

LETTER FOR PUBLICATION

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Sir,

As historians, scholars and photographers we wish to express our profound concern about the impact of the proposed cuts to the Library of Birmingham's Photography Collections and axing of its entire staff.

The LoB's photography holdings are officially designated of national and international importance. Built since the nineteenth century they contain major collections from, for instance, pioneers of photography, the collections of Sir Benjamin Stone, of Birmingham Corporation, the personal archives of important contemporary British photographers and organisations such as Birmingham Photographic Society. They are collections which document the history of both professional and amateur photography in the UK.

In recent decades the Photography Collection's team has attracted over £1 million in external sponsorship in order to mount major exhibitions, acquire collections of international importance, commission new documentary work and undertake the vital cataloguing and conservation work required to make them publically accessible. The collection has formed the basis of numerous outreach projects with culturally diverse communities in and beyond the city, and huge audiences have been brought to Birmingham and UK's photographic heritage, especially through the outdoor gallery which has brought the collections into the reach of everyone in the city. LoB is now internationally recognised as a major photography hub, and as a model for the intelligent, integrated presentation of both historical and contemporary photography.

At a time when government is actively encouraging precisely the kinds of public and private funding partnerships which have proved so successful at LoB and emphasising the need to reach out to new audiences, we believe that the Photography Collection at the LoB should be protected and harnessed for the social, economic, cultural and educational benefit of the city and UK. Whatever the outcome of the city's funding cuts consultation, the fait accompli abandonment of the Photography Collection is wholly unwarranted and will have a disproportionate impact on the region, the UK and internationally. If Birmingham City Council feels unable to properly fund its internationally important photography collections then government via DCMS needs to step in.

Signed by:

Professor Elizabeth Edwards, Photographic History Research Centre, De Montfort University,
Leicester

Dr Michael Pritchard, Director-General, The Royal Photographic Society, Bath / e: director@rps.org



Martin Barnes, Senior curator, photographs, Victoria and Albert Museum
Colin Ford CBE, Founding Director, National Media Museum
Professor Amanda Hopkinson, School of Arts, City University, London
Anne M Lyden, International Photography Curator, National Galleries of Scotland
Magnum Photos, London
Dr Brian H May CBE, photo-historian and musician
Dr Christopher Morton, University of Oxford
Professor Darren Newbury, University of Brighton
Phillip Prodger, Head of Photographs, National Portrait Gallery
Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director, National Media Museum, Bradford
Brett Rogers, OBE, Director of The Photographer's Gallery, London

Matthew Butson, Vice President, Hulton Archive, Getty Images, London
Dr Patrizia di Bello, lecturer, Birkbeck, University of London
Duncan Forbes, co-director, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland
Chris Harper, Chief Executive, British Institute of Professional Photography
Paul Herrmann, Director of Redeye, the Photography Network
Professor Francis Hodgson, University of Brighton
Steve Knight, chair, and board members, The Association of Photographers
Anne McNeill, Director, Impressions Gallery of Photography
Dr Alison Morrison-Low, Principal Curator, National Museums of Scotland
Professor Paul Seawright, Head of Belfast School of Art
Jonathan Shaw, Chair of the Association for Photography in Higher Education (APHE)
Dr Sara Stevenson, Hon Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow
Emeritus Professor Roger Taylor, De Montfort University, Leicester

Peggy Sue Amison, Artistic Director, East Wing, Dubai, UAE
George Auckland, Chairman, The Magic Lantern Society
Lisa Barnard, Senior Lecturer, University of South Wales, Newport
Professor David Bate, University of Westminster
Jason Bell HonFRPS, photographer
John Blakemore, photographer
Edward Bond, dramatist
Dr Sian Bonnell, Associate Professor of Photographic Concepts, Falmouth University
Marc Boulay, Photographic Archivist, University of St Andrews
Emma Bowkett, Photography Director
Camilla Brown, freelance writer/curator, senior lecturer, Middlesex University
David Bruce, Former Director Edinburgh International Film Festival and Former Director Scottish Film Council
Dr Mirjam Brusius, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Trinity College, University of Oxford
Professor John Butler, Head of the School of Art, Birmingham City University
Dr David Company, University of Westminster
Jim Casper, Editor & Publisher, LensCulture



Dr Vanessa Champion, Photographer, writer, editor, founder of PhotoAid Global
David Chandler, Professor of Photography, Plymouth University
Zelda Cheatle, curator and gallerist
Alberto Condotta, PhD candidate, Birmingham School of Art, Birmingham City University
Joe Cornish HonFRPS, landscape photographer
Simon Crocker, Chair, The John Kobal Foundation
Holly Davey, Photography Lecturer, University of Wales Trinity St David, Swansea
Celia Davies, Director, Photoworks
David Davis, Professor of Drama in Education, City of Birmingham University
Professor Huw Davies, Dean, College of Arts, University of Derby
Dr Sara Dominici, Visiting Lecturer at the University of Westminster
Diana Donovan, The Terence Donovan Archive
John Duncan, editor, Source magazine
Steven Evans, photographer and photographic historian, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Dr Hamish Gane, Programme Director, BA (Hons) Photography in the Arts, University of Wales Trinity
Saint David, Swansea
Prof Johnny Golding, Professor of Philosophy & Fine Art, Director, Centre for Fine Art Research
(CFAR)
Dr Andy Gotts MBE, photographer
Professor Brian Griffin Hon FRPS, photographer
Dr Mike Hallett, Research Fellow, Birmingham City University
Hugh Hamilton, Course Leader MA Photography, School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent
University
Fergus Heron, photographer and senior lecturer, University of Brighton
Judy Harrison, Principal Lecturer, BA(Hons) Photography, School of Art, Design and Media, University
of Portsmouth
Professor Paul Hill MBE, photographer
Anthony Holland Parkin, Creative Director, Getty Images
Gavin Jack, Course Leader BA Photographic Arts, University of Westminster
Liz Jobey, Associate Editor, FT Weekend Magazine
Richard Kalman, Director, Crane Kalman Photographic Gallery
Max Kandhola, Principal Lecturer / Course Leader in Photography Research coordinator
(Photography), Nottingham Trent University
Dr Kate Katafiasz, Newman University, Birmingham
Peter Kennard, Senior Research Reader in Art, Photography and the Public Domain, Royal College of
Art
David Kinney, Programme Leader, BA (Hons) Photography, British Higher School of Art & Design,
Moscow
Robin Laurance, Director, Oxford Photography Festival
Simon R Leach, photographer, former chair, Association of Photographers
Dewi Lewis, publisher
Professor Andrea Liggins, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Chris Littlewood, Director of Photography, Flowers Gallery
Matt Locke, Chair, Photoworks
Nick Lockett, Photographer and Senior Lecturer in Photography, Video & Digital Imaging, De
Montfort University
Jo Longhurst, Artist, Professor of Photography & Fine Art, Research Fellow, Centre for Fine Art
Research (CFAR), Birmingham School of Art/ Birmingham City University



Josh Lustig, Deputy Photography Editor, FT Weekend Magazine
Ian Macdonald, photographer
Ed McKeon, PhD Researcher, Director of Third Ear Music
Daniel Meadows, photographer
Christiane Monarchi, Editor, Photomonitor
Ian L Moor, Director and Head of Conservation, The Centre for Photographic conservation
Stuart Mugridge, AHRC/M3C-funded PhD student at Centre for Fine Art, Birmingham City University
Dr Gil Pasternak, Senior Research Fellow, Photographic History, De Montfort University, Leicester
Denis Pellerin, photohistorian
Dr Navtej Purewal, SOAS, University of London
Theo Reeves-Evison, Senior Lecturer, Fine Art (Theoretical and Contextual Studies), Birmingham School of Art
Pam G Roberts, curator and photohistorian
Russell Roberts Reader in Photography & Co-Director of eCPR, University of South Wales
Simon Roberts HonFRPS, photographer
Ana Rutter, Demonstrator AV, Birmingham School of Art
Marco Salotti, Manager for Higher Education, Leicester College
Nick Sargeant, University of Gloucestershire
Professor Richard Sawdon Smith, Dean of Media, Norwich University of the Arts
Professor Larry J Schaaf, Director, William Henry Fox Talbot Catalogue Raisonné, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford
Christine Shaw, MA Photography, Photography Department, University of Wales Trinity St David – Swansea
Jem Southam, Professor of Photography, Plymouth University, co-ordinator 'The Photographers' Legacy and Archive Project
Francesca Spickernell
Chris Steele-Perkins, Magnum Photos
Graham Stephenson, Interim Head of Drama, Newman University
Lindsey S. Stewart, Bernard Quaritch Ltd
Gareth Syvret, Photographic Archivist, Project Leader, Archisle: Jersey Contemporary Photography Programme, Société Jersiaise
Denis Thorpe HonFRPS, FBIPP, former Guardian photographer.
Conrad Tracy, Course Leader & Principal Lecturer - BA Commercial Photography, Arts University, Bournemouth
Dr Mark Walker, Centre for Fine Art Research (CFAR), Birmingham School of Art
Roger Watson, Curator, Fox Talbot Museum
Liz Wells, Professor in Photographic Culture, School of Art and Media, Plymouth University
Paul Wenham-Clarke, Senior Lecturer - BA (Hons) Commercial Photography, Arts University Bournemouth
Dr Kelley Wilder, Reader, Photographic History, De Montfort University, Leicester
Grace Alexandra Williams, Centre for Fine Art Research, Birmingham City University
Professor Val Williams, UAL Photography and the Archive Research Centre (PARC), London College of Communication
Dr Chris A. Wright CFAR Research Fellow, Birmingham School of Art
Dr Philippa Wright, former curator of photographs, National Media Museum, freelance curator and photographic historian

