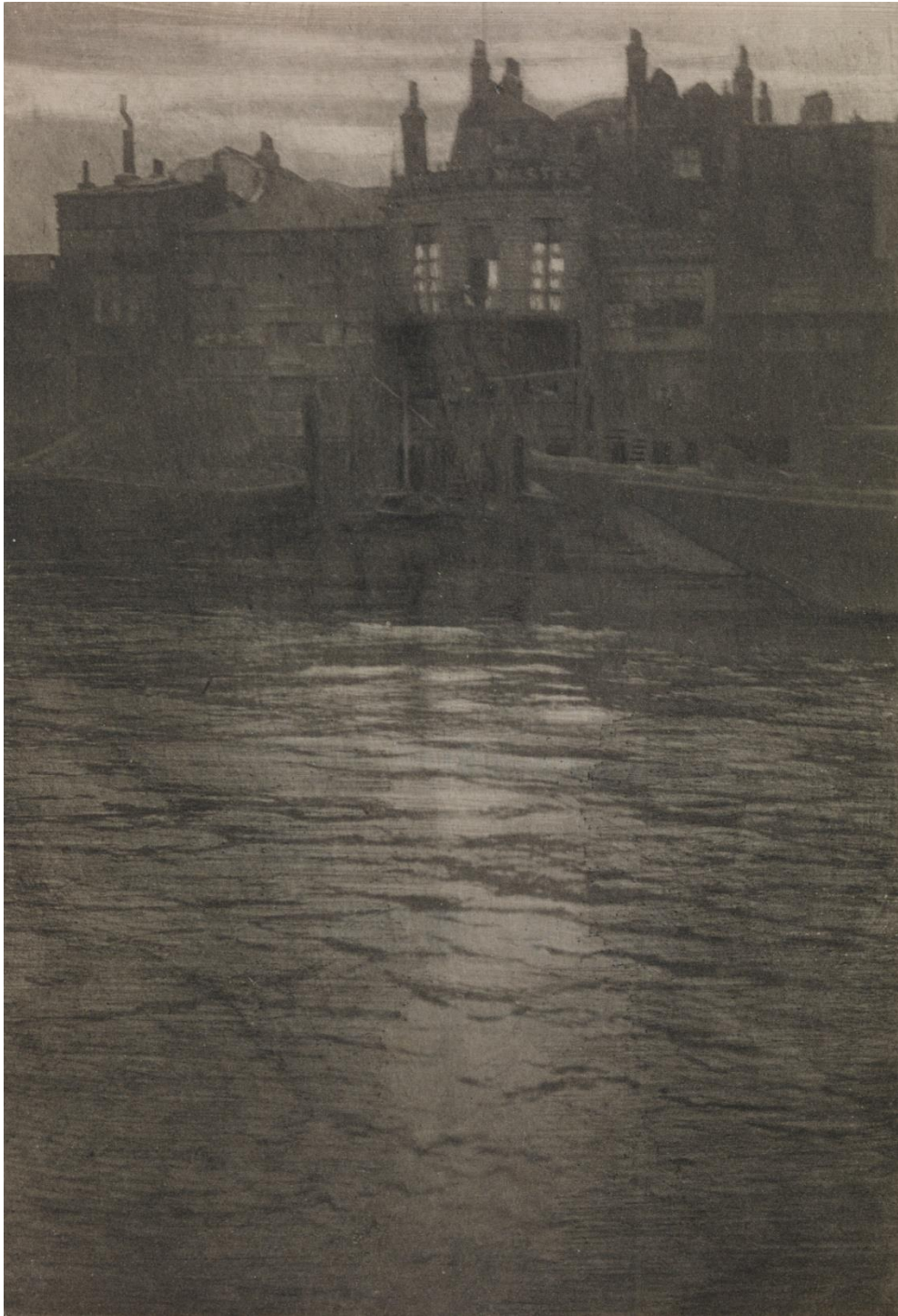


Plate XIV      Walter Benington, *Riverside Houses* (1909) (aka *Limehouse Hole*) Gravure 134 x 91mm  
RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)



Plate XV      Walter Benington, *Portrait* (1913)  
Platinum 204 x 157 mm  
RPS collection, gift of J C Warburg (1931) (photo: RPS)



Plate XVI      Walter Benington, *Ellen Terry* (1914)  
Bromide 300 x 232 mm  
RPS collection, gift of A L Coburn (1930) (photo: RPS)